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The background of the cover features a faded, purple-tinted photograph of a historic stone building with multiple arched windows and doorways. In the foreground, a large, stylized graphic of a fan or a hand with radiating lines is overlaid in a darker shade of purple. The overall aesthetic is academic and historical.

**LIONELLO VENTURI AND
THE TASTE OF THE PRIMITIVES:
FROM TEXT TO CONTEXT (1918–1931)**
The Concept of the Primitive as a Perspective for Analysis

Antonella Perna



TURUN
YLIOPISTO

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Cover photo: Lionello Venturi and Riccardo Gualino in San Gimignano, Italy. Family photo album. Courtesy of the Gualino family.

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this research on the concept of the primitive enhances the understanding, in a comprehensive and thorough way, of the professional and personal life of Lionello Venturi (1885–1961), and in particular his book, *The Taste of the Primitives* (*Il gusto dei primitivi* 1926). Venturi's notion of primitivism constitutes a common thread connecting the rich variety of his undertakings and ideas in the 1920s.

This project began with the observation of the elusive meaning of the term “primitive” in *The Taste of the Primitives*. In the book the term coexists as a historical and a conceptual reference. The concept of the primitive came to condense Venturi's aesthetic theory. In its shift from a position within an aesthetic category, to one in which it occupied a place within a discursive frame, Venturi's notion of primitivism became a ground within which his theory and his criticism, his collecting choices and cultural initiatives, gained meaning and value in a coherent way. Moreover, with this discursive practice, Venturi affected the cultural debate of the time, and came to offer an alternative perspective to the dominant discourse. His strategy indeed responded to the Fascist classicist discourse in an oppositional way. His definition and use of the idea of primitivism in the 1920s, emerges as a tool for promoting his ideas and authority as an art theorist, historian, critic, art advisor, curator, educator, and cultural influencer within an unfavourable context.

Looking at Venturi's work from the perspective of primitivism has shed new light on the connections between art-historical scholarship and collecting practices. This angle contributed to clarifying the inspirational role played by the art collector Riccardo Gualino and his circle, along with the international network of scholars and dealers – including Bernard Berenson and Osvald Sirén – in developing Venturi's thinking. Moreover, primitivism helped to explain aspects of Venturi's interest in Chinese art, his contact with Theosophy, and his relation to Fascism and to the cultural debate of the 1920s. This perspective enhanced an analysis capable of bringing together theoretical and material aspects, Venturi's thinking and his social life. At the same time, it also shifted the focus of my study from a theoretical and textual analysis, to a more complex multidisciplinary approach implying an extensive archival research.

Keywords: primitivism, history of art history, art historians, art collecting, Chinese art, Italian Studies, Fascism, Formalism, connoisseurship, Lionello Venturi, Riccardo Gualino, Osvald Sirén, Bernard Berenson, discourse theory, Michel Foucault, networking

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Tutkimuksessani keskeinen primitiivisen käsite tarjoaa tulkintavälineenä mahdollisuuden rikastuttaa ja uudistaa perusteellisella tavalla ymmärrystä Lionello Venturin (1865–1961) ammatillisesta ja henkilökohtaisesta elämästä ja erityisesti hänen kirjastaan *Il gusto dei primitivi* (1926). Primitivismi toimii punaisena lankana Venturin 1920-luvun ajattelussa ja toiminnassa yhdistäen toisiinsa hyvinkin erilaisia osa-alueita.

Tutkimukseni lähti liikkeelle havainnosta, että teoksessa *Il gusto dei primitivi* termi primitiivinen osoittautui vaikeasti määriteltäväksi. Termiin viitataan kirjassa samanaikaisesti sekä historiallisella että käsitteellisellä tasolla. Primitiivisyyden käsitteessä tiivistyy Venturin esteettinen teoria. Primitiivinen ei ollut hänelle vain esteettiseen luokitteluun kuuluva termi, vaan diskursiivinen käsite, jonka varaan hän rakensi teoriansa ja kritiikkinsä sekä taiteen keräilyä koskevat valintansa ja kulttuuriset aloitteensa – hänen toimintansa merkitys ja hänen arvomaailmansa rakentuivat koherentisti primitiivinen-käsitteen pohjalle. Tähän samaan diskurssiin nojaten Venturi myös osallistui aikansa kulttuuria koskeviin kiistoihin ja tarjosi vaihtoehtoja hallitseville näkemyksille asettuen oppositioon fasismien edustamia klassistisia käsityksiä vastaan. Primitivismi muodostui Venturille 1920-luvulla välineeksi, jonka avulla hän pystyi tuomaan esille ajatuksiaan ja joka takasi hänelle auktoriteettiaseman taideteoretikkona, -historioitsijana ja -kriitikkona, neuvonantajana, kuraattorina, opettajana ja kulttuurivaikuttajana ilmapiirissä, jonka arvoja hän ei allekirjoittanut.

Venturin elämäntyön tarkastelu primitivismien kontekstissa auttaa ymmärtämään uudella tavalla taidehistorian ja taiteen keräilyn välisiä suhteita. Olen valaisnut tätä asiaa osoittamalla, kuinka tärkeitä Venturin ajattelun kehittymiselle olivat yhtäältä taiteenkeräilijä Riccardo Gualinolta ja hänen piiriltään tullut rohkaiseva ja ennakkoluuloton vastaanotto ja toisaalta kiinnittyminen kansainväliseen taiteen tutkijoiden ja välittäjien, kuten Bernard Berensonin ja Osvald Sirénin, verkostoon. Primitivismi osaltaan auttoi myös ymmärtämään Venturin kiinnostusta Kiinan taiteeseen, hänen yhteyksiään teosofiaan ja hänen suhdettaan fasismiin sekä 1920-luvun kulttuuripolemiikkiin.

Valitsemani laaja-alainen lähestymistapa aiheeseen avasi mahdollisuuden analysoida samassa kontekstissa teoriaa ja käytäntöä – Venturin ajattelua ja hänen sosiaalista elämäänsä. Samalla se myös siirsi väitöskirjani fokuksen teorian ja tekstin

analyysistä monimuotoisemmaksi ja monitieteisemmäksi hankkeeksi, joka perustuu laajaan arkistotutkimukseen.

Avainsanat: primitivismi, taidehistorian historia, taidehistorioitsijat, taiteen keräily, Kiinan taide, Italian kulttuurin tutkimus, fasismi, formalismi, taiteentuntijuus, Lionello Venturi, Riccardo Gualino, Osvald Sirén, Bernard Berenson, diskurssiteoriat, Michel Foucault, verkostot

Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements	9
1. Introduction	13
1.1 Lionello Venturi	13
1.2 <i>The Taste of the Primitives</i> : From Text to Context	15
1.3 The Concept of the Primitive as a Perspective for Analysis	16
1.4 Theoretical Background	17
1.4.1 <i>Travelling</i> Primitivism	18
1.4.2 The Overloaded Meaning of the Concept of the Primitive	20
1.5 Venturi's Use of Primitivism as the Basis for a Discursive Frame	22
1.6 The Fascist Discourse as a Context of Venturi's Primitivism	27
1.7 The Position of the Present Research in the Landscape of Earlier Studies and Structure of the Book	29
2. The Background to Venturi's Aesthetic Theory and His Notion of Primitivism	36
2.1 Adolfo Venturi's Positivism and Art-historical Scholarship in Italy	36
2.2 Croce's Neo-Idealism	42
2.3 Formalism.....	44
2.3.1 The Second Generation of Formalists	46
2.3.2 Formalist Primitivism vs. Modernist Primitivism	47
2.4 Formalist Theorists and the Concept of the Primitive.....	53
2.4.1 Bernard Berenson	54
2.4.2 Roger Fry: The Primitive between Formalism and Modernism	62
2.4.3 Formalism and Primitivism in Clive Bell's Work	66
2.4.4 Osvald Sirén: Formalism and Spiritualism	70
2.4.5 Turning to Chinese Art.....	74
2.5 Lionello Venturi and <i>The Taste of the Primitives</i>	76
3 The Gualino Art Collection in the Light of Lionello Venturi's Primitivist Discourse	85
3.1 The Gualino Collection and Primitivism	85
3.2 The Art Market	91
3.3 The Roles of an Art Advisor.....	95
3.4 Bernard Berenson's Influence: Partnerships	105

3.5 Seeking a Partnership	116
3.5.1 The Gualino Collection: Collecting as a Collaborative Project	119
3.5.2 A New Phase in the Gualino Collection: Chinese Art	131
3.5.3 A New Influential Connection: Osvald Sirén	133
3.5.4 From the Italian primitives to Chinese Art	141
3.5.5 The Influence of Theosophy	154
4. Primitivism in the Context of the Contemporary Cultural Debate in the 1920s: A Tool of Cultural Dissent	160
4.1 Venturi's Primitivism and the Historical and Cultural Context....	160
4.2 Venturi's Perspective on Modern Classicism	161
4.3 Modern Classicism in the 1920s	162
4.3.1 Modern Classicism in Italy: Nationalism and Tradition	164
4.3.2 Quattrocentismo	166
4.3.3 Artists and Movements within Modern Classicism	167
4.4 The process of Fascistization of Art and Culture during the 1920s: The Fascist interest towards Modern Classicism	171
4.4.1 Modern Classicism and Fascist Discourse	173
4.4.2 Fascist Arts Policy	177
4.4.3 Fascistization of Art and Culture	180
4.4.4 Patronage and Cultural Institutions as Part of the Process of Centralization and Cultural Fascistization	182
4.4.5 Exhibitions as Part of the Fascist Frame	186
4.4.6 Novecento as a Discursive Frame	187
4.4.7 From Novecento to the Rome Quadriennale	190
4.5 Primitivism as a Response to the Fascistization of the Culture in the 1920s	193
4.6 Competing Frames	203
4.7 Cultural Debate, Polemics, and Cultural Activism	205
4.8 Primitivism and Politics in the 1920s	209
Towards a Conclusion	219
Bibliography	224
Appendix 1	243
Appendix 2	268
Appendix 3	272
Appendix 4	274
Appendix 5	322

Preface and Acknowledgements

When I began my project, I was planning to focus exclusively on the text *Il gusto dei primitivi* (1926) by Italian art historian Lionello Venturi and his theoretical legacy. However, the terms of my research have been renegotiated many times in the process. Its angle progressively enlarged to include Venturi's professional life and its historical context. When focusing on theoretical ideas, one easily forgets that they belong to actual people with an actual life marked by material interactions. Looking at Venturi's large international network of fellow scholars, art dealers, collectors, intellectuals and at his broad range of professional interests, I came to consider the potential impact these connections could have had on his work.

Many factors have influenced and contributed to the redirection of my study. One of these was the context in which my work took place. When I began my research, there were a number of studies being carried out about the history of art history in Finland. Some of them focused on the origins of art history as an independent discipline in academic scholarship and on its protagonists. In particular, I found both Minna Törmäs research on Osvald Sirén and Johanna Vakkari's research on J. J. Tikkanen inspiring. At the time, I could easily relate these studies to my work, as Lionello Venturi belonged to the same first generation of academically educated art historians in the 1920s and his father, Adolfo Venturi, became the first chair of art history at the University of Rome La Sapienza. These studies not only provided the example of a theoretical approach to the subject, an intellectual biography, that was new to me, but also suggested the existence of material contacts between Italian and Finnish scholars. This was indeed the way that I came to see and study Lionello Venturi's relationship with the Swedish-Finnish scholar Osvald Sirén. His influence on the Italian art historian turned out to be more significant than I could have possibly foreseen, as the literature in this regard was at best scarce. Fortunately, there was a rich seam of archival material preserved and available for research. Nevertheless, this new perspective affected my working method, as it became clear it could not be limited to textual and theoretical analysis, but also required the investigation of primary sources.

Once I began to investigate Lionello Venturi's network in the 1920s, one connection stood out: his association with the Italian entrepreneur and art collector Riccardo Gualino. While this aspect has often been dealt with by scholars studying Venturi's work in the 1920s, the figure of Gualino is not regarded at all as a mainstream topic. Moreover, I found that published information on the subject was limited and often repetitive. I therefore became interested in reconsidering the relationship between them and its significance in defining Venturi's professional work during the 1920s. However, finding original sources of information was no easy task. At the outset of my research the documents and private correspondence I needed were still held by the

family, who did not particularly enjoy public exposure. However, I eventually found the thread leading to them. While reading an article about the Gualinos, I learnt that they lived for a time at Palazzo Mattei in Trastevere, Rome. Being a native of Rome myself, I not only knew the place, but I actually recalled that one of my classmates at high school, whose name was indeed Diego Gualino, lived there. Was the legendary house where my classmates reportedly used to play football in the ballroom, scoring goals between Trecento crucifixes, the same place in which the subject of my research had lived? Indeed, it was.

Through reconnecting with Diego Gualino, I made contact with his lovely parents, Riccardo jr. and Matilde Gualino. They opened the door to their house and their family archive to me. Besides the documents, I could take advantage of the formidable memory of Riccardo jr., who, along with his personal recollections, had a profound knowledge of the papers and documents in his possession. It is unfortunate that Riccardo jr. is no longer with us to read the outcomes of my research, which he encouraged and advocated with enthusiasm and generosity. This work is also dedicated to him. Moreover, I am grateful to Riccardo's wife, his sons, Diego and Matteo, and to the rest of the family for continuing to support my work in many ways. Recently, the family's documents were donated to Archivio centrale dello Stato in Rome. Moreover, lately there have been several attempts to bring up the figure of Riccardo Gualino as an important part of a multifaceted Italian history.

The latest example is the exhibition – *I mondi di Riccardo Gualino collezionista e imprenditore*, which was held from 7 June–3 November 2019, at Sale Chiabrese in Turin – to which I contributed with an essay for the catalogue.¹ The exhibition had the merit to bring together a number of scholars, experts from different fields, on Riccardo Gualino. The last in-depth study on the subject was published at the beginning of the 1980s and thus a new work was due in order to present the latest studies throwing a new light on the topic. In particular, I was glad to see Sirén's significance becoming recognised in relation to the Gualino Collection. When I started my research, while Sirén was known to a certain extent among Italian sinologists, his name had remained mostly obscure to art historians. It was therefore a pleasure to see his name on the exhibition walls.

Once I decided to base my textual analysis on the material aspects of Venturi's professional work and life, it also became clear that I could not ignore the cultural and historical context of the time. The research of another scholar who was active in Helsinki inspired the angle of my research in this regard. Hanna-Leena Paloposki studied the diplomatic and discursive role of exhibitions under Fascism. I began to look at the Gualino Collection with new eyes and I posed the question whether Venturi's engagement with its formation could have had a discursive function too. More

1 Giorgina Bertolino and Anna Maria Bava, *I mondi di Riccardo Gualino collezionista e imprenditore* (Torino: Allemandi, 2019)

generally, the approach of discourse analysis allowed me to understand more about the position of Venturi's work with respect to Fascism during the 1920s. In particular, the approach of discourse theory, together with a perspective of analysis based on the concept of the primitive, constituted the fundamental tools to give coherence to an otherwise extensive and diverse range of material.

Organising so many angles, areas of expertise, documents and sources from different fields, into a coherent structure presented the biggest challenge to my work – especially as the literature about Italian Studies is not completely available in Finland and the archives that I was interested in were located abroad. In the end, I opted for a structure that would reflect the steps of my research, starting from the theoretical and textual analysis and progressing into the cultural and historical context, while including Venturi's professional interactions. Nonetheless, it was necessary to set boundaries and something had to be left out. Some areas of research, for instance the discussion about Fascist arts policy, have been presented mainly in order to set the context for Venturi's work and life. They did not constitute a main focus of my study and it was beyond the scope of this research to provide a complete overview of them.

This study is an example of the importance of networks because scholars, although often working in the solitude of libraries and archives, are not islands. Not in the past and not today. The exchanges I had with colleagues was not only inspirational but from time to time essential in finding information or leads to sources, archives, and documents. I am indebted to all of them for their suggestions, remarks, and for the possibility to discuss aspects or areas of study that were not always part of my own expertise. I am grateful to my supervisors, Professor Emeritus Altti Kuusamo, Professor Tutta Palin, and Adjunct Professor Johanna Vakkari, more than words can express for their support, encouragement, and trust at times when even I myself could not think this work would see the light of the day. I warmly thank Associate Professor Laura Iamurri and Dr. Hanna-Leena Paloposki for their pre-examiner's statements that guided me in the final stage of my work. I am also grateful for Professor Iamurri for taking on the task of Opponent at the defence of this thesis.

I would like to express my debt to Adjunct Professors Renja Suominen-Kokkonen and Minna Törmä from the University of Helsinki and Dr. Hanne Selkokari and M.A. Anne-Maria Pennonen from the Finnish National Gallery, for inspiring moments of confrontation they provided on topics related to the history of art history at the beginning of the 20th century. I extend my warmest thanks to my colleagues from the University of Turku for their openness to constructive discussion and for their kind support. Among them I feel I owe a particular mention to Dr. Nina Kokkinen, Dr. Riikka Niemelä, Dr. Johanna Ruohonen, and M.A. Kai Stahl. The research seminar of the department and the summer schools of the Finnish Doctoral Programme in Art History were important occasions for developing my research. I found a great opportunity of confrontation and growth also in the course Publishing in English. I wish to thank Adjunct Professor Bruce Johnson for creating a friendly atmosphere and all the other participants for being active in commenting on each others' work

in a thorough way. My thanks go also to Dr. Meri Heinonen, the Coordinator of the Doctoral Programme of History, Culture and Art Studies Juno, for the kind and clear advice she has provided over time.

In Italy, I am indebted to the support of scholars, who at times also generously championed my work, such as the late Professor Gianni Carlo Sciolla from the University of Turin and Professor Antonello Venturi from the University of Pisa. Independent scholar Beatrice Marconi and the curators of the latest exhibition on Riccardo Gualino, Giorgina Bertolino and Annamaria Bava, helped me with good advice and relevant information. In regard to Italian sinology, I wish to express my gratitude to Dr. Roberto Ciarla and Dr. Francesco d'Arelli.

Given the number and the location of the archives I consulted over the years, this research could have not been possible without the valuable, and sometime passionate, help of archival staff. In Rome, Docent Stefano Valeri and Professor Claudio Zambianchi always made sure that I could access the Lionello Venturi Archive in Rome, despite of my odd and intense timetables. In Turin, Stefano Baldi and Monica Perillo Marconi were important guides in finding my way round the department's library and to the Fondo Lionello Venturi. In Florence, I was warmly welcomed and well introduced to the material kept at the Bernard Berenson Library in Villa I Tatti by Ilaria della Monica, while Giovanni Pagliarulo provided essential insights to the photo library. At the Historical Archive of the Bank of Italy I was assisted by Elisa Lochi and later by Annarita Rigano, while Sabrina Cordelli assisted me in issues related to the Bank's art collection. I did not have the pleasure to meet in person Archivist Maddalena Taglioli from the Centro Archivistico of the Scuola Normale di Pisa, but over time she has assisted me by sending copies of the required archival material with timely response. In Stockholm, Kerstin Bergström was the first to guide me through the papers in the Sirén Archive, while more recently I was assisted with extreme kindness by Archivist Monica Sargren. My thanks go to all of them too, for according me the possibility to publish their archival material. Moreover, I wish to acknowledge those art collections that agreed to grant me permission to publish an image of their artworks in this book and provided high resolution images.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Finnish Cultural Foundation (the Juhani Kirpilä Fund and the Varsinais-Suomi Regional Fund), to the Turku University Foundation, and to the University of Turku (grant for completing a Doctoral Degree) for the generous financial support that made this work possible. I was also glad to be employed by the Finnish Doctoral Programme in Art History for a time. I also thank my language revisor Gillian Crabbe for her immeasurable patience and brilliant solutions and Henri Terho for the layout of this book.

Last, but not least, I wish to express my gratitude to my family, Janne, Leonardo and Miranda, for providing unconditional love and support and for reminding me that there is life beyond research. This work is dedicated to them and to my parents, Maria Teresa and Oreste.

1. Introduction

1.1 Lionello Venturi

This research focuses on the concept of the primitive, which is here considered as a perspective of analysis that enhances in a consistent and thorough way our understanding of the professional and personal life of the Italian art historian Lionello Venturi (1885–1961), in particular his book *The Taste of the Primitives* (1926).¹ In this regard, I chose to focus on the period 1918–1931 because it constitutes a clear professional stage in Venturi’s career defined by the recurring, even if not entirely congruent, reference to the concept of the primitive. In 1918, Venturi returned to teach at the University of Turin, where he had held a professor’s position briefly in 1915, shortly before joining the war front. In 1931 the professor left his academic position and also left the country to return only at the end of the Second World War. This period also coincided with his work as art advisor to the entrepreneur Riccardo Gualino (1879–1964) regarding his art collection. Although many studies have been conducted on Venturi’s work during the 1920s – the crucial period of his maturation – there is still a lack of a unifying perspective on his work and life in those years. I wish to argue that, although remaining limited to a short timespan, a perspective based on primitivism will help to shed light in a more comprehensive way on key aspects concerning Venturi’s theoretical background, his international network, his role as art advisor, and his position in the contemporary cultural debate.

Lionello Venturi is one of the founding figures of art-historical scholarship in Italy. He was the son and protégé of Adolfo Venturi (1856–1941), who was the first professor in Italy to be appointed to the chair of Art History at the University of Rome, La Sapienza, in 1901.² Lionello Venturi therefore belonged to the first generation of professionally and academically educated art historians. The process of

- 1 Lionello Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi* (1926), 2nd ed. (Torino: Einaudi, 1972). Although the book was never published in English, the draft of an unpublished translation, presumably edited by Venturi, exists in the Lionello Venturi Archive. In this study I will nevertheless refer to the book as *The Taste of the Primitives*.
- 2 Giacomo Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell’arte in Italia. Adolfo Venturi. Dal museo all’università 1880–1940* (Venezia: Marsilio editori, 1996), 154.

professionalisation of art-historical scholarship, a phenomenon common to many Western countries, had started during the 19th century.³ Lionello Venturi contributed to the development of art history as an academic discipline, suggesting aesthetic considerations as the starting point for art-historical analysis. He also promoted an expansion of the discipline beyond its traditional cultural and chronological limits. As a result, during his career Venturi dealt with a multitude of subjects, ranging from medieval to baroque and contemporary art, from Chinese to Indian art, and from art theory to art criticism.⁴ Because of his passion for reforming art-historical scholarship, he decided at the beginning of the 1910s to leave his promising career in the museum field in order to pursue an academic profession.

In 1915, Venturi secured his first appointment as Professor of Art History at the University of Turin. The inaugural speech he made when he took up his position reveals the enthusiasm with which he undertook his job.⁵ He clearly laid out his ideas about the need for a change of approach and methodological ground in the study of art. However, his time at the university was interrupted due to the outbreak of the First World War.⁶ Venturi was sent to the front in 1915 and returned to professional life only in 1918, having suffered a serious injury to one eye.⁷ In spite of this traumatic experience, Venturi returned to his Chair at the University of Turin with a renewed enthusiasm for the development of the methodological basis for art-historical scholarship. This became a fertile period in his personal and professional life. In 1919, he was appointed to a permanent position as a professor, a role which he would pursue, although changing institutions and roles, until his death in 1961.⁸

- 3 Elizabeth Mansfield, "Making Art History a Profession," in *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and Its Institutions*, ed. Elisabeth Mansfield (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1–9.
- 4 Stefano Valeri, "Bibliografia di Lionello Venturi," Supplement to *Storia dell'arte*, Nuova serie, 1, no. 101 (2002).
- 5 Lionello Venturi, "La posizione dell'Italia nelle arti figurative," *Nuova antologia* no. 260 (January 1915): 213–225.
- 6 Stefano Valeri, "Lionello Venturi e il rinnovamento della critica dell'arte in Italia," *Laboratorio de arte* no. 30 (2018): 419–438, 420–421, accessed February 25, 2019, http://institucional.us.es/revistas/arte/30/023_Stefano_Valeri.pdf.
- 7 Antonello Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio," in *Dal nazionalismo all'esilio. Gli anni torinesi di Lionello Venturi, 1914–1932*, ed. Franca Varallo (Torino: Aragno, 2016), 47–48.
- 8 Angelo d'Orsi, "Lo strano caso del professor Venturi," in *Dal nazionalismo all'esilio. Gli anni torinesi di Lionello Venturi 1914–1932*, ed. Franca Varallo (Torino: Aragno, 2016), 10; Stefano Valeri, *Lungo le vie del giudizio nell'arte. I materiali dell'archivio di Lionello Venturi nella Sapienza Università di Roma* (Roma: Campisanto editore, 2014), 20.

1.2 *The Taste of the Primitives: From Text to Context*

Venturi's commitment to reforming the discipline of art history and its methodology in the 1920s was connected to his theoretical background, which contributed to shifting the focus on artworks from documentary considerations to their analysis as expressions of a creative and spiritual revelation.⁹ His particular way of positioning himself in the field resulted in his major publication in the 1920s, *The Taste of the Primitives*. This book is an art-historical account that involves a critical perspective and aesthetic considerations in the analysis of artworks. This text also served to present Venturi's aesthetic theory to a somewhat wider public. *The Taste of the Primitives* makes fascinating, yet not easy reading. It is a complex and original book that defies classification due to its untraditional structure and language. The book is structured in two parts (248 pp.). The first deals with 'the primitives and the art criticism', focusing on theoretical matters and on the critical reception of Early Renaissance art throughout history. In the second part, 'the taste of the primitives and art', Venturi analyses primitive aesthetic traits in various artistic practices and compares them with those he considered typical of classical and classicist art.

Although he warns in his book that artworks are individual and singular entities, he did not limit the comparative layout to those works belonging to similar aesthetic and stylistic landscapes. He also drew a parallel between items belonging to a different chronological context and cultural background. (Figs. 5–8) The result of these sets of juxtapositions is the definition of a dualism between primitive and classical taste, which, in Venturi's words, ends up representing the polarity between art and non-art, inspiration and imitation.¹⁰ The author is in the foreground clearly voicing the primitive perspective without any attempt to conceal his position. Although the book deals with theoretical and aesthetic issues, the variety of language – the register – employed is direct and informal, occasionally even sarcastic and derisive.¹¹

9 Luca Aniello, *Lionello Venturi. La via dell'arte moderna* (Napoli: La Città del Sole, 2004), 7–16.

10 Antonella Perna, "Taidekritiikin historia ja taidehistoria. Benedetto Crocen taiteen henkisestä olemuksesta Lionello Venturin parataktiseen menetelmään," transl. Riikka Niemelä, in *Kuinka tehdä taidehistoriaa?*, eds. Altti Kuusamo, Minna Ijäs and Riikka Niemelä (Turku: Utukirjat, 2010), 240–265.

11 For an example see, Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, 192–193, 235–236. "...il critico di opinioni realistiche sarà tutto contento per aver trovato la conferma del buon cammino compiuto in Toscana tra la prima e la seconda metà del Duecento...E nemmeno s'accorge il critico suddetto che la sua soddisfazione lo rende, se possibile, più cieco di prima. Perché il quadro di Berlinghieri è un grande capolavoro e quello di Margheritone è un'opera mancata...[Margheritone] era stato educato alla medesima scuola, ma incapace di slanci mistici si era preoccupato d'immettere nelle forme e nei colori appresi qualche elemento osservato in natura; e bastò quella modesta intenzione per sgretolare la visione mistica, per rendere goffa l'immagine di frate questuante, per trasformare il Francesco-Dio in un mostricino pseudoumano". "Di fronte all'asestata

Throughout the text, the author addresses the readers directly and it seems that he would like to engage them in a dialogue. Because of this structure, Venturi's reasoning is captivating, logical and flawless and thus the conclusions emerge as obvious. This book, which clearly supports of his primitive standpoint, still makes fascinating reading for its bold and original perspective.

My determination to understand this book fully was the starting point for this research. However, it soon became clear that a textual analysis and a purely theoretical approach would not suffice to shed light on many of the problematic questions posed in the text. Instead it seemed that the contextualised analysis of the book was going to be a far more suitable method for discovering the meaning of the book and its relation to the cultural debate of the time. The text hints at connections that go beyond academic scholarship and aesthetic theory. The link to the art trade and collecting, to Venturi's polemical interventions, to his involvement in the organisation of public cultural events, and to his relationship with contemporary artists, indeed suggests a role as a committed intellectual in the contemporary cultural debate of the 1920s.¹² The book seems to be the result of Venturi's attempt to provide a common ground of reference both for his theoretical work and cultural activities. It became the source of authority for his aesthetic and methodological principles. Therefore, it cannot be understood in isolation from its historical context; it needs, and deserves, to be considered in relation to a larger picture.

1.3 The Concept of the Primitive as a Perspective for Analysis

One particularly interesting aspect of *The Taste of the Primitives* is the meanings and kinds of use Venturi gives to the term primitive. The prominent position he gave it in the book's title shows it was a key concept in his thinking. However, the exact meaning of the term in the text is not straightforward and remains elusive. It is attached to a plurality of meanings at different levels. It first shows a historical perspective, referring to Early Renaissance art following its traditional definition as the *Italian primitives*. Then the term is used to describe certain common aesthetic features, such as creativity, mysticism, universality, and abstraction, shared by geographically and chronologically wide ranging artworks. Lastly, the concept incorporates an ideological and moral landscape. Because of this complex amalgam of meanings, I began to

damina olandese del Seicento, Argia, la cugina di Fattori, ci appare una beccera toscana, vestita da festa, di una vivacità così intensa che non si sa bene se irriti o esalti...e ora mi par di sentire la voce del buon Vasari che una constatazione simile avrebbe mandato in visibilio. Ma io preferisco guardare la rozza porta di legno...".

- 12 Laura Iamurri, "Un libro d'azione? *Il gusto dei primitivi* e i suoi lettori," in *Dal nazionalismo all'esilio. Gli anni torinesi di Lionello Venturi (1914–1932)*, ed. Franca Varallo (Torino: Arago, 2014), 115–141.

reflect on the role that the notion of the primitive had in Venturi's thinking. Where did it originate? How was it related to Venturi's methodological approach to art criticism and to art theory?

Moreover, Venturi's use of the term in its plurality of meanings and conceptual implications is specific to his work during the 1920s, thus suggesting a fundamental connection with the historical context. Primitivism constituted the common ground for all his writings and interventions at the time. I furthermore came to question how it was associated with its historical, political, and cultural background. I suggest that the understanding of Venturi's use of the concept of the primitive in connection with a discursive practice would provide access to a deeper understanding of his ideas about aesthetics, while at the same time unfolding their relation to material aspects of his professional and personal life. Therefore, I came to consider the perspective of analysis based on Venturi's notion of primitivism as the key to embracing all aspects of his work as a coherent whole. Moreover, in this way, I aim to bring together Venturi's multiple roles as art advisor, professor, scholar, critic, theorist, curator, populariser, cultural promoter, and publicly committed intellectual, in the light of the historical context and the art-historical discourse of the 1920s. I thus hypothesise that analysing his notion of primitivism means analysing the underlying frame of reference for all of his claims and activities during the 1920s.

When I speak of frames, or framing, I address a process of interpretation that is guided by an active agent within a discourse that produces "extra-textual" or "intra-textual" information necessary for the understanding of the subject under scrutiny.¹³ I argue that understanding the meaning and implications of the concept of the primitive as a discursive practice in Venturi's thinking in the 1920s, will clarify aspects regarding both his theoretical work and his involvement in the cultural debate of the time. However, in order to turn the concept of the primitive into an efficient perspective of analysis, it is first necessary to clarify what it meant for Venturi, and what implications it had for his work and thinking.

1.4 Theoretical Background

The cultural critic Mieke Bal, author of *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities* (2002), has investigated the problematic nature and implications of concepts.¹⁴ Her theory about *travelling concepts* is especially useful in reflecting on the tension between tradition and the re-contextualisation of concepts. Concepts change and need continuous redefinition. They gain new meanings and implications according to contextual

13 Gale MacLachlan and Ian Reid, *Framing and Interpretation* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994), 3,7.

14 Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

discourses and individual uses. Bal claims that concepts are tools directed to facilitate communication through creating a common language. Therefore, it is of primary importance that concepts are widely accepted in order to fulfil their function.¹⁵ However, Bal explains, this is rarely the case, especially with concepts enduring a long life.¹⁶ Concepts are flexible and mutable, and their meanings are not fixed.¹⁷ They tend to wander among disciplines, scholars, academic communities, and across time. They are adapted to the phenomena they are required to represent and at the same time, being abstractions, they distort them.¹⁸ This means that, while concepts change and adapt to the objects they describe, an object itself appears in a different way in its conceptual representation.

Concepts are tools employed to make communication more synthetic and clearer. Nonetheless, their ever-changing meaning within different contexts makes them elusive, thus falling short of their *raison d'être*. As a result, to be efficient critical tools, concepts need to be continuously clarified and redefined. There is a continuous tension between the heritage that concepts bring with them and their re-elaboration within an aesthetic and art-historical discourse. The process of re-elaboration is the very mechanism through which concepts are shaped as theoretical and critical tools. In this sense, Bal claims that concepts are never merely descriptive, but are also strategic and normative.¹⁹

1.4.1 *Travelling* Primitivism

The travelling of the concept of the primitive has been already considered as a recurring phenomenon within the history of Western culture. The art historian Ernst H. Gombrich dedicated a book, *The Preference for the Primitive* (2006), to the subject, and it was not the first on the topic.²⁰ The issue had been earlier considered from both the point of view of the history of ideas, by for instance Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas,²¹ and more specifically from the perspective of art history, by Giovanni

15 Ibid., 22–55.

16 Ibid.

17 Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

18 Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities*, 22–55.

19 Ibid.

20 Ernst H. Gombrich, *The Preference for the Primitive: Episodes in the History of Western Taste and Art* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2006).

21 Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1935); George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1948).

Previtali.²² Interestingly enough, Gombrich also referred to Venturi's *The Taste of the Primitives* as a precedent to his work and as a history of "the appreciation of early Italian and early Flemish art".²³ In my opinion, what Gombrich missed in reading Venturi's reference to the "primitive" exclusively in historical terms, was the emphasis on it as an aesthetic idea.

Along its travels, the concept of the primitive has been used mostly in opposition to the concept of the classical. However, it has also been utilised as analogous to the "modern", while at the same time defined as "pre-civilised". It has served to label artists and artistic practices that are distant from one another within different and sometimes incompatible chronological, geographic, social and cultural contexts. Within the timeline of art history, the concept of the primitive has been employed in reference to several phenomena, with wide ranging and contradictory meanings, be they negative, as in Hobbes's idea of barbarism, or more positive in terms of the idea of the noble savage.²⁴ During the Romantic era, the concept of the primitive was associated with spirituality and used to express a position against the dominant positivistic materialism at the end of the 19th century. The artists and theorists of Romanticism looked at medieval artists, who were defined as primitive, as a source of genuine spirituality. Within the Symbolist aesthetic, the concept of the primitive pointed to the preference for the representation of a transcendental and introspective vision, rather than the faithful depiction of material reality.²⁵

Within Symbolism and Neo-Idealism, individual consciousness was the only source of reality and as such reality could never be depicted in an objective way. According to these theories, there is a threshold between metaphysical (abstraction) and material existence (representation). They claimed that an objective representation of reality is not possible, because an objective perception of it, as such, does not exist. The fulcrum of art production therefore shifted from the cognitive representation of reality to the expression of emotional and spiritual sentiment. Artists had to detach themselves from rational thinking and embrace their spiritual instinct in

22 Giovanni Previtali, *La fortuna dei primitivi. Dal Vasari ai Neoclassici* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1989).

23 Gombrich, *The Preference for the Primitive*, 9. Gombrich stated that although he considered Venturi's work as a challenge to the academic taste, he thought that his definition of the primitive had remained linked to the art of the 13th and 14th centuries. Ernst H. Gombrich, *Il gusto dei primitivi. Le radici della ribellione* (Napoli: Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici, 2005), 12.

24 Daniel Miller, "Primitive Art and the Necessity of Primitivism to Art," in *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art*, ed. Susan Hiller (London: Routledge, 1991), 65; Gill Perry, "Primitivism and the Modern," in *Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century*, eds. Charles Harrison, Francis Frascina and Gill Perry (London: Yale University Press, 1993), 6.

25 Gombrich, *The Preference for the Primitive*, 87–176; Colin Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 14–16.

order to produce art. The primitive in this context existed as a reference to both the process of impulsive thinking and to that of formal simplification.²⁶

During the heyday of early modernism, the concept of the primitive rose to become one of paramount importance. It contained all the essential aesthetic values on which the artists had based their aspiration to artistic reform. Since the beginning of the 20th century, primitivism has been an important part of modernism both for art theorists and artists. Within modernist discourse, primitivism emerged in reference to formal abstraction and to the expressive meaning of art. This aspect was connected to the modernist enthusiasm for breaking with the academic and figurative art tradition. Modernist primitivism was based on the idea that civilisation was detrimental to the creative process. Modernist artists were indeed seeking new aesthetic values within artistic experiences that were not familiar to the 19th century academic scene, such as tribal art and other subcultures and non-European native cultures. All these experiences were considered as primitive.²⁷

1.4.2 The Overloaded Meaning of the Concept of the Primitive

As a result of its long journey, the concept of the primitive can now be considered to have become deprived of meaning, yet politically problematic, and therefore of no use. Its evocative power has expanded to include an extremely wide, varied, and contradictory set of references; a spectrum too broad to retain the clarifying function intrinsic to concepts. In the past few decades, the term has been deemed meaningless, if not misleading, and the concept has been the subject to much debate. The exhibition 'Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern', which opened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York on the 27th September 1984, raised the issue about the necessity for a more aware deployment of the concept of the primitive and for a better understanding of (modernist) primitivism.²⁸ In particular,

26 Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory, 1900–2000* (Maldon, Oxford and Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 11–14.

27 Sally Price, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, 2nd edition (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*; Perry, "Primitivism and the Modern"; Gombrich, *The Preference for the Primitive*, 235–241; Jack Flam and Miriam Deutch, eds., *Primitivism and Twentieth-century Art: A Documentary History* (London: University of California Press, 2003); Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory, 1900–2000* (Maldon, Oxford and Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 66–69; Moshe Barasch, *Modern Theories of Art 2: From Impressionism to Kandinsky* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998), 191–289.

28 William Rubin, *Primitivism in 20th century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984); Gombrich, *The Preference for the Primitive*, 201–203; Flam and Deutch, eds., *Primitivism and Twentieth-century Art*, 2003, 17–19. Part four of Flam and Deutch's book is an anthology of texts related to MOMA's exhibition on Primitivism (313–413).

the debate addressed the problematic relationship between Western modernism and non-European art.

The exhibition was structured as a comparison and dialogue between modernist artworks and tribal art, with the intention of highlighting their affinities and similarities. However, the context, rather than being an explanatory ground for tribal artworks together with their European counterparts, limited their perception merely to the functions of modernism; tribal artworks were ascribed no other function or meaning beyond a modernist perspective. The tribal object was presented only as a projection of modernist aesthetic values with an aetiological function. The tribal artefact was in no way allowed to speak for itself, or for the culture or set of values within which it originated and which it represented.²⁹ The conception of primitivism promoted by this exhibition was misleading, not only in terms of the interpretation of the tribal artworks, but also in terms of the more general understanding of modernism. If the circumstantial meaning of the primitive as a concept is not fully grasped, the analysis of the phenomenon it refers to becomes faulty.³⁰

It is no surprise that, following the MOMA debate, about twenty years later the newly opened French museum dedicated to non-European Art could find no better name than Musée du quai Branly – a reference to its geographical location in Paris.³¹ Any reference to the primitive – even indirectly, through alternative terms like primeval, aboriginal, tribal, exotic – was considered too compromised to be able to describe the content of the museum neutrally. The art historian Jack Flam dealt with the same problem in his book, *Primitivism and Twentieth Century Art* (2003), which he edited with Miriam Deutch. He considered the term primitive, besides being discriminatory, to be meaningless in relation to modernism, even though it was an important part of the understanding modernism itself.³² However, although it becomes clear that the concept of the primitive cannot be employed safely as a description of this artistic phenomenon, it can still offer a valid perspective of investigation.

Knowing precisely the meaning that modernism ascribed to the concept of the primitive and what values were evoked through it in terms of a discursive frame,

29 Susan Hiller, "Introduction," *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art*, ed. Susan Hiller (London: Routledge, 1991), 5.

30 Jill Lloyd, "Emil Nolde's 'Ethnographic' Still Lifes: Primitivism, Tradition, and Modernity," in *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art*, ed. Susan Hiller (London: Routledge, 1991), 92.

31 For more about the museum see, Sally Price, *Paris Primitive: Jacques Chirac Museum on the Quai Branly* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007); "History of the Collections," Musée du Quai Branly Jacques Chirac, accessed April 9, 2019, <http://www.quaibrantly.fr/en/collections/all-collections/history-of-the-collections/>. The museum opened in 2006.

32 Jack Flam, "Preface," in *Primitivism and Twentieth-century Art: A Documentary History*, eds. Jack Flam and Miriam Deutch (London: University of California Press, 2003), xiii–xvii.

makes it easier to grasp the modernist aesthetic in its formation. In my case, the understanding of Venturi's use of the concept of the primitive will allow a more comprehensive, historically grounded reading of his work and thinking. Even if the term cannot be used as a critical concept, it is still possible to engage it as a perspective of critical investigation within the history of art history and art criticism, precisely because of its stratified meaning and evocative power. It should be used to reflect upon the subject that used it as an implicitly self-evident device, rather than to study the object that it attempted to describe. It is instrumental in affording a broader view of the context.

1.5 Venturi's Use of Primitivism as the Basis for a Discursive Frame

The example of modernist primitivism manifests well the strategic and normative power described by Bal in relation to concepts.³³ The uptake of concepts as means to express an aesthetic perspective contributes to the definition of aesthetic discourses. Discourses have an assertive authority and express a truth, which stands as self-explanatory, regardless of the veracity of the claims they advance.³⁴ Discourses also correspond to an interpretative frame, based on appropriation and re-elaboration, which determines the key to interpretation according to specific categories.³⁵ This means that a particular aesthetic meaning is projected onto all the objects considered in the context of the discursive perspective. When I speak about appropriation, I refer to the notion as explained by art historian Robert S. Nelson. Nelson defined appropriation as a *second order of signification* and a *semiotic construction*, similarly to Barthes' definition of myth, but rather stressing the *personal agency* involved in the process.³⁶

The *active agents of signification* are crucial in Nelson's notion of appropriation. They work as filters that project a new meaning onto an object, which appears as a mere passive entity. The new meaning indeed reflects the agent. This process can be explained more explicitly in terms of a distinction between *those who act and those who are acted upon*; facts and objects are passively absorbed by "active agents of signification" in a determined historical context, rather than being objectively analysed.³⁷ Moreover, Nelson described the process of appropriation as one that is not casual,

33 Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities*, 22–55.

34 Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 2–8, 88.

35 MacLachlan and Reid, *Framing and Interpretation*, 11.

36 Robert S. Nelson, "Appropriation," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 160–173.

37 Nelson, "Appropriation," 172.

but intentional and motivated by a purpose. As parts of personal and individual processes, objects or notions can be re-appropriated repeatedly and in different ways. Nevertheless, Nelson considered appropriations, like myths, as distortions of previous significances rather than as an opposition or negation of them.³⁸

When Venturi came to use the concept of the primitive, it was already charged with meaning, albeit not a univocal one. In the 1910s, when Venturi's consideration of the primitive at a conceptual level began to take shape, it evoked a long tradition, going back to Vasari in the 16th century, yet having a contemporary association with modernist ideas. Nevertheless, Venturi could re-elaborate and make use of the concept in a very personal way. He re-cast the concept to match and express his aesthetic perspective in an assertive and normative way. This concept of the primitive was then used as a tool to express, explain and justify his theoretical claims. It enhanced an aesthetic discourse, which in its authoritative nature, contributed to branding and supporting his ideas. Within this discursive context, or frame, artistic practices gained a new meaning in the light of Venturi's aesthetic premises.

In order to understand better the implications of a reference to discursive practices in regard to Venturi's use of primitivism, I studied Michel Foucault's discourse theory, especially in relation to its association with power.³⁹ A discourse can establish relations, structure reality, and create knowledge through the assemblage of texts. As pointed out by Foucault in his theoretical stance on the multiple functions of discourse, it can be displayed in order to define reality, while also establishing authority and power.⁴⁰ Foucault says that by producing knowledge, discourses govern the construction of power. They establish categories of thinking that are taken as truth, while others are marginalised. This aspect is particularly important if one considers that, in the 1920s, Venturi was acting within a dominant cultural situation in which concrete political power was in many ways distant from his own position.

The discursive theory has also been adopted in order to analyse the meaning of primitivism within the context of modernism, while linking it with colonialist policy.⁴¹ In the debate on primitivism at the end of the 20th century, this has been seen as a perspective that could enlighten and address some of the contradictions in terms of "power relationships".⁴² The methodological stand of the discourse theory

38 Ibid.

39 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, transl. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 107; Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, transl. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 78–108.

40 Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and Discourse on Language*, 107; Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 78–108.

41 Perry, "Primitivism and the Modern," 3–85.

42 Ibid.

attempted to unveil and consider political, social, and ideological implications seen as part of the primitivist discourse. According to this perspective, the definition of the object, appropriated within a discursive frame as primitive, aimed at justifying domination and authority. This definition thus reflects the claims of the agent and its ideology, rather than the objects considered as primitive. Their identity as primitive exists only within the modernist discursive frame.

Edward Said's seminal study *Orientalism* (1978), whose main focus is on the colonialism of Maghreb and the Middle East, is taken as proof of a similar employment of discursive theory.⁴³ In this concern, I think that Said's notion of orientalism is a particularly functional perspective in highlighting the issue of appropriation of an object in order to represent and support inner subjective claims, instead of objectively describing and understanding the object.⁴⁴ Said describes orientalism as a grid that defined the West, rather than the East.⁴⁵ He claimed that it is a way of looking at the East as a mirror or filter of the image of the West, showing what is missed or different or opposite. However, with an interpretation of primitivism from the point of view of discursive analysis, I am not so much interested in the political aspects related to colonialism. Instead, I am more interested in the process of appropriation, interpretation, and aesthetic self-identification as an authoritative basis.

Within modernist discourses, artists aimed at producing artworks that mirrored the aesthetic characteristics of selected "primitive" models. Often the original meaning of objects coming from different cultures or periods was not understood, but primitivist artists appropriated and projected their own aesthetic views onto them. This was the case, for instance, with tribal art. In this process, these artworks were invested with modernist aesthetic values. There was no interest in the objects *per se*; they only mattered in relation to modernist theory. Through primitivism, modernist discourses could be explained, justified, and branded.⁴⁶

In general, the concept of the primitive throughout history has been employed in order to define the degree of civilisation of different cultures on the scale from original and primeval to developed, whereby Western culture occupies the highest rank in the scale.⁴⁷ The otherness or distance can be temporal (past–present), geographic

43 Perry, "Primitivism and the Modern," 3–4; Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

44 Perry, "Primitivism and the Modern," 56–58; Hal Foster, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art (1985)," in *Primitivism and Twentieth-century Art: A Documentary History*, eds. Jack Flam and Miriam Deutch (London: University of California Press, 2003), 384–395.

45 Rasheed Araeen, "From Primitivism to Ethnic Art," in *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art*, ed. Susan Hiller (London: Routledge, 1991), 166.

46 Flam and Deutch, eds., *Primitivism and Twentieth-century Art*; Perry, "Primitivism and the Modern," 56–58; Foster, "The 'Primitive' Unconscious of Modern Art," 384–395.

47 Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*, 13–22; Gombrich, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, 10–11.

(centre–periphery) or cultural (culture–subculture).⁴⁸ As in the case of the term Orient in Said’s analysis of Orientalism, the primitive is silenced and cannot contribute to its own definition. The so-called primitives do not recognise themselves in the terms evoked by the concept of the primitive. The concept of the primitive reflects aesthetic considerations and does not respond to ethnographic demands. Even in the case of modernist artists who were self-proclaimed primitives, such as Paul Gauguin, their definition is heard only because it emerges from a Western and non-primitive stand.⁴⁹ It actually expressed a feeling of alienation, of being inappropriate. However, despite the rejection of the mainstream culture and the search for a new identity, modern primitivist artists were far from understanding or presenting their selected models objectively.⁵⁰

The concept of the primitive therefore worked as a structure that responded to the need to describe the cultural agent’s own aesthetic ground and artistic expression, and as such it was not even aimed at really understanding the “primitives”. Primitivism is the result of a theoretical reflection and a tool for the expression of an aesthetic perspective, rather than the result of objective analysis and understanding of actual artworks. In this sense, the primitive exists only in terms of a projection of aesthetic values.⁵¹

In Lionello Venturi’s case, the notion of primitivism in connection to a discursive frame does not show a connection with colonialist policies. Nevertheless, I found the use of the discursive theory to be a useful approach for analysis. I think that Venturi used the concept of the primitive in relation to a discursive practice aiming at establishing a truth and gaining traction against the dominant discourse. I suggest that through the self-explanatory ground of the primitivist discourse, which relies only on Venturi’s own concept of the primitive as a premise for and key to interpretation in order to gain credibility, he could produce and reclaim authority. Through it he could argue and support his choices and his judgement. Therefore, from this study it will emerge how Venturi’s primitivist discourse was especially meaningful as a strategy for promoting his aesthetic ideas and his position within the contemporary cultural debate.

The use of critical discourse analysis constitutes a helpful tool in reading *The Taste of the Primitives*, as well as addressing Venturi’s work and thinking in general

48 Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, “Primitive,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 217–231.

49 Abigail Solomon-Godeau, “Going Native: Paul Gauguin and the Invention of Primitivist Modernism,” in *Art in America* 77 (July 1989): 119–129; Perry, “Primitivism and the Modern,” 8–43.

50 Perry, “Primitivism and the Modern,” 56–58.

51 Antliff and Leighton, “Primitive,” 217–233; Foster, “The ‘Primitive’ Unconscious of Modern Art,” 384–395.

in the 1920s. Through this perspective of analysis based on primitivism, I wish to provide an in-depth reading of the *Taste of the Primitives* in relation to Venturi's aesthetic background and his role in the cultural debate of the time. This will allow me to consider both his textual and extra-textual work from the same angle. The concept of the primitive in Venturi's thinking indeed went beyond the aesthetic ground. As a discourse, it also consisted in the adjustment of the theoretical stance to meet practical ends, as for instance in the need to promote his work as an art critic and choices as an art advisor and to protect his ideas and influential role by opposing the dominant discourse of his time: modern classicism in the context of Fascism. The opposition to classicism went beyond the abstract theoretical and aesthetic ground, involving cultural, political, and ideological aspects within the contemporary context. I thus suggest that this approach will uncover aspects in regard to Venturi's relation to contemporary discourses and intellectual networks that have not been previously studied adequately, such as his professional engagement with the Finnish-Swedish art historian and art advisor Osvald Sirén (1879–1966), the nature of his connection to the Gualino Collection, and his position in relation to Fascist arts policy.

In order to analyse the connection between the Gualino Collection, which grew out of Venturi's partnership with the collector and in the light of the art historian's aesthetic ideas, I consider it on the basis of Mieke Bal's definition of exhibitions in terms of discursive practices that are able to produce an authoritative meaning.⁵² The ways and contexts within which artworks are exhibited by a curatorial authority affect their perception, their meaning, and their identity, as was also the case in the shift from an anthropological interest in the "primitives" to their inclusion in aesthetic categories.⁵³ Art galleries have also been recognised as "semiotic fields", corresponding to a framing process that can alter the interpretation of artworks.⁵⁴ I find that this would apply to private collections too, especially when they have been formed with a strategic vision and collaborative aim, such as those characteristic of the Gualino Collection.

I therefore think that the collection curated by the art historian functioned as a discursive frame, reflecting and reinforcing Venturi's primitivist discourse, on which it depended. Within the collection the artworks were appropriated, homogenised, and interpreted according to Venturi's aesthetic perspective. The appropriation of the artworks, while obtaining meaning and coherence in the context of the collection, also provided a fascinating concrete illustration of Venturi's theory.⁵⁵ In the context

52 Bal, *Double Exposures*, 2–8, 88.

53 Tony Bennett, "Exhibition, Truth, Power: Reconsidering 'The Exhibitionary Complex'," in *The Documenta 14 Reader*, eds. Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk (Munich: Prestel, 2017), 339–400.

54 MacLachlan and Reid, *Framing and Interpretation*, 31–32.

55 See Appendix 2 for a list of artworks included in the Gualino Collection.

of my research and timespan, I was inspired by the Finnish art historian Hanna-Leena Paloposki's dissertation, in which she analysed Finnish-Italian exhibition practices under the Fascist era as tools of diplomacy, in order to present and promote an image of Fascist cultural identity internationally.⁵⁶ The comparison between Fascist exhibition practices and the Gualino Collection suggests the employment of similar strategies.

1.6 The Fascist Discourse as a Context of Venturi's Primitivism

As discourse analysis offers the possibility for a perspective that takes into account the relations outside the text and beyond its textual content, it will also allow for focusing on the impact of Venturi's conceptual tools and his construction of a text in connection to the dominant discourse. There is a hidden message in his discourse and a secondary meaning that plays on his right to have a voice within a master discourse that tended to silence and dismiss it.

In the 1920s Fascism, which had been founded as a revolutionary movement in 1919, acquired a leading role in Italian politics, society, and culture and eventually turned into a totalitarian Regime (1922–1943).⁵⁷ I argue that the definition of the relationship between the Fascist regime and the sphere of culture in the 1920s, in Foucauldian terms of discourse, rather than in terms of ideology, better contributes to outlining the context within which Venturi operated. While ideology expresses a condition of definitive values imposed through strategies of oppression and submission, discourse describes the situation of a dominating and homogenising platform within which different agents can nevertheless act independently, both collaborating

56 Hanna-Leena Paloposki, *Taidenäyttelyt Suomen ja Italian julkisissa kuvataidesuhteissa 1920-luvulta toisen maailmansodan loppuun* (Helsinki: Valtion taidemuseo, 2012). For other authors who have elaborated on the theme of Fascism's diplomatic use of international exhibitions, see for instance, Emily Braun, "Leonardo's Smile," in *Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, eds. Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 173–186; Claudio Fogu, "To Make History Present," in *Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, eds. Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 33–49.

57 Federico Chabod, *L'Italia contemporanea. 1918–1948* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 1961); Angelo d'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000), 67–70. Fascism emerged at first as a revolutionary movement called *Fascio di azione rivoluzionaria* (1914) and its priority was promoting Italy's involvement in the First World War. Later, in 1919, it was re-founded as political movement, *Fasci italiani di combattimento*, which in 1921, after increasing political success, was turned into a political party, *Partito nazionale fascista*. In 1922 Mussolini was named Prime Minister.

and contesting each other. According to Foucault, while an external reality exists, its interpretation and meaning is defined by the underlying discourse, which “structures our sense of reality”.⁵⁸ Discourse, in his view, is therefore the basis for structuring knowledge – meant as what is known, what can be said and expressed and what is deemed possible and real – and, consequently, determining power.⁵⁹ Fascist discourse became the dominant discourse of the time, setting the limits of what could be said and how it could be said. It contributed to structuring society and its “built-in” beliefs.⁶⁰ However, this situation of control, at least during the timespan considered in this research, was not primarily achieved through explicit coercion, censorship, or establishing a State aesthetic and formal norms, as the variety of art practices and aesthetic experimentations coexisting at the time suggests.⁶¹ Instead it relied on a strategy of discursive framing.

The relationship between knowledge and power in Foucault’s understanding is linked to semiotic practices.⁶² In the case of Fascist discourse, this relationship was defined on the basis of myths – in the Barthesian sense – and rhetorical practices rooted in the interpretation of classicism in terms of nationalism and tradition as the basis for its hegemony. These myths became the key to interpret, experience, and perceive reality and to assert values.⁶³ This did not mean that Fascism would have imposed those myths and values as tools of oppression. And it did not necessarily mean that artists or intellectuals embracing those myths would engage actively with

- 58 Gary Gutting, *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 42–43.
- 59 Colin Gordon, “Governmental Rationality: An Introduction,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991); Michel Foucault, “Politics and the Study of Discourse,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).
- 60 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*; Lisa Downing, *The Cambridge Introduction to Michel Foucault* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3–21.
- 61 Marla Stone, “The State as Patron: Making Official Culture in Fascist Italy,” in *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy*, eds. Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 204–238; Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2001), 1–15; Giovanni Sedita, *Gli intellettuali di Mussolini. La cultura finanziata dal fascismo* (Firenze: Le lettere, 2010), 181–185.
- 62 Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 87–104; Gutting, *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction*.
- 63 Motherland, race, tradition and modernity, origin and rebirth, empire, Roman legacy, force and health were among the most recurring myths in the Fascist discourse. Emilio Gentile, *La grande Italia. Il mito della nazione nel XX Secolo* (Roma–Bari: Editori Laterza, 2006); Bruno Wanrooij, “Mobilitazione, modernizzazione, tradizione,” in *Storia d’Italia. 4. Guerre e fascismo, 1914–1943*, eds. Giovanni Sabbatucci and Vittorio Vidotto (Roma–Bari: Editori Laterza, 1998), 433.

them in terms of a Fascist ideology. On the contrary, the Fascist discursive frame appropriated and reinterpreted already existing and widely shared myths. The nationalist myth, for instance, had been a widespread value in Italy since the beginning of the 20th century, with a stratified range of meanings. Fascism appropriated the nationalist myth as part of its rhetoric, aiming at identifying the regime with the national cultural identity.⁶⁴ This identification became the basis for attracting consensus towards the Regime and it was suggested mainly through the use of symbolic images provided by the visual arts. Art and culture were of great importance in the process of fascistization, or the normalisation of Fascist discourse, in the country. Controlling education and culture was part of the Fascist strategy to achieve the fascistization of society.

I assume that *The Taste of the Primitives*, and Venturi's definition and use of the concept of the primitive as a vehicle for anti-classicism and anti-nationalism in general, are part of Fascist discourse, although in a contesting relationship. Venturi introduced statements that, while contesting the dominant Fascist discourse, relate to it in a contrasting way. Venturi indeed displayed similar strategies. With his discourse, he tried to affect the discursive structures, thus affecting the perception of reality and the interpretation of objects from an alternative perspective.

1.7 The Position of the Present Research in the Landscape of Earlier Studies and Structure of the Book

In my opinion, previous studies of Lionello Venturi have dealt with the complexity of his position in a fragmented way and they lack a comprehensive perspective that would make possible cross-exposures of different aspects and his multiple roles – as theorist, art historian, art critic, connoisseur, art advisor, and political activist. It is symptomatic that many of the latest and most important studies on Venturi are collections of essays rather than monographs. Moreover, in spite of the international relevance of Venturi as a scholar, his texts from the 1920s have not been translated and studies in English on him are scarce. I hope to contribute to bridging this gap by including an analysis in the light of the connection with Anglo-American art theory

64 Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum, "Introduction," in *Donatello among the Black-shirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, eds. Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 1–10. In this anthology the concept of appropriation was used to explain Fascism's relationship with the past in terms of a means to shape a shared national identity, to blend tradition and modernity, and to ultimately legitimise the present. On a similar ground my research employed this concept in order to focus on the Fascist appropriation of contemporary art as a means to reinforce the Fascist discourse.

and criticism, which previously has only been considered in part.⁶⁵

In order to make this study more accessible to an international audience, I include some extracts from the typescript of an English translation of *The Taste of the Primitives* that was presumably edited by Venturi but not published.⁶⁶ The typescript is clearly a draft and contains Venturi's first-hand revisions and amends. Although Venturi did not translate the book himself, his meticulous attention to correctly rendering the concepts presented in the book nevertheless emerges from the typescript. The project of translating the book into English was then abandoned, probably because the author decided instead to publish a new book dealing with the history of art criticism – *The History of Art Criticism* (1936).

Stefano Valeri, the former keeper of the Lionello Venturi Archive at the University La Sapienza in Rome, made the most organised attempt to reconstruct a rounded professional profile of Venturi in his various contributions, especially focusing on his role as art history professor. The broad spectrum of Venturi's interests and the magnitude of his network, the variety of aesthetic and methodological issues he tackled, the array of artistic fields of expertise, his commitment as an educator, both in an academic context and for a non-academic audience, are probably some of the reasons why a comprehensive biography was never written. However, yet another reason has been influential. I think that considerations about Venturi's position in respect to Fascism have carried weight in the analysis of his biography since the description of him by his fellow art historian and pupil Carlo Giulio Argan (1909–1992) as having been “forced to flee as a result of political persecution” and of *The Taste of the Primitives* as being “one of the first signs of the commitment of culture in politics”.⁶⁷

While there have been scholars who have scaled back the role of anti-Fascism as a driving force in Venturi's work, the scope of which was indeed very limited during the 1920s, this rhetoric has proved difficult to challenge. One example of this situation is the lack of clarity that persisted until a few years ago about Venturi's involvement in the *Manifesto of the Fascist Intellectuals* (1925). It was difficult to access information about this, I suppose, because it clashed with the rhetoric of the anti-Fascist hero. However, Angelo d'Orsi and Antonello Venturi have recently tackled this issue in a

65 Laura Iamurri, “Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica Italiana,” *Prospettiva*, no. 87/88 (July–October 1997): 69–90.

66 The typescript of the English translation of *Il gusto dei primitivi* is at the Lionello Venturi Archive. The translator's name does not appear on the typescript, but another document points to Mr. George Crichton, living at Villa Benedettini, Via Camerata, Florence as the author of the translation. The Lionello Venturi Archive, Nuove accessioni. I thank Professor Antonello Venturi and Professor Claudio Zambianchi for kindly allowing me to publish in this study excerpts from the typescript.

67 Carlo Giulio Argan, “Prefazione,” in Lionello Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, 2nd ed. (Torino: Einaudi, 1972), xv–xxviii; Carlo Giulio Argan, *Lionello Venturi* (Roma: s.n., 1961).

clarifying way.⁶⁸ In my research, I try to throw new light on Venturi's position within the historical and cultural context of the 1920s and on the relationship between his work and theory as a whole. I have structured my thesis as an in-depth path, starting from the consideration of an aesthetic theoretical ground – my original starting point – moving to the relationship between scholarship and collecting practice, and arriving finally at the analysis of Venturi's position within the historical and political context.

The first chapter focuses on Venturi's aesthetic ideas and analyses the influence of formalist theories. I argue that those theories are key to understanding the shift from a historical interest in the art of the Early Renaissance to the definition of a conceptual ground that supported Venturi's commitment to disciplinary reform. The work carried out by art historians Gianni Carlo Sciolla and Giacomo Agosti provides an essential starting point for defining the context of the history of art history and of aesthetic ideas in Italy at the time.⁶⁹ From the point of view of an analysis of Venturi's aesthetic ideas, Luca Aniello and Mascia Cardelli's studies have drawn attention to the contradictory aspects of his theory.⁷⁰ In particular, Cardelli included in her philosophical essay a detailed analysis of the critical landscape in the 1920s – representing an important resource in this regard – in an attempt to position Venturi's ideas in the context of the cultural debate of the time. However, I find that in her work a gap remains between these two angles of analysis. In my study, I contextualise Venturi's aesthetic ideas in order to open them up for a more thorough understanding of their meaning and origin.

I previously elaborated on the importance of Venturi's connection with Croce and Neo-Idealism.⁷¹ However, I think that investigating Venturi's ideas from the perspective of the concept of the primitive and of its implications will reveal a less obvious aesthetic background and intellectual network. In particular, this approach will afford a better understanding of the nature of Venturi's spiritualism, which is an important aspect of his theory at this time. In this regard, Laura Iamurri's research about Venturi's connection to Bernard Berenson is of particular interest.⁷² Iamurri outlined a fascinating profile of this scholar – his personal theory and method based on connoisseurship but enriched by personal criticism and intuition – hinting at Berenson's role as one of the key influences on the second generation of professional art

68 D'Orsi, "Lo strano caso del professor Venturi"; Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio".

69 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*; Gianni Carlo Sciolla, *La critica d'arte del Novecento* (Torino: Utet, 1995).

70 Aniello, *Lionello Venturi*; Mascia Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi* (Firenze: Le Càriti editore, 2004).

71 Perna, "Taidekritiikin historia ja taidehistoria," 240–265; Aniello, *Lionello Venturi*; Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*.

72 Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana".

historians in Italy. Iamurri has also provided an important contribution in positioning Venturi's theoretical ideas in relation to his activism within the cultural debate of the 1920s.⁷³

However, I think that important connections in Venturi's scholarly network have still remained undetected. In particular an analysis of Venturi's relationship with the Finnish-Swedish art historian Osvald Sirén can open up new considerations about Venturi's aesthetic background, especially in connection to esotericism. This professional relationship, suggested by Johanna Vakkari, one of my supervisors, had not been studied before and thus required an investigation of primary sources.⁷⁴ However, the Finnish art historian Minna Törmä's biographical work on Sirén provided an essential starting point, without which this aspect could not have been appropriately tackled in my study.⁷⁵ The theoretical influence of Sirén on Lionello Venturi could also be a factor in explaining the presence of Chinese artworks in the Gualino Collection, following Venturi's collaborative and strategic advice. There has been very little research into the Chinese items in the collection, especially concerning their significance in relation to Venturi's aesthetic theory, and more particularly his conception of primitivism.⁷⁶ Their analysis from this point of view contributes in a highly interesting way to the definition of Venturi's thinking and networking at the time.

The second chapter of my thesis concentrates on Venturi's relationship with Riccardo Gualino and his art collection. The analysis of Venturi's connection to the Gualino Collection offers an insight into his definition and employment of the concept of primitivism. The Gualino Collection is a recurring reference in the context of studies on Venturi's work in the 1920s. However, here I go beyond considerations about the connection between the collection and Venturi's aesthetic theory. Instead I aim to analyse the inspirational role that the collection played in Venturi's thinking and in positioning him within the cultural debate at the time of his definition of a primitivist discourse. His work with the collection provided opportunities for

73 Laura Iamurri, "L'azione culturale di Lionello Venturi. L'insegnamento, gli studi, le polemiche," in *Lionello Venturi e la pittura a Torino 1919–1931*, ed. Maria Mimita Lamberti (Torino: Fondazione CRT, 2000), 81–105; Iamurri, "Un libro d'azione?"

74 Johanna Vakkari, "Alcuni contemporanei finlandesi di Lionello Venturi: Osvald Sirén, Tancred Borenius, Onni Okkonen," *Storia dell'arte*, Nuova serie, 1, no. 101 (January–April 2002), 108–117.

75 Minna Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans: Osvald Sirén's Journey into Chinese Art* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013).

76 Osvald Sirén, "A Reconstruction of a Great Collection of Chinese Sculpture," *East and West*, New Series, 11, no. 2–3 (June–September 1960): 75–93; Paola Mortari Vergara Caffarelli, "Chinese Art," in Bank of Italy, *Art Collections in Palazzo Koch* (Milano: Electa, 1982), 73–77; Carlo Maria Suriano, "Chinese Sculpture from the Gualino Collection," *Orientalism* 26, no. 4 (April 1995): 37–47.

travelling, for exposure to modernist circles and in particular to Theosophy – an aspect not considered before – and his contacts in the art trade.

Examining the links between the Gualino Collection and Venturi's idea of primitivism presents the problem of the correlation between art-historical discipline and the art trade. In regard to the history of art collecting, the contributions by Aline B. Saarinen and Francis Haskell continue to be great sources of information. For my study I also consulted sources that would provide a deeper insight into the profound meaning of collecting practices. Essays published in the volume edited by Susan M. Pearce in 1994 analyse the psychological disposition intrinsic to the act of collecting from different angles. Authors such as Michelle Huan, Krzysztof Pomian, and Lenore Metrick-Chen instead provide a base for further considerations regarding the interpretation of collecting as a discursive frame producing meaning through the appropriation of artworks and the shaping of identity for collectors. More specifically, many years ago, Maria Mimita Lamberti suggested looking at the Gualino Collection from the perspective of American collecting practices at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.⁷⁷ However, too little has been done in this area, despite its importance for gaining a better understanding of the roots and functions of primitivism in Venturi's discourse.

The third chapter looks at Venturi's definition of primitivism from the point of view of the historical, political, and cultural context. My main references in regard to a consideration of art and culture in relation to Fascism have been Emilio Gentile, Emily Braun, Elena Pontiggia, Claudia Lazzaro and Monica Cioli.⁷⁸ The landscape of studies about Fascism is extremely vast and far from homogeneous, but I prioritised sources that enhance an analysis of Fascism in terms of discourse. In choosing my sources, I looked with particular interest to those authors who stressed the multifaceted nature of Fascism, its adaptability, its inner diversity, and its continuous negotiation of values. D'Orsi, for his part, is an essential source for anyone approaching the cultural situation in Turin between the two World Wars.⁷⁹ All have contributed to a better understanding of the contradictions in the cultural discourse of the time, both in terms of artistic practices and Fascist arts policy. This constitutes an important

77 Maria Mimita Lamberti, "Riccardo Gualino. Una collezione e molti progetti," *Ricerche di storia dell'arte*, no. 12 (1980); Iamurri, "L'azione culturale di Lionello Venturi," 81–105, 96–97.

78 Emily Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism: Art and Politics under Fascism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Emilio Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity: Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2003); Elena Pontiggia *Modernità e classicità. Il Ritorno all'ordine in Europa dal primo dopoguerra agli anni Trenta* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori editore, 2008); Monica Cioli, *Il Fascismo e la 'sua' arte. Dottrina e istituzioni tra futurismo e Novecento* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2011).

79 D'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*.

premise for the understanding of Venturi's use of primitivism as a discursive frame and strategy.

My perspective of analysis focusing on primitivism will afford a more coherent picture of Venturi's professional and personal life in the 1920s based on primitivism as a core concept that functioned as a ground for all his activities, both academic and public. The importance of the role of the concept of the primitive as a key to understanding Venturi's work diverted me from my original plan, which was essentially an aesthetic and textual analysis in a narrower sense, and brought me to a broader consideration of the contextual landscape. Therefore, this project came to stretch over many fields, including intellectual biography, a history of art history, a history of art collecting, a history of culture and politics, and an aesthetic analysis. The aim, scope, and ground of this research has been renegotiated several times. While for this reason a systematic approach has been at stake, nevertheless I hope to be able to present a coherent and univocal conclusion that gives a more unified picture of Venturi's profile and allows a more profound reading of *The Taste of the Primitives*, while contributing to the different disciplinary fields involved in this research.

In order to achieve my goal, I have needed to develop my methodological toolkit, as well as the scope of my observations, in response to unexpected emerging new aspects. For this reason, from the methodological point of view, I combined textual and aesthetic analysis with archival research, including unpublished documentation. The Lionello Venturi Archive (University of Rome La Sapienza) contains a vast array of documents of different kinds. Newspaper cuttings, extracts from Venturi's publications and others' critical reviews of his work, have been useful resources facilitating my research. Venturi's personal notes and photographs gave me an invaluable insight into his working method. Some significant letters are also preserved in the Lionello Venturi Archive, but generally the correspondence left from the 1920s that is available there is limited. In this regard other archives, such as the Bernard Berenson Library (Villa I Tatti, Florence), the Fondo Adolfo Venturi (Centro Archivistico della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa), and the Sirén Archive (The Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm), were complementary sources, as they preserve a great number of Lionello Venturi's letters. This datum is per se important because it contributes to emphasising the extension of his international network and his nature as a prolific writer who was keen to maintain a connection with other scholars.

The Sirén Archive is particularly important because the Finnish-Swedish art historian used to keep a draft or a copy of the letters that he sent out, and therefore it is possible to follow his "dialogues", even when his actual letters have otherwise been lost. The Bernard Berenson Library is also important for the photographic material it contains, especially regarding artworks from the Gualino Collection. Last, but not least, the Fondo Riccardo Gualino (Archivio centrale dello Stato, Rome) provides documents and photos portraying snapshots of the collector's private life and of his circle. This material also contributes to fleshing out the background of Venturi's

personal and cultural spheres of influence outside of the Accademia in the 1920s. Until recently, the Fondo Riccardo Gualino has indeed been property of the family, who have preserved with care documents of all kinds, ranging from the more domestic and intimate to the most official and bureaucratic.⁸⁰ The latter, and in particular the artworks' import documents, were extremely useful in dating with precision the stages and the strategies of Gualino's evolving practices of collecting in the 1920s. This is particularly important in relation to the Chinese artworks, which have not yet been studied extensively.

80 The Riccardo Gualino Archive was recently donated by the family to the Archivio centrale dello Stato in Rome. The material, absorbed under the name of Fondo Riccardo Gualino, is undergoing a process of organisation and cataloguing.

2. The Background to Venturi's Aesthetic Theory and His Notion of Primitivism

From his father, Venturi took his interest in documentary research, from Croce his reasoning method, from Berenson the need for accuracy and direct reflection, from Ruskin his enthusiasm and moral rigour.⁸¹

In order to appreciate fully Lionello Venturi's work and thinking during the 1920s, it is important to understand the complex aesthetic background to his theoretical outlook. From analysing his theoretical ideas one can see he was indebted to a rich international network with which he was connected. (Fig. 15) However, it seems that Venturi was able to adopt and adapt these diverse influences to produce original results. Moreover, his theoretical work became the basis for his activism in contemporary cultural debate, venturing beyond the traditional limits of art-historical scholarship. His father Adolfo Venturi and the philosopher Benedetto Croce had the strongest impact on his thinking during his formative years as a scholar. However, in the 1920s it seems that Formalism became the most significant reference point for Venturi's ideas on aesthetics.

2.1 Adolfo Venturi's Positivism and Art-historical Scholarship in Italy

Lionello Venturi was among the first art-historical scholars to receive an academic education in the discipline, as the first professorship in Art History at the University of Rome had been established only in 1901.⁸² Therefore, he studied under the super-

81 Carlo Carrà, "L'Arte dei primitivi," *L'Ambrosiano*, 20 July 1926. Consulted as a newspaper cuttings at the Lionello Venturi Archive.

82 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 88, 114, 131, 161–163. Before developing his art historical studies into academic scholarship Adolfo Venturi had travelled throughout Europe and was inspired to network with an international group of professionals since 1896. He favoured the model provided by the German school and oriented the art-historical scholarship as a documentary research. He also considered the direct observation of artworks an important element. He put himself forward

vision of his father Adolfo Venturi, who was the newly appointed professor.⁸³ At that time art-historical scholarship was going through a period of reorganisation and professionalisation, and was developing as an independent academic field.⁸⁴ Since the second half of the 19th century, art-historical discourse had been undergoing a process of professionalisation, evolving from the practices of connoisseurship.⁸⁵ During these years Art History gained scientific status and independence as an academic discipline. Through this process the university became the primary place for establishing authority in regard to the legitimisation and standardisation of art-historical discourse.⁸⁶ Moreover, the process of disciplinary professionalisation also meant the loss of an elitist and aristocratic status for art history, with the knowledge of the field becoming more widely available, especially among the wealthy and empowered middle class. This process has been set against the backdrop of the growing nationalism concomitant with the increasing number of independent nations in Europe and beyond.⁸⁷ In Italy it developed along with the emerging need for a thorough classification of the country's cultural and artistic heritage.⁸⁸ The practices of connoisseurship and a positivist documentary methodology provided useful tools in this regard and came to dominate art-historical discourse.

Adolfo Venturi had been part of the international network of scholars who aimed to professionalise the discipline.⁸⁹ In 1888, in order to foster a connection with his

to be appointed as a Chair of Art History in the Italian University in 1889 for the first time. However, he only obtained a lecturing post. The Chair of Art History was eventually established in 1901 and Adolfo Venturi was named as the first professor in charge.

83 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*; Laura Iamurri, "Art History in Italy: Connoisseurship, Academic Scholarship and the Protection of Cultural Heritage," in *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*, ed. Matthew Rampley (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 393–396.

84 Mansfield, "Making Art History a Profession".

85 *Ibid.*, 3.

86 *Ibid.*, 2.

87 *Ibid.*, 2.

88 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 81. In 1887 Adolfo Venturi was transferred in order to take part in the State's project to compile a catalogue of the nation's artistic heritage, which was initially directed by Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle.

89 As a result of his travelling across Europe, Adolfo Venturi established a network of professionals. Journals were an essential strategy to keep these relationships alive and, in this spirit, Adolfo Venturi co-founded his journal *l'Archivio storico dell'arte*. In the beginning it was mainly regarded as a tool for those involved in the state administration but later it became a real professional forum for international scholars. Adolfo Venturi succeeded in bringing together an international range of professional art historians, among them was also the first Finnish professor of art history J. J. Tikkanen. Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 72–73, 114. Tikkanen was among the first international contributors, beginning in 1888. Tikkanen also visited Venturi in Italy. Letters from J. J. Tikkanen to Adolfo Venturi from 24 October 1892

colleagues, he founded the academic journal *L'Archivio storico dell'arte*, together with art historian Domenico Gnoli (1838–1915), later, in 1898, re-founded as *L'Arte. Rivista di storia dell'arte medievale e moderna*.⁹⁰ The journal also became a medium for bridging connoisseurship and Art History. His work was crucial in turning the figure of the connoisseur into the role of a professional art historian.⁹¹ Adolfo Venturi, in his role within the public administration, had been in charge of recording on behalf of the State as many examples of Italian architecture, painting, and sculpture as possible. In this regard he followed the experience of Giovanni Morelli (1816–1891) and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle (1819–1897), who after Italian unification (1861), were in charge of reviewing the country's artistic heritage and compiling the catalogue of the artworks with their attributions.⁹² With the same purpose in mind, Adolfo Venturi had travelled extensively across the country.⁹³ The project of drawing up the General Catalogue, including the full national heritage, corresponded to the process of national unification that Italy had been undergoing since 1861.⁹⁴ The project, besides its practical function of listing single monuments and artworks in the property of the State, also contributed to the definition of a national identity. Moreover, as a result of his travels, from 1901 Adolfo Venturi began to compile a comprehensive history of Italian art – a massive undertaking that aimed to illustrate Italy's heritage across the centuries, beginning with its art before the year 1000 A.D.⁹⁵

Adolfo Venturi's work followed a positivist and documentary method, which was necessary in order to handle a large number of artworks and monuments and to collect the essential information required to classify them. As a follower of Morelli

to 14 February 1937, in Centro Archivistico della Scuola Normale di Pisa, Fondo Adolfo Venturi (FAV). Adolfo Venturi visited him in Finland too. Johanna Vakkari, *Focus on Form: J. J. Tikkanen, Giotto and Art Research in the 19th century* (Helsinki: Suomen Muinaismuistoyhdistys, 2007), 15; Gianni Carlo Sciolla, "J. J. Tikkanen and the Origin of the Kunstwissenschaft in Italy," in *Towards a Science of Art History: J. J. Tikkanen and Art Historical Scholarship in Europe: The Acts of an International Conference*, ed. Johanna Vakkari (Helsinki: The Society for Art History in Finland, 2009), 95.

90 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 75–79, 140–142.

91 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*; Iamurri, "Art History in Italy," 393–406.

92 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 68–72.

93 *Ibid.*, 171, 200.

94 Marisa Dalai Emiliani, "Morelli e la questione del catalogo nazionale," in *Giovanni Morelli e la cultura dei conoscitori*, atti del convegno internazionale Bergamo, 4–7 giugno 1987, 3 vols, eds. Giacomo Agosti et al. (Bergamo: Lubrina, 1993), 107–119; Donata Levi, "Il viaggio di Morelli e di Cavalcaselle nelle Marche e nell'Umbria," in *Giovanni Morelli e la cultura dei conoscitori*, atti del convegno internazionale Bergamo, 4–7 giugno 1987, 3 vols, eds. Giacomo Agosti et al. (Bergamo: Lubrina, 1993), 133–148.

95 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 155–157; Adolfo Venturi, *Storia dell'arte italiana*, 25 vols (Milano: Hoepli, 1901–1940).

and Cavalcaselle, he had adopted the idea that the artwork itself is the primary source for its study.⁹⁶ This was another factor that contributed to the development of Adolfo Venturi's extensive international network, as he was eager to travel widely in order to see artworks first hand, even when they were located abroad.⁹⁷ However Adolfo Venturi also kept himself at a distance from his masters because he relied heavily on the documentary aspect of art-historical research. He was also sceptical about the relevance of single formal details in the analysis of the artworks, which was in turn the most characteristic aspect of Morelli's positivist method for attributions.⁹⁸ Instead Adolfo Venturi's approach to attribution work stressed the importance of documents and the connoisseur's intuition, based on strong knowledge of each single artist's production.⁹⁹

Most of the artworks and monuments that Adolfo Venturi covered in his survey had never before been documented, classified, or studied. Therefore, the information he presented was often acquired first hand and came from direct observation.¹⁰⁰ The situation was somewhat easier with the artworks from the 14th to the 16th centuries, as the art of this period had already aroused interest since the end of the 19th century, especially among scholars from Northern Europe and America, as Joseph Archer Crowe (1825–1896) and Cavalcaselle's co-authored publications indicate.¹⁰¹ In particular, since 1894 Bernard Berenson (1879–1966) had accurately illustrated Italian Renaissance art in his volumes and articles.¹⁰² Berenson was a connoisseur and employed an approach of direct observation of artworks similar to that used by Adolfo Venturi, although his work was initially mainly intended for dealers and collectors. While aesthetic issues did not constitute a priority for Adolfo Venturi and Berenson, their work had vital importance for the development of Italian art-histori-

96 Giacomo Agosti, "Giovanni Morelli e Adolfo Venturi. Alle origini dell'istituzione delle discipline storico-artistiche in Italia," in *Giovanni Morelli e la cultura dei conoscitori*, atti del convegno internazionale Bergamo, 4–7 giugno 1987, 3 vols, eds. Giacomo Agosti et al. (Bergamo: Lubrina, 1993), 253–278.

97 Johanna Vakkari, *Lähde ja silmä. Kuvataiteen tuntemuksen historiaa ja perusteita* (Helsinki: Palmenia, 2000), 90.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 155–157.

101 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 187–190; Joseph Archer Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, *A History of Painting in Italy from the Second to the Fourteenth Century: Drawn up from Fresh Materials after Recent Researches in the Archives of Italy, and from Personal Inspection of the Works of Art Scattered throughout Europe*, 3 vols (London: J. Murray, 1864–1866); Donata Levi, "Crowe e Cavalcaselle. Analisi di una collaborazione," *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Classe di Lettere e Filosofia*, Serie 3, 12, no. 3 (1982): 1131–1171.

102 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 187–190, 198; Bernard Berenson, *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance with an Index to their Works* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1896).

cal scholarship of Renaissance and Early Renaissance art. Both his father and Berenson had a great impact on Lionello Venturi's early education, and he considered these senior scholars as unrivalled authorities.¹⁰³

However, Lionello Venturi believed that art history should aim at including an aesthetic and critical approach in the research on artworks.¹⁰⁴ He thought that this was the only way of enabling scholars to understand the spiritual and emotional aspects of art. He thought that these aspects were instead overlooked by the positivist and documentary approach used by Adolfo Venturi.¹⁰⁵ He saw that the positivist approach had been functional in the classification of the Italian heritage in the aftermath of unification, but he also believed that it was of no use in understanding the aesthetic aspects of artworks. Lionello Venturi believed that art history should rely on philosophical and aesthetic literature rather than on historical documents.¹⁰⁶ He also suggested that the aim of an art historian was to outline artistic personalities rather than to document biographies. All in all, he thought that art-historical scholarship should respond to a mystical and universal nature of art. In this sense he claimed that geographical, chronological, and cultural elements should be considered of secondary importance. Therefore, he was preoccupied with finding a method that would allow the artistic nature of each artwork to emerge from its material aspect and historical context.¹⁰⁷ He also had a vision of scholarship that would widen his own scope and focus.¹⁰⁸ In this regard he proposed to include modern and Asian art and asked his father to consider the institution of a Chair of Oriental art at the University of Rome that would include Byzantine, Chinese, Persian, and Indian art to complement the professorship of Italian and European art.¹⁰⁹

Lionello Venturi wanted to bring his experience as a connoisseur, as an art historian and as an art critic together in order to influence the methodological approach to the study of artistic phenomena by looking at single artworks from a broader perspective.¹¹⁰ The need for disciplinary and methodological development was the

103 Letter from Lionello to Adolfo Venturi, 14 July 1922 (VT V1 b44 68), in FAV; Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana".

104 Argan, "Prefazione," xv–xxviii. Argan recognised Venturi's introduction of an aesthetic and critical perspective as the most important aspect of his contribution to the development of the art-historical discipline in Italy.

105 De Luca, *Lionello Venturi*, 7–28.

106 Venturi, "La Posizione dell'Italia nelle arti figurative".

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid.

109 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, s.d. (VT V1 b45 10), in FAV. "Non comprendere arte asiatica nella scuola mi pare che impedirebbe l'auspicata riforma (?) degli studi. Ci vuole coraggio. Ti sarò grato se terrai duro."

110 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, 9 June 1926 (VT V1 b45 21), in FAV. Venturi tells about his intention to bring together his experience as a connoisseur and an aesthete in the making of *The Taste of the Primitives*; Giulio Carlo Argan,

result of his theoretical thinking. When he began to pursue an academic career, he did so with the intention of reorienting the discipline's organisation and methodology by combining an aesthetic and a critical perspective in art-historical research.¹¹¹ In 1915, Lionello Venturi turned to academic professorship from museum administration, and declared his intentions publicly on the occasion of an inaugural address at the introduction to his course.¹¹² The results of his personal methodological approach can be found in his book *The Taste of the Primitives*, which went beyond the traditional art-historical account and was aimed at including an aesthetic and a critical perspective on artistic practice, rather than focusing on documentary research. Venturi shifted his focus to the meaning of spiritual intuition and to the identity of form and content, leaving out matters related to naturalism.

In 1914, Lionello Venturi had applied for professorships in several universities. It is interesting, in the light of the other options that became available to him, that he chose to accept the post at the University of Turin.¹¹³ He considered this university a favourable place for fostering his intended reforms, probably due to its distance from Rome, a centre of more traditional scholarship, and in spite of what he considered a more limited artistic heritage compared to other Italian cities, which he intended to compensate by travelling.¹¹⁴ Turin was at the time culturally provincial and traditionalist.¹¹⁵ It is reported that art historian and critic Roberto Longhi (1890–1970) commented in this regard that the city's zoological museum would be a more interesting

“Lionello Venturi,” in *I critici. Per la storia della filologia e della critica moderna in Italia*, ed. Gianni Grana (Milano: Marzorati editore, 1969), 3368.

- 111 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, 28 April 1915 (VT V1 b44 35), in FAV. Lionello expressed the intention to work for some new undertaking through the academic career.
- 112 Venturi, “La Posizione dell’Italia nelle arti figurative,” 3; Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell’arte in Italia*, 199, 208–210; Stefano Valeri, *Lungo le vie del giudizio nell’arte*, 17. Before being appointed professor, Venturi had worked as Inspector of Art Galleries (Ispettore delle gallerie) in Venice and in Rome (1909–1910) and as Curator of the National Gallery of Urbino (Sovrintendente della Galleria Nazionale). In 1912 he was appointed at the direction of the Galleria Nazionale di Urbino. He was also for a time the director of the Galleria Borghese in Rome; Stefano Valeri, ed., *La storia critica dell’arte nel magistero di Lionello Venturi* (Roma: Aracne, 2011). His reformed methodological approach affected his teaching as well as his studies.
- 113 Venturi, “Dal nazionalismo familiare all’esilio,” 39.
- 114 Venturi, “Dal nazionalismo familiare all’esilio,” 39; letter from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, 28 April 1915 (VT V1 b44 35), in FAV; letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 16 February 1915, in the Bernard Berenson Library, Villa I Tatti—The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, Historical Archives, Bernard and Mary Berenson, papers, 1880–2002. Correspondence. Florence (BBL). Venturi tells Berenson that he feels that he can freely work in Turin.
- 115 D’Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 199–203; De Luca, *Lionello Venturi*, 225; Angelo Dragone, “Lionello Venturi a Torino. Gualino e i ‘Sei’,” in *Da Cézanne all’arte astratta. Omaggio a Lionello Venturi*, eds. Giorgio Cortenova and Roberto Lambarelli (Milano: Mazzotta, 1992), catalogue to the exhibition, 88.

place to visit than the local picture gallery.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless Venturi saw the city's location as an advantage, it being near the French border and thus close to the modern and liberal influence of Italy's neighbour.¹¹⁷ Venturi's interest in an international platform is not surprising if one considers his multidisciplinary background and the fact that he had been acquainted with his father's international network of scholars since a young age.¹¹⁸ The influence of an international arena for art-historical research and aesthetic discussion became an important driver for his work.

Above all, he wished to introduce modern art in the academic curriculum.¹¹⁹ This alone was such a ground-breaking measure that Venturi held his lessons on modern art away from the university's premises, at the Pinacoteca di Torino, with the complicity of the museum's Director Guglielmo Pacchioni.¹²⁰ This new approach emerges directly from Venturi's lessons, as can be verified from the transcript made at the time by his students.¹²¹ During these lessons he used to make frequent references to aesthetic, critical, and literary sources, rejecting chronological order and favouring a comparison between artworks from different epochs. Chronological and aesthetic matters coexisted in a more flexible structure, blending history and criticism. Moreover, he proposed to look at artworks in the light of the context of the contemporary aesthetic ideas in order to evaluate whether artists worked on a positively stimulating ground, in other words whether they operated in a spiritual or in a materialist environment. Then he invited the students to search for the spiritual vision that would make an object a piece of art. The lessons offer an important perspective on the maturation of Venturi's thinking, and they constituted the direct premise of the *Taste of the Primitives*.¹²² In his lessons, as in his inaugural address, one can find his first attempts to define his notion of primitivism with reference to his aesthetic ideas grounded in the principles of universality, mysticism, and abstraction.

2.2 Croce's Neo-Idealism

Venturi's method of considering the spiritual aspect of art shows the influence of another important figure in the Italian cultural landscape of the time, the philosopher Benedetto Croce (1866–1952). Although Venturi recognised his father's

116 Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio," 39.

117 Ibid.

118 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 171, 200.

119 Enrico Crispolti, "Brevi riflessioni su Venturi e l'arte del proprio tempo," in *Storia dell'arte*, Nuova serie, 1, no. 101 (2002): 145–148.

120 Valeri, ed., *La storia critica dell'arte nel magistero di Lionello Venturi*.

121 Ibid.

122 Stefano Valeri, "Alle origini de *Il gusto dei primitivi*. Lionello Venturi docente a Torino," in *Enrico Mauceri. Storico dell'arte tra connoisseurship e conservazione* (Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Palermo, 27–29 settembre 2007), ed. Simonetta La Barbera (Palermo: Flaccovio editore, 2009), 135–140.

authority and his education was rooted in the tradition of connoisseurship and in a positivist and documentary approach, he became interested in the links between art history and aesthetic matters following Benedetto Croce's Neo-Idealism.¹²³ Through Croce, Venturi also became acquainted with a strand of Formalism that, based on the principle of considering art beyond naming and attributing artworks to important artists, regarded artworks in a different light and for a different purpose compared to connoisseurship.¹²⁴ Croce rather developed his aesthetic theory on a philosophical ground, including literature as well as the visual arts. His ideas were related to Hegel and Kant's Idealism.

Publishing his first treatise on aesthetics in 1902,¹²⁵ he underlined the spiritual nature of art and described the creative process as an act of acquiring knowledge.¹²⁶ He called this *artistic knowledge* and thought that it was achieved through an un-intellectual and intuitive approach to the observation of reality. He believed artists were able to grasp intuitively spiritual aspects that remained obscure to the rational mind. Artworks were thus considered a phenomenological manifestation of spiritual or *artistic knowledge* perceived by artists. Croce described such scrutinised artworks in terms of a synthesis of spiritual knowledge and artistic form. In other words, he considered intuition and expression as an indivisible unit. In his mind there was no distinction between form and content, as he believed that there is no content without form and no form without content. He excluded from consideration that any other content or purpose would exist in relation to artworks. Art was, in his mind, a matter of expression and not of representation.¹²⁷

Analysing form, Croce distinguished between *poetic* and *narrative language*. He believed that in poetic language, the meaning and signifier are coincidental – he described this as *pure form*. Moreover, he thought that *artistic*, or poetic, *form* expresses a spiritual content, while *ordinary*, or *narrative*, *form* expresses an intellectual content. He also distinguished between *pure form* and *apparent form*, which he defined as meaningless abstract form. This aspect shows that Croce's criterion for distinguishing art was not based on form, but on the relation between form and spiritual content.¹²⁸ It is this aspect that reveals a major point of contact with

123 De Luca, *Lionello Venturi*, 29–33; Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 101–163; Perna, “Taidekritiikin historia ja taidehistoria,” 240–65.

124 Benedetto Croce, “La teoria della Pura Visibilità (1911),” in *Nuovi saggi di estetica*, ed. Mario Scotti (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1991), 217–230; Valeri, “Lionello Venturi e il rinnovamento della critica dell’arte in Italia” 425–428; Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 101–107.

125 Benedetto Croce, *L’Estetica come scienza dell’espressione e linguistica generale* (Bari: Laterza, 1902).

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid.

128 Croce, *L’estetica come scienza dell’espressione*.

the theory of pure visibility.¹²⁹ He particularly appreciated the recognition of the importance of aesthetic matters in art-historical discourse, as well as the claim that everything needed to understand an artwork lies within the artwork itself.¹³⁰

The idea of the spiritual meaning of art, of its autonomy in terms of the expression of an individual intuition, and its expression through a synthesis of form and content, are all aspects that had a great impact on the definition of Lionello Venturi's theory.¹³¹ Venturi also adopted Croce's idea that aesthetics and criticism were an integral part of art-historical discourse. Venturi especially focused on the idea of a spiritual inspiration at the beginning of the creative process. This idea also dovetailed with the idea of considering artworks in terms of emotional expression rather than material representation. Nevertheless, unlike Croce, Venturi continued to believe that the material and historical aspects of an artwork are equally important in art-historical research, although only as a source of information for understanding the material context. He considered those aspects irrelevant to the universal and emotional meaning of the artworks, but nonetheless relevant in determining the cultural and historical context influencing the artist's choice in regard to matters such as style, technique and iconography.¹³² Like Croce, Venturi distinguished between ordinary and artistic forms and, unlike Croce, based this difference on the creative process rather than on style.¹³³ He indeed thought that there were no better or worse types of forms, or artistic forms *a priori*, but their artistic value depended on the synthesis made by the artist in relation to the expression of spiritual content.¹³⁴ The influence of Croce and Formalism are at the root of new role for the art historian, for whom the main focus lies in the recognition of the creative process and of artistic synthesis, rather than in the identification of the author and other historical information, as well as considerations about style and iconography.¹³⁵

2.3 Formalism

The influence of Formalism on Venturi's theory became more evident from the beginning of the 1920s, especially in relation to his plans for disciplinary reform. Formalist theories, which emerged from different contexts between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, were part of the dominant art-historical

129 Benedetto Croce, "Un tentativo eclettico nella storia delle arti figurative," in *Nuovi saggi di estetica*, ed. Mario Scotti (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1991), 231–235.

130 Ibid.

131 Sciolla, *La critica d'arte del Novecento*, 150.

132 Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, 168–170; Lionello Venturi, *La storia della critica d'arte* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000), 26–30.

133 Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, 13–15, 168–181.

134 Ibid., 9–14.

135 Venturi, *La storia della critica d'arte*, 23.

discourse.¹³⁶ They shed new light on the understanding of form in art in terms of independent meaning, rather than as means of representation. Formalism was close to Croce's Neo-Idealism in many respects, especially in terms of the conception of form as significant.¹³⁷ Croce had indeed been the first to introduce the idea of Pure Visibility in Italy, and it became the type of Formalism most discussed in the country during the 1910s, although Italian scholars maintained some reservation about it.¹³⁸ However, Formalism presented form as more important than content in a different way from Croce, who believed artistic form was an inseparable unit of form and content and saw it as a direct means of visual expression, abstract and independent from material reality.

Two essays that Venturi wrote on Heinrich Wölfflin (1864–1945) and on Pure Visibility – the latter referencing Hans von Marées, Adolf von Hildebrand, and Konrad Fiedler – are a testimony of Venturi's interest in Formalism at this time.¹³⁹ On the basis of the assumptions raised within the idea of Pure Visibility, which meant to assert the cognitive value of the visual experience, Wölfflin suggested employing formal categories for the investigation of artworks and wrote a history of style.¹⁴⁰ Venturi thought that, while formalist schemes were useful tools for investigating the formal and empirical aspects of an artwork, influenced by the historical and cultural context, they failed to cover the essential artistic component residing in its spiritual inspiration. He saw formalistic schemes as ways of providing a background for the understanding of the artistic side of artworks and constituting a prerequisite for their aesthetic consideration. He assumed that this aspect could be seen only through reflection upon aesthetic and conceptual categories. He indeed lamented that the lack of conceptual tools was one reason for the inadequacy of methods in art-historical scholarship failing to give the right consideration and evaluation of artworks. He argued that it had been common in historiographical practice to dismiss certain

136 Sciolla, *La critica d'arte del Novecento*, 63–65.

137 Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 133–161; De Luca, *Lionello Venturi*, 65–101; Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, *Profilo della critica d'arte in Italia* (Firenze: Edizioni U, 1948), 101–105.

138 Sciolla, *La critica d'arte del Novecento*.

139 Lionello Venturi, "Gli schemi del Wölfflin," in *Saggi di critica* (Roma: Bocca, 1956); Lionello Venturi, "La Pura Visibilità e l'estetica moderna," in *Saggi di critica* (Roma: Bocca, 1956). Venturi's criticism of Wölfflin's theory was the focus of his lessons in 1919 and in the following years. Valeri, "Alle origini de *Il gusto dei primitivi*," 9. Although Venturi dealt widely with Wölfflin's theory, he had taken distance from his ideas as early as 1920. "Ho letto da poco i libri del Wölfflin...e ho constatato con molta soddisfazione l'essenziale differenza dalla loro della mia mentalità critica." Letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 20 January 1920, in BBL.

140 Heinrich Wölfflin, *Classic Art: An Introduction to the Italian Renaissance* (1899), transl. Peter and Linda Murray (Oxford: Phaidon, 1980); Heinrich Wölfflin, *Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art* (1915) (New York: Dover, 1950).

artworks as uninteresting because they were being evaluated according to schemes that were foreign to them. More specifically, he thought that primitive art was misunderstood because it was being considered in the light of schemes related to classical formal principles.¹⁴¹

Such formalistic schemes, in his opinion, corresponded to a dominating discourse that would unconsciously and indirectly determine formal preferences. Venturi also described this process in terms of *Taste*. This notion in particular shows the influence of Alois Riegl's (1858–1905) art theory. Riegl belonged to the aesthetic School of Vienna and at the beginning of the 20th century he was interested in the so-called minor arts and marginal artistic periods. He employed formalist principles to foster the organisation of an art-historical practice primarily focusing on the formal aspect of the artworks, rather than on their makers. In his investigations, Riegl also employed literary sources and came to develop the concept of *Kunstwollen* (artistic will).¹⁴² Both aspects of his approach were important in the shaping of Venturi's theory and concept of taste, as will become clearer in the following subchapters.

2.3.1 The Second Generation of Formalists

Venturi's theory in the 1920s came to share more points of contact with the second generation of Formalists. In those years the role of German and Austrian theoreticians as leading authorities, who had been at the forefront of the discipline, lost traction as a consequence of losing the war, leaving room for the emergence of other schools of thought.¹⁴³ I think that this situation is reflected in Venturi's theoretical references shifting from German to English authors. This trend might also have been encouraged by his connection with Berenson, whose activity as a connoisseur he had been acquainted with since the beginning of the century. Although Berenson was not properly a theorist, he indeed supported his connoisseurship on a formalist ground based on the conception of art as a spiritual expression capable of stirring emotions addressing a sensory perception.

This view of Formalism, rooted in the idea of aestheticism and art for the art's sake and characterised by the interpretation of artworks as abstract expressions of universal value, was common to other contemporary theorists, such as Roger Fry, Clive Bell, and Osvald Sirén. They shared the description of form as a pure abstraction

141 Venturi, "Gli schemi del Wölfflin"; Venturi, "La Pura Visibilità e l'estetica moderna"; De Luca, *Lionello Venturi*.

142 Joaquín Lorda, "Problems of Style: Riegl's Problematic Foundations," in *Framing Formalism: Riegl's Work*, commentary Richard Woodfield (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2001), 107–133; Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 106–107, 161.

143 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 225–226; Ragghianti, *Profilo della critica d'arte in Italia*, 78–83.

conveying aesthetic emotions, and as being independent from resemblance to material reality. It was believed that the emotional and evocative power of visual elements determined forms' significance in a similar way to the abstract significance of music.¹⁴⁴ All these aspects became crucial in Venturi's theory from the 1920s, as it emerged in *The Taste of the Primitives* (1926). Another facet of second-generation Formalism that came to influence Venturi's work was primitivism. Formalist theorists introduced the concept of the primitive in order to support their theory. This perspective is a good explanatory ground for the understanding of Venturi's concept of the primitive, which escaped the traditional identification of the term with Italian art from the 13th and 15th century and did not concur with modernist primitivist discourse. His notion of primitivism instead showed a direct derivation from formalist primitivism. This perspective sheds light on the background to Venturi's ideas and work, during the 1920s.

2.3.2 Formalist Primitivism vs. Modernist Primitivism

Primitivism, meant as a positive perception of aesthetic qualities associated with the concept of the primitive, was an important part of formalist thinking. The term "primitive" was traditionally employed to refer to the Italian masters of the 13th and 15th century. This designation, coined by Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574), implied that these artists, although not yet ripe, had laid the foundations for the later achievements of Renaissance artists in terms of illusionistic representation (plastic and three-dimensional).¹⁴⁵ They were considered as forerunners of a new artistic tradition focused on naturalistic representation, who nevertheless had not yet developed the skills and tools to achieve these aims fully. Vasari's use of the term primitive to describe Early Renaissance art remained unchallenged for centuries, because the almost continuous aspiration to naturalistic representation dominated Western art-historical discourse.

However, at the turn of the 19th century, within modernist discourses the term primitive not only gained a positive denotation, but it began to include a reference to a wider range of phenomena besides the Italian art of the 13th to the 15th centuries. Moreover, within modernist discourses, the term primitive did not refer to particular and historically defined phenomena, as it did in Vasari's case. Rather it referred to every artistic experience belonging to a primordial stage, a context associated with

144 Ernst H. Gombrich, "Meditations on a Hobby Horse or the Roots of Artistic Form," in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1985), 1–11; Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory*, 13; Sixten Ringbom, *The Sounding Cosmos: A Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1970).

145 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti* (Roma: Grandi tascabili economici Newton, 1993).

formal abstraction and unintellectual relation to material reality.¹⁴⁶ Subsequently, strands of artistic modernism indeed retained Vasari's idea of the primitive as an initial stage of evolution, but preferred to accord the highest status to this stage. Within modernist discourses, the primordial stage was considered as favouring the emotional creative process of abstraction and expression not only on the basis of aesthetic matters, but also of social, cultural, physiological and psychological factors.¹⁴⁷ The primitive became a concept referring to modernist aesthetic claims, working as their explanatory ground.

Modernist aesthetics developed in opposition to academicism and attempted to escape the norms and values of the dominating bourgeois industrial and urban society.¹⁴⁸ Modernist thinking had also been influenced by new scientific disciplines, such as anthropology, psychoanalysis, palaeontology, natural sciences introducing a new perspective into art discourse.¹⁴⁹ Artists searched for inspiration from outside the traditional academic boundaries of artistic practice and art-historical discourse. Art produced within what was defined as a contemporary primordial stage was considered a survivor of the positivist and materialist civilisation. So modernist artists not only looked to the past, but also to marginal and peripheral contexts, such as rural society, and archaic and folkloristic subcultures.¹⁵⁰ Colonisation put artists in contact with artefacts from far and "exotic" tribes.¹⁵¹ Children and mentally ill people were also similarly considered as being at a primordial stage.¹⁵² These "primitives" were all considered privileged because they were either not interested or unable intellectually to process material reality. In this regard abstraction, associated with the primordial stage, was considered a shared aspect of the "primitives", uncorrupted

- 146 Gombrich, "Meditations on a Hobby Horse or the Roots of Artistic Form," 1–11; Gombrich, *The Preference for the Primitive*, 235–241.
- 147 Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*; Perry, "Primitivism and the Modern"; Jack Flam, "Introduction," in *Primitivism and Twentieth-century Art*, eds. Jack Flam and Miriam Deutch (London: University of California Press, 2003), 10–12; Wilhelm Worringer, "Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style," in *Art in Theory, 1900–2000*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Maldon, Oxford and Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), transl. Michael Bullock, 66–69.
- 148 Perry, "Primitivism and the Modern"; Gombrich, *Il gusto dei primitivi*; Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*.
- 149 Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*; David Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origin of Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004); Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory*, 11–14.
- 150 Lovejoy and Boas distinguished between the chronological and the cultural primitive. Lovejoy and Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity*; Perry, "Primitivism and the Modern"; Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*, 23–59; Guy Brett, "Unofficial Versions," in *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art*, ed. Susan Hiller (London: Routledge, 1991), 124.
- 151 Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*, 68–106; Flam, "Introduction," 1–25.
- 152 David MacLagan, "Insiders or Outsiders," in *The Myth of Primitivism: Perspectives on Art*, ed. Susan Hiller (London: Routledge, 1991), 37.

and unintellectual.¹⁵³ The psychological nature at the base of the creative process was indeed an important focus of modernist discourse.

Wassily Kandinsky (1866–1944), for example, adhered to the tenets of the Anthroposophical movement and he associated pure form with an instinctual expression of contingent emotions. He claimed that forms have an autonomous meaning, abstract from the representation function, and a spiritual origin. Consequently, he also considered pure forms as capable of stirring similar emotions.¹⁵⁴ He explained pure forms in terms of music, as abstract and arousing a sensory reaction.¹⁵⁵ Like music, he described form as a universal form of expression. Moreover, in his opinion, abstract and spiritual art was a prerogative of primitive artists, which he intended in a modernist sense.¹⁵⁶

Wilhelm Worringer (1881–1965) also associated abstraction with primitivism, but he focused even more explicitly on the psychological approach to the creative process. He thought that abstract vision was stronger among the “primitives”, who were described as estranged from a scientific understanding of nature. Worringer, in his book *Abstraction and Empathy* (1908), pointed out that the development of a particular civilisation goes hand in hand with a major confidence in the power to control nature and the surrounding environment, leading to a positivist approach and to a naturalistic representation of it.¹⁵⁷ On the other hand, the primordial stage characterised by a feeling of uncertainty towards the environment, tended to encourage a different state of mind, or psychological attitude, based on introspection and abstraction. He considered the latter as the ground for creative process, implying that “the less mankind succeeded... in entering into the relation of friendly confidence with the appearance of the outer world, the more forceful is the dynamic that leads to the striving after this abstract beauty”.¹⁵⁸

However, when looking at modernist primitivism, one should bear in mind that it is primarily the result of a process of appropriation aimed at reflecting and reinforcing modernist aesthetics.¹⁵⁹ The concept of the primitive brought together and homogenised all those cultures considered as primordial, and marginal to the dominant discourse, within a frame designed to support the modernist desire for aesthetic

153 Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*; Gombrich, “Meditations on a Hobby Horse”.

154 Leigh Clemons, “Staging New Dimensions: Wassily Kandinsky, ‘Der Blaue Reiter’ Almanac and the Reconfiguration of Artistic Space,” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 9, no. 1 (1994): 135–143.

155 Ringbom, *The Sounding Cosmos*; Barasch, *Modern Theories of Art 2*.

156 Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo, eds., *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art 1: 1901–1921* (Boston: Hall & C., 1982).

157 Worringer, “Abstraction and Empathy,” 66–69; Barasch, *Modern Theories of Art 2*.

158 Worringer, “Abstraction and Empathy,” 69.

159 Perry, “Primitivism and the Modern; Barasch, *Modern Theories of Art 2*; Foster, “The ‘Primitive’ Unconscious of Modern Art”.

regeneration in Europe.¹⁶⁰ Through this frame, those artistic experiences were made to respond to the modernist aesthetic based on the idea of a sensory and emotional origin of abstract expression. Consequently, the qualities found in those artworks defined as primitive reflected the aesthetic aspirations of modernist artists, rather than an objective observation of their appearance and contextualised meaning.¹⁶¹

Although many modernist artists described their encounter with “primitive” art as impressive and inspiring,¹⁶² modernist primitivism cannot be considered as the cause or origin of modernism, but rather as its consequence. It corresponded to the need to present and advocate their own ideas. The “primitives” included in modernist discourse had no voice in presenting and defining their own self within Western art-historical discourse. In this context they existed only in the form of appropriation by modernist primitivism.¹⁶³ Modernism stressed the universal value of pure forms, perceived beyond material contexts and through a sensory and instinctual approach. Despite the modernist sense of democratisation and inclusiveness towards Otherness, this perspective in fact favoured the process of appropriation. This means that, rather than promoting the objective understanding of those Others, modernist discourse produced a biased interpretation of them. Emptying an artwork of its contextual meaning enhanced the possibility to fill it with the projection of a modernist interpretation.

The museum was the primary place of decontextualisation, appropriation, and re-interpretation.¹⁶⁴ Museums and exhibitions, working as a frame, provided the context for the interpretation of the so-called¹⁶⁵ primitives in terms of modernist aesthetics, as for instance in the case of the display of “African objects” at the Trocadéro in Paris in 1907.¹⁶⁶ The way in which primitive artworks were exhibited and presented alongside the works of modernist artists reinforced a discourse about the primitive as uncorrupted by the intellectual structures of a progressive civilisation deemed detrimental to artistic expression and leading to representation. The primitives were presented as capable of contemplating nature through an interior eye and from a position of fear. The weight of the modernist interpretation, enhanced by the lack of a proper research about the objects of appropriation, can be exemplified by the bewildered reaction about the discovery of the Altamira paintings.¹⁶⁷ The palaeontological discovery could not be believed to be true because it showed a natu-

160 Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*.

161 Hiller, *The Myth of Primitivism*, 12; Rhodes, *Primitivism and Modern Art*, 13–22. Modernist artists “perceived and used the primitive” in different ways.

162 Flam and Deutch, *Primitivism and Twentieth-century Art*.

163 Hiller, *The Myth of Primitivism*, 2.

164 Brett, “Unofficial Versions,” 114.

165 Bal, *Double Exposures*, 2–8.

166 Flam and Deutch, *Primitivism and Twentieth-century Art*, 4–6.

167 Barasch, *Modern Theories of Art 2*, 192–272; Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave*.

realistic attitude during a primordial stage. This problem was also addressed by the art historian and critic Carl Einstein, who, already in 1915, noted that because of the lack of information about the historical and cultural context of the tribal works coming to Europe, they risked being associated with a meaning that did not belong to them.¹⁶⁸

The second generation of Formalists introduced a conceptual use of the primitive, which, similarly to modernist primitivism, aimed at synthesising their aesthetic claims. Formalist primitivism shows many points of contact with the meaning the term had within modernist discourses. However, the convergence is only partial. The formalist notion of primitivism was coined in order to epitomise what were regarded as essential aspects of art. These were, besides the anti-materialist and non-intellectual dimension of artistic inspiration, formal abstraction and simplification. Through it, Formalist theoreticians highlighted their spiritual or emotional interpretation of the origin of art. The concept of the primitive corresponded to the idea of art as a universal and eternal phenomenon, based on its abstract and expressive character. Within modernist discourses, especially because of the important contribution given by the artists to art theory, the focus on identifying the exact formal characteristics of primitivism had an important role. In contrast, Formalist theorists were not particularly interested in matters of style.

Both modernist and formalist articulations of primitivism referred to a very heterogeneous range of examples of what was regarded as primitive art, but seldom overlapping. Roger Fry, for instance, was the only one among the group of formalists here considered who included ethnic, non-European art and subcultures in his reference to the concept of the primitive.¹⁶⁹ Formalist theorists also included geographically and chronologically spread phenomena, as far apart as Italian primitive masters, Chinese art, and Modern art. However, they kept referring to examples of fine art, traditionally included – although differently valued – within the limits of the art-historical discourse. The inclusion of different examples of primitive art, compared to modernism, is of no small importance as it reflects a different aesthetic background and a different relationship within the traditional art-historical discourse, which Formalists were not necessarily interested in challenging. Moreover, Formalists did not see primitivism in relation to stages of civilisation or development and did not endorse a psychological interpretation of the creative process.

Besides the distance in regard to aesthetic and the formal references, Formalism and modernism shared a similar strategy of appropriation and interpretation within a discursive frame that favoured and supported an aesthetic perspective on the basis

168 Lloyd, “Emil Nolde’s ‘Etnographic’ Still Lifes,” 102; Carl Einstein, “Negro Sculpture,” in *Art in Theory, 1900–2000*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Maldon, Oxford and Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), transl. Nicholas Walker, 110–116.

169 Roger Fry, “The Art of the Bushman,” in *Roger Fry: Vision and Design*, ed. J. B. Bullen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 60–69.

of a specific concept of the primitive. Within this strategy, examples of artworks deemed as primitive were indeed selected and appropriated within a discursive frame for their ability to reflect, and thus promote, aesthetic claims. The meaning of the artworks within the aesthetic frame responded to a pre-defined primitivist discourse, and did not take into account their original and inner meaning. Through their work and texts, theorists like Berenson, Bell, Fry, and Sirén contributed to defining a discursive frame where the concept of the primitive was associated with formalist aesthetic qualities.

They appropriated and interpreted artistic phenomena in relation to the primitivist frame in order to support their aesthetic perspective. From their discourse the “primitives” emerged as good artists, or rather authentic, according to the requirements of the creative process as profiled by formalist theory. In the case of both Berenson and Sirén, the primitivist discourse was also reinforced through their involvement in collecting practices. Collections would play their part in enacting discursive frames, and thus directing a conceptual interpretation, while at the same time they would acquire a major value and aesthetic relevance, thanks to the branding power of the conceptual ground they referred to.

In general, during the modernist era the idea of the emotional nature of artistic production was also applied to the aesthetic appreciation of artworks, thus considering them in terms of a mere sensory response. This view corresponded to a more democratic idea of art that tended to dismiss the role of traditional experts as much as that of academic artists. By contrast formalist theorists believed that a professional authority should have mediated the understanding of art. As they believed that not everybody could produce fine art, they also believed that not everybody could achieve a profound understanding of it.¹⁷⁰ In this regard it is interesting that Fry, who leaned towards a kind of modernist appreciation of art, noticed that this aspect was at the origin of traditional scholars’ scepticism towards Post-Impressionism.¹⁷¹ While the appreciation of the Italian “primitives” and Chinese art, according to Fry, was still associated with the erudition and sophistication of the upper classes, it was especially modern art that was associated with an exclusively sensory approach, thus providing a similar experience for the educated public and the masses of illiterates alike, placing their ability to appreciate art on the same level.¹⁷²

While promoting an alternative and anti-academic aesthetic perspective, Sirén and Berenson retained a rather conservative position. They intended to preserve a

170 Ann Mary Calo, “Bernard Berenson, Modern art, and Modern Criticism,” abstract, accessed February 25, 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/35407351_BERNARD_BERENSON_MODERN_ART_ANA_MODERN_CRITICISM_BERENSON_BERNARD_ART_CRITICISMg.

171 Roger Fry, “Retrospect,” in *Roger Fry: Vision and Design*, ed. J. B. Bullen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 206.

172 *Ibid.*, 203–204.

hierarchy that depended on traditional structures and professional authorities, such as academic scholars, museum keepers, critics, experts, and advisors. They deemed these agents indispensable guides who oriented the recognition and understanding of art and its aesthetic and financial value. A purely sensory approach, promoted by modernist discourses, was perceived as a challenge to the professional status of art historians and connoisseurs. Theorists such as Berenson and Sirén, themselves experts and advisors, scholars and museum keepers, had a special interest in maintaining the art discourse within traditional boundaries.¹⁷³

This explains why the Formalists, despite having a similar aesthetic ground to modernist aesthetic theories, excluded from their interests ethnic and post-Impressionist art. As a consequence, although they used primitivism to promote an aesthetic discourse that provided an alternative to materialist and academic naturalism, they remained cautious about the avant-gardes. In this regard it is significant that Sirén, in 1915, although describing modern times as more receptive to the aesthetics of the primitive, was concerned about the future. In his opinion, it was not possible to imagine what would follow on from the modernist revolution in the field of art.¹⁷⁴ Although the second generation of formalist theorists were partly responsible for inspiring modernist discourses with their aesthetic claims, they were not able to understand fully the achievements of modernist artistic practices. They did not grasp the modernist attempt to give art a whole new meaning – the power to break with past schemes, introducing new media and techniques, and their aim at provoking thought.

2.4 Formalist Theorists and the Concept of the Primitive

Berenson, Bell, Fry, and Sirén's ideas are examples of the deployment of primitivism as an explanatory ground of formalist art theories. Among them, Berenson and Sirén had a direct impact on the shaping of Lionello Venturi's aesthetics and primitivism. Venturi had known Berenson through his father since he was very young.¹⁷⁵ Berenson and Adolfo Venturi had met before 1861 and both had been Morelli's followers.¹⁷⁶ Lionello Venturi became acquainted with Sirén at the beginning of the century at the time of his first travelling in Italy and of his first cooperation with *L'Arte*, the journal directed by Adolfo Venturi, since the 1904.

173 Calo, "Bernard Berenson, Modern art, and Modern Criticism".

174 Osvald Sirén, "Primitiv och modern konst," *Ord och bild* 24 (1915): 35–47.

175 The first letter addressed to Lionello from Berenson is dated 1907, in ALV. The first letter from Lionello to Berenson is dated 27 April 1908, in BBL.

176 Colin Simpson, *The Partnership: The Secret Association of Bernard Berenson and Joseph Duveen* (London: The Bodley Head, 1987), 56–63; Vakkari, *Lähde ja silmä*, 90.

Sirén and Lionello Venturi shared a common formative path as they had been among first generation of art historians to gain a professional academic education in Italy and in Finland, respectively, while looking with interest to developments brought by Berenson to connoisseurship. Nonetheless their relationship became more direct and frequent in the beginning of the 1920s. In those years Sirén, with whom Venturi studied for a few years in Paris, introduced him to Chinese art.¹⁷⁷ With Berenson and Sirén, Venturi also shared the application of their authority as professional scholars in the art trade. Moreover, Venturi's definition of primitivism was influenced by Berenson and Sirén's work, and through Sirén's mediation, by Fry and Bell too. Their books were also found in Venturi's personal library.¹⁷⁸ Like them, starting from the study of the Italian "primitives", he arrived at the expression of general aesthetic principles involving other phenomena, such as for instance modern and Chinese art.

2.4.1 Bernard Berenson

I owe to Bernard Berenson the ideas about the plastic value of Florentine painting and the Asiatic and mystic character of Sieneese painting.¹⁷⁹

Although not strictly a theorist, Bernard Berenson's attempt to break away from the academic tradition and to reshape art discourse, made him an inspirational figure for the development of a formalist aesthetic based on the concept of the primitive. Berenson used the term primitive mainly as a historical meaning associated with the Italian art of the 13th and 15th centuries, but it also came to indicate general aesthetic features that he considered as essential. Although he did not exactly use the term primitive as a concept, he was partly responsible for the shaping of the myth of the primitive that had a strong impact on the art discourse of his time. Primitive artists,

177 Letters from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, 28 May 1926 and 1 June 1926 (VT V1 b45 19 and VT V1 b45 20), in FAV.

178 When Lionello Venturi's personal library was bequeathed by the family, it was divided in two parts: to the University of Turin went mostly books of art theory and to the University of Perugia went mostly catalogues to art exhibitions or collections. Other documents and notes went to the University of Rome La Sapienza. Monica Perillo Marconi, *Relazione sulla catalogazione del fondo Lionello Venturi*, 2007, accessed February 25, 2019, <https://www.bibliosum.unito.it/it/biblioteche-e-media-teca/biblioteca-di-arte-musica-e-spettacolo/fondi-librari>. Venturi's collection of books is part of the library of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Turin. Fondo Venturi accessed February 25, 2019, http://www.biblioteche.unipg.it/F/?-func=find-c&ccl_term=wcc%3Dbum+and+fven&adjacent=N&local_base=UPG01. In Perugia, Venturi's collection of books is part of the library of the Centro Servizi Bibliotecari, Università degli Studi di Perugia. Archivio di Lionello Venturi accessed February 25, 2019, <https://saras.uniroma1.it/strutture/archivio-lionello-venturi>.

179 Venturi, "La posizione dell'Italia nelle arti figurative," 9.

in his opinion, were inclined to create art that expressed spiritual emotions through forms that directly stirred the senses, thus escaping intellectual reasoning and avoiding external representation.

Berenson was an American, a Harvard graduate in literature, and he became interested in art history while travelling in Europe. During his sojourn in Italy this interest was stimulated through practising connoisseurship, but he had developed a personal approach that was based on the principle of *tactile values*. He gained his expertise in Italian primitive art as a consequence of his encounter with Giovanni Morelli and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle in Italy.¹⁸⁰ Morelli and Cavalcaselle developed the art of connoisseurship into a methodology for the attribution and authentication of artworks based on the internal elements in the work.¹⁸¹ Morelli's method was distinctive for its positivist approach in processing information about the details in artworks that would enhance the identification of the author.¹⁸² This method recalled the natural sciences that had been part of his former education. Berenson was especially indebted to Morelli for considering artworks as a primary source of information and for his limited trust in documents relating to an artwork. Documents, history, subject matter were in his opinion of secondary importance and irrelevant to an aesthetic appreciation.

Berenson's first book, *The Venetian Painters of the Renaissance* (1894), reflects the influence of Morelli and Cavalcaselle's method, in particular for the list of attributions that it included.¹⁸³ Following the example of the connoisseurs, Berenson regarded formal aspects in artworks as useful elements for authentication and attribution. His book, which was reprinted several times, had a remarkable impact on art discourse, as well as defining Berenson's authority as a leading scholar in the field of the Italian old masters. Together with his subsequent publications, it became a fundamental resource in studying the Italian art of the Renaissance.¹⁸⁴ As a result of his studies he published a series of books, written between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, on Italian primitive art that had a great resonance and

180 Simpson, *The Partnership*, 54–56, 59–63; David Alan Brown, "Giovanni Morelli and Bernard Berenson," in *Giovanni Morelli e la cultura dei conoscitori*, atti del convegno internazionale Bergamo, 4–7 giugno 1987, 3 vols, eds., Giacomo Agosti et al. (Bergamo: Lubrina, 1993), 389–398.

181 Raggiamenti, *Profilo della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 39–53.

182 Richard Pau, "Le origini scientifiche del metodo morelliano," in *Giovanni Morelli e la cultura dei conoscitori*, atti del convegno internazionale Bergamo, 4–7 giugno 1987, 3 vols, eds. Giacomo Agosti et al. (Bergamo: Lubrina, 1993), 301–320; Vakkari, *Lähde ja silmä*, 80.

183 Bernard Berenson, *The Venetian Painters of the Renaissance with an Index to their Works* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1894).

184 Rollin Van N. Hadley, ed., *The Letters of Bernard Berenson and Isabella Stewart Gardner, 1894–1924* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), xxi. The reprints were made in 1895 and 1897.

had been behind a rising interest in the subject among scholars, museum professionals, collectors, dealers, as well as art-lovers and travellers.

Over the years Berenson became a widely respected expert in the field of Italian art of the 13th and 15th centuries. His books were popular because they were easy to read, becoming influential among American travellers visiting Italy, and instilling a passion for the Italian old masters.¹⁸⁵ They were an easy read because they were not loaded with excessive quotations of documentary sources and data.¹⁸⁶ They were nevertheless appreciated also among professionals because of the first-hand information Berenson had gathered on a vast number of artworks.¹⁸⁷ His attributions were the result of a meticulous connoisseurship aimed at grouping artists according to stylistic coherence. He distinguished himself with his profound sense of observation and memory concerning details that made it possible to isolate groups of works under given schools or artistic personalities.¹⁸⁸ He also compiled an index of artworks to be considered of ascertained authorship according to his studies. Although his books were not always accepted as scholarly works, the information he provided and the attributions he made as a connoisseur were widely considered reliable and authoritative. Moreover, his index and lists were also accepted as precise and pertinent and many scholars and collectors took up the index as a guideline.¹⁸⁹ In addition, his authentications of works in several English collections, often downgraded previous attributions.¹⁹⁰ His authority came to affect tradition, even challenging the privileges of the aristocracy.

However, he went beyond connoisseurship in his books, basing his claims on aesthetic reflection.¹⁹¹ He engaged in a subtle criticism of artworks and artistic personalities. He appreciated the spirituality and pure religiosity of the Italian old masters. Although these artworks represented a religious theme, he thought that their true religiosity was to be found in the colours and forms reflecting an inner spiritual feeling. This spiritualism emerging from forms and colours was, in his opinion, the source of the powerful evocative force of the primitive artists in stirring emotions. Therefore, he thought that connoisseurial and documentary researches were not sufficient to the understanding and appreciation of art. For this reason, Berenson

185 Rachel Cohen, *Bernard Berenson: A Life in the Picture Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), i.

186 Iamurri, “Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana”; Raghianti, *Profilo della critica d’arte in Italia*, 88–93. Raghianti compares the accessibility and pleasure of Berenson’s writings with Wölfflin’s more scholarly traditional style.

187 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, i.

188 *Ibid.*, 218.

189 Iamurri, “Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana”.

190 Aline B. Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors: The Lives, Times and Tastes of Some Adventurous American Collectors* (New York: Random House, 1958); Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 88, 143.

191 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, i.

assumed the methods of the connoisseurs, taking them forward especially in considerations about the quality of the form and its association with aesthetic considerations.¹⁹² Similarly he criticised Adolfo Venturi by defining him as a *good archivist* rather than as an art historian.¹⁹³

In this regard his books became significant within this field of scholarship, setting the example of a new approach based on aesthetic meditation associated with the practice of attribution.¹⁹⁴ The aesthetic background guaranteed him skills in art appreciation, which contributed to his success among the general public. In the *Florentine Painters of the Renaissance* (1896), for instance, he described Botticelli's painting, the *Birth of Venus*, in formalist terms, as a work that communicates sensations through mere formal elements that, by suggesting the effect of movement and tactile sensations, stir emotion in a way similar to music.¹⁹⁵ (Fig. 66) The perspective, put forward in his books, of a purely aesthetic and sensory enjoyment of art, beyond erudition, fascinated the audience.

Berenson's formalist theory remained strongly related to his practice of connoisseurship. Single artworks were at the centre of Berenson's focus. In this regard he made extensive use of photographs as a basis for his aesthetic discussion, as well as for the argumentation of his attributions. Berenson acquired a large collection of photographic reproductions of artworks, financed mainly through his activity as an art advisor and intermediary.¹⁹⁶ The use of photographs facilitated relationships among experts, collectors, and dealers. At the time photography was becoming an accepted tool of research within art-historical scholarship and was adopted by several scholars. Berenson used photographs as a tool to observe and compare artworks.¹⁹⁷ He also made his notes directly on the photographs, which then became the basis of his aesthetic reflection. (Figs. 32, 37) Most of the photographs in his archive are marked with comments on the back, revealing aspects of his working method. He also used his photographs to exchange opinions with other scholars. This was the case when he discussed *Crucifixion, Nativity, and Annunciation* from the Johnson

192 Vakkari, *Lähde ja silmä*, 92.

193 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 113, 140.

194 Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana".

195 Bernard Berenson, *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance with an Index to their Works* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1896); Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 2.

196 Elisabetta Cunsolo, "Catalogo e digitalizzazione nella fototeca di Villa I Tatti. Le fasi di un progetto," *Predella*, no. 28 (December 2010), accessed March 4, 2013, http://predella.arte.unipi.it/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=118&-catid=61&itemid=89; Giovanni Pagliarulo, "Photographs to Read: Berensonian Annotations," in *Photo Archives and the Photographic Memory of Art History*, The Acts of the Conference, London, Courtauld Institute of Art, 16–17 June 2009, ed. Costanza Caraffa (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2011), 181–191.

197 Hadley, *The Letters of Bernard Berenson and Isabella Stewart Gardner*, xxi.

Collection in Philadelphia, attributed to the Paduan School, with his younger colleague Osvald Sirén. (Figs. 32, 37–38) Photographs of the artworks, with comments written on their back, accompanied the epistolary exchange.¹⁹⁸

Mainly interested in single artworks rather than in a larger scale theoretical discourse, Berenson conceived formalist analysis as a tool for his activity as a connoisseur. His considerations about the quality of formal aspects were not merely auxiliary elements in the practice of attribution and authentication of artworks, but central criteria for the determination of artistic value. For him aesthetic emotions were expressed through purely visual elements that implied a physiological response. Therefore, he claimed that art could be experienced through its formal aspect only. The quality of the form was considered fundamental to the aesthetic enjoyment.¹⁹⁹ In this respect, he distinguished between *decorative forms*, which express artistic content, and *illustrative forms*. He thought that decorative forms, in contrast to illustrative forms, affect the senses in a direct way, with no intellectual implications.²⁰⁰ Moreover he associated decorative forms with *tactile value*, which he considered as the transmission of a sensorial reaction related to the sense of touch experienced by looking at a painting.²⁰¹ He also considered tactile value as an eternal and universal aspect of art creation.²⁰² Because tactile values affect the beholder at a sensory level, they could be enjoyed regardless of the geographical, chronological, and cultural context. Berenson thought that the Italian primitives, and Early Florentine paintings in particular, represented the highest aesthetic achievement in Western art history. He explained their super realism in terms of decorative formal relationships and tactile value.

Berenson's theoretical work and his expertise on the Italian primitives run parallel to his involvement in the art trade and art collecting. From 1891 onwards, he became involved with the art market as an expert in Italian primitive art, following his encounter with Morelli, who granted him access to a vast number of exclusive documents on Italian artworks, thus giving him an advantaged position.²⁰³ While Berenson's authority as a connoisseur and art historian had an impact on his credibility in the art trade, the outcomes of his activities as an art collector and as an advisor

198 Pagliarulo, "Photographs to Read".

199 Berenson, *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance with an Index to their Works*, 41.

200 Altti Kuusamo, "The Idea of Art as a Form behind Tactile Values: The Recuperation of Art in Art History c. 100 Years Ago," in *Towards a Science of Art History: J. J. Tikkanen and Art Historical Scholarship in Europe*, ed. Johanna Vakkari (Helsinki: The Society for Art History in Finland, 2009), 119–126.

201 Ibid.

202 Bernard Berenson, *The Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (London: Putnam and Sons, 1909), 5, 10, 14.

203 Hadley, *The Letters of Bernard Berenson and Isabella Stewart Gardner*; Brown, "Giovanni Morelli and Bernard Berenson," 389–398.

were also significant in influencing his theory. His twofold functions nurtured each other. Collecting and advising both reflected and steered his theoretical discourse, thus drawing legitimisation from it. Particularly important in this regard was the framing role of his own collection, reflecting and promoting the myth of the primitive along with his aesthetic perspective. The composition of Berenson's collection, and especially the way it was presented, contributed in displaying and communicating a primitivist discourse, regardless of being true or not (beyond objectivity), to impress the audience, while promoting his aesthetic argumentations.²⁰⁴

Berenson, besides advising collectors on the purchase of Italian primitive masters' paintings, acquired a good share of them for himself. Although he kept his collection at his private residence, Villa I Tatti, near Florence, it nevertheless acquired an uncommonly public dimension. The Villa was the hub of Berenson's professional network, where he would receive and entertain his guests: scholars, intellectuals, collectors, and dealers.²⁰⁵ Therefore, the collection was highly visible, impacting on both his regular and occasional visitors, as much scholars as collectors. As a result, it became a powerful evocation of his aesthetic claims. Moreover, although Italian primitive art was the almost exclusive protagonist in his writings, Berenson's collection shows that the term primitive came to imply a wider set of references and to assume a generic aesthetic meaning. Chinese sculptures and Impressionist paintings were displayed side by side with Italian primitive artworks and were regarded as evoking similar aesthetic experiences.²⁰⁶ In his opinion, they all shared a common aesthetic character, reflecting the myth of the primitive and thus promoting the idea of primitive art as a universal phenomenon detached from material and cultural influence. Through this process of appropriation, enfranchising the artworks from their original and contextual meaning, it was possible to project on those artistic phenomena a different interpretation by including them in a new discursive frame.

Berenson became familiar with Chinese art while working as an advisor for Isabella Stewart Gardner's art collection, which also included Italian primitive as well as Chinese artworks. He was active in the trade of Italian primitive paintings but did not have the necessary expertise for selecting and finding Chinese artworks.²⁰⁷ Chinese art had become popular in the United States since the end of the 19th century. By the mid-1910s, North America saw a significant increase in the flow of artworks from China and a growing number of collections.²⁰⁸ Concomitant with this was the

204 Bal, *Double Exposures*, 2–8.

205 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*.

206 Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiano," 71; Laurance Roberts, *The Bernard Berenson Collection of Oriental Art at Villa I Tatti* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1991).

207 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*.

208 Lenore Metrick-Chen, *Collecting Objects/Excluding People: Chinese Subjects and American Visual Culture, 1830–1900* (Albany: State University of New York Press,

development in Western countries of Oriental art scholarship, yet this did not mean that Chinese art would have been profoundly understood, as it was mostly absorbed within a Western discourse and aesthetic perspective.²⁰⁹ Japanese scholar Kakuzo Okakura (1862–1913), who moved to the United States in 1904, was regarded as the most prominent connoisseur of Oriental art and was an important link for Western scholars in their approach to Japanese art and culture.²¹⁰ He also became one of the major traders in Eastern art, advising a number of American private and museum collections, among them Isabella Stewart Gardner's collection.²¹¹

Berenson's connection to Okakura also accounts for the quality of the Chinese artworks that he was able to acquire for his own collection, taking advantage of the growing availability of Chinese art.²¹² However, it was Berenson who, by including Chinese art in his texts and his collection – alongside Italian primitive artworks – came to associate it with a theoretical discourse that relied on a concept of the primitive that had been taking shape in those years in a formalist sense. Chinese art gained recognition in connection to the myth of the primitive and on the basis of the formalist principle of a spiritual sensibility expressed through the purely formal relations that came with it. He reinforced this association in his essay on the Sieneese artist Sassetta (c.1400–1450), where he compared the 14th-century Italian artist to Asian art.²¹³ In this process of appropriation, projecting meaning and value on those artworks, Berenson came to contribute to the definition of the perception of Chinese art that also affected other collections of the time. Berenson's discursive frame legitimised, valued, and gave sense to collecting Chinese art. Therefore, in this process, Berenson not only established an aesthetic association with other artworks from other cultures, i.e. Italian primitives, but he also used his authority to affirm the market value of Chinese art.

2012); Yiyou Wang, "The Louvre from China: A Critical Study of C. T. Loo and the Framing of Chinese Art in the United States, 1915–1950" (PhD diss., Ohio University, 2007), 17–18, accessed February 25, 2019, <https://etd.ohiolink.edu/>.

209 Michelle Huang, ed., *The Reception of Chinese Art Across Cultures* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

210 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 17, 21.

211 Hadley, *The Letters of Bernard Berenson and Isabella Stewart Gardner*. Isabella Stewart Gardner travelled to Japan and acquired Far Eastern art from Okakura since the 1880s.

212 Roberts, *The Bernard Berenson Collection of Oriental Art at Villa I Tatti*.

213 Carl Brandon Strehlke, "Berenson, Sassetta, and Asian Art," in *Sassetta. The Borgo San Sepolcro Altarpiece*, vol. 1, ed. Machtelt Israëls, Villa I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies (Florence: Primavera Press, 2009), 37–49; Bernard Berenson, "A Sieneese Painter of the Franciscan Legend," in *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 3, no. 7–8 (September–November 1903): 3–35, 171–184.

Berenson's activity is one example of the intermingling of art history, the art trade and collecting at the beginning of the 20th century.²¹⁴ The art market exploited the validation received from art-historical discourse, which in turn enhanced Berenson's unconventional method and aesthetic ideals. At a time when art history was undergoing a process of professionalisation and independence among other academic and scientific disciplines, Berenson represented the figure of an independent professional committed at the same time to art-historical discourse, as well as the art trade, dialoguing at once with scholars, collectors, and dealers. The art-historical discourse of the time appears, despite its new status of scientific and independent academic discipline, to be permeable to the influence of the art market, which in turn gains legitimisation from it.²¹⁵ The art-historical discourse at the time was therefore not only grounded on aesthetic considerations, but also on financial and social factors. Berenson was not an isolated case, but he set up the model of a functional relationship between art theory and the art market, including collecting, which was also typical of other Formalist theorists such as, for instance, Osvald Sirén and Lionello Venturi. I will analyse this aspect further in the next chapter.

Although Berenson included artworks by Cézanne and the Impressionist painters in his collection, he was more cautious about modern art. His theoretical work, dealing with the intrinsic value of form and the disinterested nature of aesthetic pleasure, was inspirational in its modernist departure from the academic tradition. Berenson nonetheless maintained a distance from the utmost avant-gardist outcomes, especially in his later years. If modernism on the one hand reflected Berenson's vision of detachment from an academic tradition, on the other hand it also constituted a threat to the fundamentals of traditional art-historical discourse, on which Berenson had based his authority and privileged position in the art trade. The modernist aesthetic mined the traditional conception of art as a commodity.²¹⁶

Berenson, along with Adolfo Venturi and Croce, was among the scholars who most strongly influenced Lionello Venturi's thinking and work. Berenson's work influenced Venturi's theory in relation to Formalism and supported the development of his primitivism. Moreover, his influence was at the basis of Venturi's effort to reform art-historical scholarship and to bring into the open the intermingling between connoisseurship, the art trade, and art history. Venturi respected Berenson's opinion, and in regard to attributions, considered him the only higher authority, besides his father, to his own judgement.²¹⁷ Berenson had also been the primary model in relation to

214 For more on the interrelation between art history and art trade in regard to Oriental art see, Wang, "The Louvre from China".

215 Mansfield, "Making Art History a Profession," 4–6.

216 Calo, "Bernard Berenson, Modern art, and Modern Criticism".

217 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 31 January 1926, in BBL. "Aver trovato il 'mio' signor Berenson, quello a cui ho sempre pensato con ammirazione e con gratitudine". Letter from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, 14 July 1922 (VT

Venturi's role as an advisor for the Gualino Collection. I will consider this matter further in the next chapter.

2.4.2 Roger Fry: The Primitive between Formalism and Modernism

Berenson's theory and its relation to the conception of the primitive had an impact on formalist art criticism.²¹⁸ Roger Fry (1866–1934) was a formalist aesthete, an art critic, a historian of Italian art, and a painter, although he gained his initial education in the natural sciences.²¹⁹ He was a senior member of the Bloomsbury group, an association of progressive artists and intellectuals in Britain. Fry visited Berenson in Florence on several occasions.²²⁰ At first Fry looked up to the senior scholar, but then came to oppose Berenson, despite the intellectual debt.²²¹ While Fry was initially indebted to Berenson's theory, he eventually became known for what actually distinguished him from Berenson. Fry used the formalist background in order to promote modern art, while Berenson resisted an involvement with the most recent artistic production and with modernist premises.²²² Moreover, Fry gained institutional recognition, both in academia and in the museum context, which Berenson, by contrast, never achieved.²²³

Fry shared Berenson's love for Early Florentine paintings, which were the basis of his initial theoretical considerations about form.²²⁴ Fry considered *pure form* as the most elementary element of vision, independent from a descriptive function and more important than external or narrative contents. He believed that artists who detached themselves from an intellectual or functional practice were more inclined to focus on the *imaginative life*, which he considered to be the mental process at the base of abstraction. Abstraction, in terms of filtering material reality, reducing it to purely formal relationships, was conceived as the key element of the creative process.

V1 b44 68), in FAV. "Non accetterei cioè i giudizi se non di te [Adolfo], di Berenson e di Bode." These letters are examples of Venturi's regard for Berenson.

218 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 103.

219 Craufurd D. Goodwin and Asa Briggs, "An Interpretation: Roger Fry and the Market for Art," in *Art and the Market. Roger Fry on Commerce in Art: Selected Writings, Edited with an Interpretation*, ed. Craufurd D. Goodwin (Chicago: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 1–66.

220 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 97; Frances Spalding, *Roger Fry: Art and Life* (London: Granada Publishing, 1980), 67–69.

221 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 109.

222 *Ibid.*, 104.

223 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 164; Spalding, *Roger Fry*, 81–107. Fry was appointed as curator of paintings at the Metropolitan Art Museum, a position Berenson had wanted.

224 J. B. Bullen, "Introduction," in *Roger Fry: Vision and Design*, ed. J. B. Bullen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), xi–xxv.

He thought that, through pure forms, artists could express, and at the same time stir, *aesthetic emotions* in a direct way, affecting the senses rather than the intellect.²²⁵

Similarly to what Berenson said about *tactile values*, Fry thought that aesthetic emotions have an effect at the level of the nervous system, conveying a physiological reaction. Moreover, because of their autonomous meaningfulness, pure forms were considered to be universal and eternal. In Fry's opinion, for instance, it made no difference if an artwork was produced hundreds of years ago in China or very recently in New York, because they were appreciated exclusively in terms of the pure forms resulting from the artist's abstracting *aesthetic vision*.²²⁶ As a result of his theoretical background, Fry influenced traditional art discourse with the inclusion of phenomena geographically, chronologically, and culturally Othered and underrated, such as medieval, ethnic, and modern art.

Similarly to Berenson, the concept of the primitive was an important tool in spreading his ideas about art as an abstract, sensory experience. Fry, like other Formalists, retained the traditional Vasarian definition of the term, but with opposite outcomes. He thought that the inability to reproduce material reality perfectly and the perspective of an interior eye were indeed an advantage. Fry used the term primitive as an alternative to the barbaric and the uncivilised. For him this meant that primitive artists were more inclined to create art through a process of abstraction from material reality into purely formal relationships. In Fry's view, uncivilised societies and cultures were not preoccupied with naturalistic representation. He thought that their lack of skills, or will, to represent objects illusionistically was an advantage, and at the same time claimed that the interest in imitation considered typical of fine civilisations was detrimental to aesthetic vision.²²⁷

Following the example of Berenson, Fry's interpretation of the Italian primitives led him to highlight aesthetic principles that he thought were common to artworks across different epochs, locations, and cultures.²²⁸ However, he included a wider range of formal examples in relation to the primitive aesthetic, compared to Berenson. Fry's notion of primitivism became the ground for associating art experiences, which were very distant, but at the same time, considered as sharing important aesthetic aspects. For instance, he appreciated Giotto because he found that the artist was not conditioned by material nature and his forms were simple and emotionally evocative.

225 Roger Fry, "An Essay in Aesthetics," in *Roger Fry: Vision and Design*, ed. J. B. Bullen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 12–18.

226 Roger Fry, "The Artist's Vision," in *Roger Fry: Vision and Design*, ed. J. B. Bullen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 35.

227 Fry, "Art and Life," in *Roger Fry: Vision and Design*, ed. J. B. Bullen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 8.

228 Roger Fry, "The Art of Florence," in *Roger Fry: Vision and Design*, ed. J. B. Bullen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 124–129.

For the same reasons he also appreciated the art of ethnic groups, subcultures, and modern Western artists.²²⁹

Although Berenson's stance was an important reference point for Fry's theoretical background, his understanding of primitivism also drew on modernism and modernist primitivism, which was mainly concerned with the appropriation of ethnic art. Fry's experience of non-European art was indirect and filtered through the example of modernist artists, such as Picasso and Matisse, whom he knew personally.²³⁰ This was also the case with his encounters with African and Islamic art. He saw African art as a particularly good example of achieving great aesthetic results, in terms of abstraction, within an uncivilised society. Nevertheless, his relation to ethnic art shows a similar process of appropriation to that characterised by both modernist primitivism and Berenson's view of the "primitive", relating artworks to an aesthetic perspective through the projection of meaning and an interpretative frame. He saw African artists as free from representational or intellectual intents and as possessing an extraordinary ability to translate reality into pure forms. In general, he thought that primitive art was characterised by *conceptual vision*.²³¹ This, according to Fry, meant that primitive artists isolated details important for their conceptual significance, investing them with expressive value through simplification and stylised forms. Fry considered these aspects of primitive art, observed both in the Italian old masters and in tribal examples, as essential characters of *good art*.

The assumption of an inverse relation between primitive art and civilisation in Fry's theory, became problematic with regard to Chinese and Post-Impressionist art.²³² He considered these artistic phenomena to be the result of fine civilisations, although they were also characterised by abstraction and purely formal relationships. He did not use the term primitive to describe their aesthetic achievements, but he observed in their artworks similar characteristics to those associated with Italian primitive art. Fry became familiar with Chinese art through his friend Denman Ross (1853–1935), who had been one of the most important supporters of Chinese art collecting in the United States (Boston Museum Collection).²³³ Although Fry began writing about Chinese art in its early stages of popularity, his interest remained only

229 See essays in *Roger Fry: Vision and Design*, ed. J. B. Bullen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

230 Bullen, "Introduction," xxi–xxiii.

231 Roger Fry, "Negro Sculpture," in *Roger Fry: Vision and Design*, ed. J. B. Bullen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 70–73.

232 *Ibid.*, 72–73.

233 Fry met with Denman Ross at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts during his first trip to America in 1904. During this first journey, Fry also met Isabella Stewart Gardner at Fenway Court and visited her art collection in two consecutive occasions. It is useful to remember that in 1904 Kazuko Okakura was busy in cataloguing and assessing the Boston Museum of Fine Arts' oriental collection. Spalding, *Roger Fry*, 85; Fry, "An Essay in Aesthetics," 22–23; Strehlke, "Berenson, Sassetta, and Asian Art," 37–49.

marginal and superficial. His main preoccupation was with Post-Impressionist art. Fry introduced modernist art and aesthetics into Britain in the 1910s, at a time when modernism had not yet penetrated the British art discourse, which was still dominated by academicism. He thought that the British public had been accustomed to look at art as a means to reproduce naturalistic illusions and that therefore it needed to be educated in a new perception of form. Fry used formalist theory and the aesthetic frame of primitivism with the intention of promoting modern art. With the same purpose in mind, he also curated the first Post-Impressionist exhibition in London in 1910.²³⁴

The exhibition, which had a shattering effect, was meant to orient the public's eye to the new aesthetic trend. Fry, in recalling the event much later, affirmed that, although the exhibition was shocking in the 1910s, by the 1920s Post-Impressionism was widely accepted in the country.²³⁵ Discarding the idea of representation and the primacy of subject matter as important elements in art, he opened the way to the understanding of modern art. Fry professed the assimilation of Post-Impressionist artists with the Italian primitives.²³⁶ He thought that they were all extraordinary artists, who shared a common use of forms as abstraction and as expressive means. However, Post-Impressionism, he claimed, had the additional merit of bringing the achievements of a primitive aesthetic within civilisation. He particularly appreciated Cézanne's work in consideration of his ability to overcome naturalistic representation while retaining three-dimensionality and unity of expression, which he still considered other essential aspects of art.²³⁷

Fry, similarly to Berenson, used the concept of the primitive as a tool to promote a myth that responded to specific aesthetic demands. However, although they shared a common aesthetic ground rooted in Formalism, Fry was more interested in modern art than in the art of the past. He represents a more progressive professional profile, introducing the figure of the art critic, who was more interested in studying contemporary phenomena and in addressing a non-professional public. He used the myth of the primitive in order to promote Post-Impressionist art and to affect contemporary cultural debate, while Berenson was more involved in the elitist practices

234 Spalding, *Roger Fry*, 130–140, 153–154; Elisabeth Berkowitz, “The 1910 ‘Manet and the Post-Impressionists’ Exhibition: Importance and Critical Issues,” *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, ed. Dino Franco Felluga, accessed February 2, 2019, http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=elizabeth-berkowitz-the-1910-manet-and-the-post-impressionists-exhibition-importance-and-critical-issues. The official name of the exhibition that opened at Grafton Galleries in London on 8 of November 1910 was “Manet and the Post-Impressionists”.

235 Roger Fry, “The French Post-Impressionists,” in *Roger Fry: Vision and Design*, ed. J. B. Bullen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 166–170.

236 Fry, “Retrospect,” 204.

237 Fry, “The French Post-Impressionists,” 166–170.

of the art market and collecting antiquities. However, in spite of his progressive position, Fry's discourse remained in many respects aesthetically conservative. For instance, he rejected the idea of pure abstraction. In his opinion form should represent something concrete and reflect a recognisable reality in a three-dimensional way. For example, he was sceptical about Clive Bell's suggestion of significant forms conceived as completely abstract from representation and conveying autonomous aesthetical emotions. Fry did not agree that it was possible to isolate purely aesthetic emotions within artworks. He thought that such a process of abstraction would involve a mystic approach that he rejected as an explanatory ground for the creative process and aesthetic emotions.²³⁸ However, Fry was responsible for the spreading of Formalism and primitivism among the general public and scholars in Britain, raising an important debate on aesthetic issues. Among the scholars participating in this debate was the art theorist Clive Bell, who was also a member of the Bloomsbury group along with Fry, Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, and Duncan Grant among others.

2.4.3 Formalism and Primitivism in Clive Bell's Work

Clive Bell (1881–1964) was personally close to Fry. Bell shared Fry's formalist aesthetic perspective and considered form more important than content. Bell was among the second generation of Formalists, the one that elaborated on primitivism in the most extensive way. In his theoretical essay *Art* (1914), he defined *significant form* as the most essential element of art.²³⁹ According to Bell, significant forms are pure forms completely detached from material reality, directly stirring aesthetic emotions. In a similar way to Fry, Bell thought that forms in art concern the emotional sphere and are independent from external factors. For this reason, he thought that *significant forms* should not bear a descriptive function, or any other practical function such as iconographic or illusionistic aspects. Moreover, he considered forms to be universal and to provoke aesthetic emotions since they are detached from material and intellectual aspects and independent of a contingent historical or cultural context. Form was, in his opinion, abstract and independent of material representation.

Interestingly, in order to support his assumption about the emotional and universal value of art, Bell reported the story of Isabella Stewart Gardner's advisor Kakuzo Okakura, whose encounter with Western art he had heard from Fry.²⁴⁰ As reported, Okakura, whom Fry assumed to be a complete stranger to Western art, on arrival in America, and seeing European artworks, could appreciate only those that shared a unifying formalist ground, such as Italian art from the 13th century, Byzantine art, and paintings by Matisse. On the other hand, according to Fry, naturalistic and

238 Fry, "Retrospect," 199–211.

239 Clive Bell, *Art* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes co, 1914), 7–8.

240 *Ibid.*, 77–79.

descriptive artworks, such as those belonging to the more intellectual and materialist tradition of Renaissance art, were challenging for the Japanese scholar.

However, Okakura had been educated by Western missionaries since the age of six and worked as an interpreter for American scholars, before becoming a key figure in the mediation of Eastern art into the Western discourse.²⁴¹ He was also appointed curator of the oriental collections of the Museum of Modern Art in Boston in 1910. Therefore, it is difficult to recognise in this acculturated intellectual who was actually close to Western culture and art, the naïve spectator described in Fry's account. However, the episode was part of a discursive frame conceptually depicting primitive art as universal and emotional, affecting physiologically rather than intellectually. Fry and Bell's intention was most probably to stress the sensory power of form, rather than to diminish Okakura's stance.

Nevertheless, this episode is a good example of how the process of appropriation into a conceptually defined frame works in order to project meaning and to promote an aesthetic perspective. According to Bell, all artworks responding to formalist aesthetics, which he also classified as primitive for their formal simplification and their emotional value, could be aesthetically appreciated, regardless of any understanding of the object represented or knowledge of its historical context. From Bell's point of view, Fry's story was meaningful in proving the positive universal and emotional qualities of *significant forms*. He believed that artworks stirring emotion through formal abstraction can be appreciated universally and independently from their contingent context. Abstraction enhanced a purely sensory appreciation, which did not require erudition or knowledge of the cultural context of an artwork. The story of Okakura's encounter was a useful device for validating Bell's theory. This story reinforced the primitivist discursive frame linked to formalist theory, because it worked as "as replacement of proof and exemplum" in establishing truth and knowledge.²⁴²

As a proof of the benign intention towards his Japanese colleague, Bell compared Okakura's experience with the Western reaction to the Japanese art exhibition that took place at Shepherd's Bush, in London, in 1910. He underlined the sensory appreciation of these Asian artworks that occurred among the British audience as similar to Okakura's experience in front of the Western primitives. In doing so, Bell assimilated the two artistic phenomena and included Japanese art in a frame defined on the basis of a formalist interpretation of the concept of the primitive. In commenting on the event, Bell indeed claimed that Japanese art was accessible to an audience who were culturally complete strangers to it, because of its abstract and sensory nature.²⁴³

241 Christine M. E. Guth, "Charles Longfellow and Okakura Kakuzo: Cultural Cross-Dressing in the Colonial Context," *Positions* 8, no. 3 (Winter 2000): 605–36.

242 Mieke Bal, *On Story Telling: Essays in Narratology* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1991), 1.

243 Bell, *Art*, 23–25.

A similar formalist perspective emphasising the discourse about the sensory appeal of Japanese art can be found in both Berenson's and Sirén's accounts of their first encounters with Oriental art as enlightening moments of spiritual revelation.²⁴⁴ However, the success of the London exhibition was above all due to the curator's mediating efforts to reconstruct a fascinating exotic environment and to select artworks that would appeal to the local taste and the Western idea of the Orient. The exhibition, which raised much interest in Britain, was indeed not well received in Japan because it was not considered as a genuine presentation of Japanese art and culture.²⁴⁵

In regard to the emotional and universal value that Bell accorded to art, it is important to notice that his was based on a consideration of art as regulated by unknown and mysterious laws.²⁴⁶ Bell, like Berenson and Sirén, considered spiritual inspiration as the basis of the process of abstraction. Moreover, Bell thought that art, similarly to religion, had the power to induce a state of emotional ecstasy. Although he considered art and religion as two distinct phenomena, in his view, they represented different paths to reach a similar condition.²⁴⁷ Mysterious and emotional aspects of art were an important part of his theory and they also characterised his view of primitivism. Bell, as well as Berenson and Fry before him, retained the Vasarian meaning of the term primitive referring to Italian art from the 13th and 15th centuries and interpreted as a primal stage in artistic development.

Unlike Vasari, however, he thought that the primitive artists were advantaged in realising *significant forms*, and thus in achieving artistic results, because of being more strongly inclined towards abstraction and spiritual emotions.²⁴⁸ As exemplified in the narrative about Okakura and the London exhibition of Japanese art, the term primitive began bearing a conceptual meaning summing up essential aesthetic characteristics, such as spiritual inspiration and the emotional dimension, abstraction and formal simplification. These characteristics might be achieved either intentionally or due to a lack of skills, but in Bell's opinion, the level of technical advancement or theoretical awareness was irrelevant to aesthetic matters. In fact, he claimed that "the secret of primitive art is the secret of all art, at all times, in all places – sensibility to the profound significance of form and the power of creation".²⁴⁹

Based on this principle, Bell had placed side by side the Italian old masters and artistic experiences he considered aesthetically similar on the ground of his concept of the primitive, such as Sumerian sculpture, archaic Greek art, Chinese art,

244 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*; Strehlke, "Berenson, Sassetta, and Asian Art," 37–49.

245 Kotarō Mochizuki, *Japan To-day: A Souvenir of the Anglo-Japanese Exhibition Held in London* (Tokyo: Liberal News Agency, 1910).

246 Bell, *Art*, 8.

247 *Ibid.*, 81–102.

248 *Ibid.*, 40–41.

249 *Ibid.*, 199.

Byzantine art of the 6th century, and Cézanne's paintings. Bell associated primitive art with *Christian slopes*, historical periods dominated by spiritualism and detached from materialism.²⁵⁰ He considered these slopes as favourable contexts for the formalist creative process, which were then followed by eras of decadence promoting naturalism, which were considered deterrent to art creation. Nevertheless, although Bell believed that principles of imitation had dominated Western aesthetics in the period following the Italian primitives, he recognised that art creation was always possible.

He thought that there had always been cases of artists able to overcome the limits of a context dominated by naturalism, and to create *significant forms*. He names Piero della Francesca, Poussin, Ingres, and, in more recent times, Cézanne, all of whom he defined as primitive artists, although they were not working during a primitive *slope*. For instance, he thought that Cézanne, whom he dubbed a new Giotto, together with some others that followed, i.e. the so-called Post-Impressionist artists, were able to reject imitation in favour of the use of significant forms. Bell assumed that these artists had been able to regain the emotional significance of primitive art through abstraction from material reality, formal simplicity, and the gaze of an interior eye.²⁵¹

Bell's relation to modernism constitutes another point of departure from Fry. As for Fry, Bell's version of primitivism served to establish a parallel between primitive and modern art, offering in particular a perspective for the appreciation of Post-Impressionism. In his discourse, he advocated an aesthetic based on creativity, originality, and individuality, displaying anti-academic sentiments. Although these aspects were related to modernist aesthetics, modern art was not the main focus of his attention. His writings about modern art reveal a conflicting position, indicating in fact a limited understanding of it. For instance, Bell appreciated Cézanne, Picasso and some of the Post-Impressionists, but he defined most of their followers as copyists or as *Montmartre's sensationists*.²⁵² He completely dismissed Futurism as a descriptive movement that was more interested in matters unrelated to art, such as its social and political claims. Bell thought that the Futurist artists were excessively concerned with practical matters that diverted their focus away from the quality of their artistic form, overlooking aspects such as aestheticism and expressive synthesis. He considered their claims about art's liberation from past tradition as merely theoretical and rhetorical, while at the same time retaining an academic and descriptive style unable to stir emotions.²⁵³

Bell also refrained from including within his primitivist discourse references to tribal art or subcultures that had been part of the modernist discourse and a subject

250 Ibid., 132.

251 Ibid., 41–50.

252 Ibid., 80.

253 Ibid., 21–23.

of meditation for Fry. Moreover, although he agreed with Fry that technical development and an intellectual approach were detrimental to the formalist creative process, he believed that primitivism (abstraction, emotion, spiritual inspiration, formal simplification) did not regard the level of civilisation of the artists, but rather the aesthetic qualities of the work. In this sense he could easily include in the primitive frame Chinese religious art, while Fry had been reluctant to do so because he regarded it as the remarkable product of a developed civilisation. However, the reference to Chinese art also remained marginal within Bell's discourse. Chinese art, in connection with formalist primitivism, instead gained a major importance in the work of another Formalist theorist, Osvald Sirén.

2.4.4 Osvald Sirén: Formalism and Spiritualism

Osvald Sirén was a Finnish-Swedish art historian who spent the most part of his life in Sweden. He studied Art History, a newly established discipline in Finland, at the University of Helsinki under the supervision of J. J. Tikkanen (1857–1930), who became the first professor of Art History in the country in 1897.²⁵⁴ Soon after his graduation in 1898, Sirén settled in Stockholm, Sweden, to work first at the Nordic Museum and then at the National Museum. At the time, the Swedish capital had more opportunities and networks to offer art historians compared to Finland because of its broader spectrum of academic life, museums, and private collections. Collecting and the art market offered a feasible alternative employment to art historians besides museums and universities, thanks to the demands of an increased number of collectors among the middle-class. While living in Stockholm, Sirén also completed his doctoral dissertation on 18th-century Swedish genre painting, a field that remained his area of research for some time after gaining his doctorate.²⁵⁵ However, at the beginning of the 20th century, he began exploring a new field, the Italian old masters.²⁵⁶ It is not clear why he became interested in Italian art, but this field of studies was popular at the time.²⁵⁷ At the time the Italian primitives were becoming increasingly desired and valued among collectors and this opened up remunerative prospects.

From 1901 onwards Sirén visited Italy on a regular basis and wrote several articles and monographs based on his trips there.²⁵⁸ During those early travels to Italy, Sirén established important connections, which he retained throughout his life and which contributed to his rapid increase in status as an acknowledged authority on

254 Vakkari, *Focus on Form*, 38–45.

255 Osvald Sirén, *Carl Gustaf Pilo och hans förhållande till den samtida porträttkonsten i Sverige och Danmark. Ett bidrag till den skandinaviska konsthistorien* (Stockholm: Sveriges Allmänna Konstförening, 1902).

256 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 9–13.

257 Ibid.

258 Ibid., 15–35.

Italian old masters. For instance, he met many distinguished scholars, such as Adolfo Venturi and Bernard Berenson, who helped him to develop rapidly into an internationally recognised connoisseur of Italian Early Renaissance art.²⁵⁹ Sirén's research in the field resulted in several publications of international relevance, such as those on Don Lorenzo Monaco in 1905, Giotto in 1906, Giottino, in 1908, and Leonardo, in 1911. Berenson's connoisseurial method had an impact on Sirén's purely visual approach to the study of Italian primitive paintings.²⁶⁰ He also made use of his academic expertise and his theoretical background in his practice of advising collectors. For instance, he provided advice to the Sinebrychoff Collection in Finland and edited the catalogue of the Jarves Collection of primitive art at Yale.²⁶¹ Working as an art advisor, besides providing the opportunity to see artworks hidden from the public eye, could also provide a further source of profit alongside one's salary as a professor or as a museum employee.

Sirén's studies of the Italian primitives were grounded on a strand of formalist theory associating primitivism with essential aesthetic characteristics. He stated his indebtedness towards Berenson, Bell, and Fry openly in the foreword to his text anthology, *Essentials in Art* (1920).²⁶² A number of direct quotations from Bell and Fry also emerge from Sirén's first formalist theoretical essay, *Primitive and Modern Art* (1915), where the two scholars are presented as referential authorities.²⁶³ If Berenson had been a role model particularly in regard to the practice of the connoisseur and for his activity as an art advisor and collector, a reference to Bell was crucial to Sirén's theoretical enhancement. Sirén considered formal aspects to be an essential element of art creation and referred to them as *abstract* or *pure forms*.²⁶⁴ His conception of form shared many features with Bell's concept of significant form.

He believed abstract form to be autonomous from material reality and thought of it as the manifestation of individual imagination, expressing, and at the same time conveying, inner spiritual emotions. He looked at artworks as a combination of pure visual elements and formal relations (colours, lines, and forms) rhythmically displayed and affecting the senses directly, without any intellectual filter. Like Fry and

259 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 15–35; In Adolfo Venturi's archive there are nine letters from Osvald Sirén dating from 1903 to 1927, in FAV. Sirén published articles in the journal directed by Adolfo Venturi, *L'Arte. Rivista di storia dell'arte medievale e moderna*, since 1904.

260 Ibid.

261 Kai Kartio, "Introduction: Paul and Fanny Sinebrychoff and Their Art Collection," in *Sinebrychoff Art Collection: A Celebratory Exhibition*, ed. Kai Kartio (Kerava: Kerava Art Museum, 1993), catalogue to the exhibition, 26–35; Osvald Sirén, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Pictures in the Jarves Collection Belonging to Yale University* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916).

262 Osvald Sirén, *Essentials in Art* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1920), v–vi.

263 Sirén, "Primitiv och modern konst," 35–47.

264 Ibid.

Berenson, he thought that abstract forms would provoke an emotional response to art, but he rather explained it as a consequence of the *formal rhythm*.²⁶⁵ He considered rhythm to be, as in music, an important component of visual expression and a direct source of vibrations, like sound, and thus of emotions.²⁶⁶ Moreover, because of their sensory nature and detachment from material elements such as content and historical context, he considered abstract forms to be eternal and universal.

Sirén thought that the *abstract mode* of representation – independent from a naturalistic and descriptive function and grounded on an inner emotional and spiritual perception – was an advantage in the creative process.²⁶⁷ Like Bell, he claimed that the intellectual approach directed to a naturalistic representation of material reality, was instead detrimental to art. He explained such opposition in terms of the inner view and the external eye.²⁶⁸ In Sirén's view spirituality gained even greater importance than it did in Bell's theory. Sirén saw the creative process fundamentally as a mystical experience. His interest in Theosophy certainly influenced his ideas about spirituality. From as far back as 1900, Sirén had been an active Theosophist and had published articles in the Swedish Theosophist journal, *Theosophia*, foregrounding the expressive spiritualism of the Italian primitive artists.²⁶⁹

Sirén came to consider them as intermediaries of God, in the same way that artists had been considered as such within the occultist discourse since the end of the 18th century.²⁷⁰ Esotericism had a strong impact on Sirén's art theory, and in his understanding of spirituality he sought to distance himself from organised religion. He saw spirituality as an emotional aspect of individual life. Moreover, because of his idea of art drawing nourishment from the spiritual life, he considered the creative process to have been favoured during historical epochs that had been dominated by religiosity, when emotions were valued more highly than the material life.²⁷¹ Sirén described these religious epochs in similar terms to Bell's primitive *slopes*. He thought that the spiritual and emotional aspiration to express an inner reality is aroused in religiously minded times.

Like Bell too, Sirén associated religious epochs and the abstract mode of representation with primitive art.²⁷² He referred to primitive art as an initial stage of human development, dominated by spirituality and uninterested in representation.

265 Sirén, *Essentials in Art*, 11–14.

266 Sirén, "Primitiv och modern konst," 35–47.

267 Sirén, *Essentials in Art*, 19–21.

268 *Ibid.*, 9.

269 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 15–35.

270 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 15–35; Tessel M. Bauduin, "Science, Occultism, and the Art of the Avant-Garde in the Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Religion in Europe* 5, no 1 (2012): 23–55.

271 Sirén, *Essentials in Art*, 49–66.

272 Sirén, "Primitiv och modern konst," 35–47.

In this sense he thought that the primitive artists, with their spiritual sensibility, are better equipped to engage with abstract forms as a means to express spiritual emotions. As with Berenson, Bell, and Fry before him, Sirén's use of the term primitive has a double meaning: as a reference to the Italian art from the 13th and 15th century and as an aesthetic reference to a creative process based on spiritual intuition, formal abstraction, and emotionally expressive qualities.

In other words, the term primitive was also employed as a concept to express the essential aesthetic aspects of art creation.²⁷³ Because Sirén saw Italian primitive art as the product of an epoch of spiritual and emotional aspirations, he came to associate the concept of the primitive with the essential characteristics of art, like formal simplification and abstraction, abandonment to emotions, expression of inner view or spiritual perception. On the basis of such a conceptual generalisation of primitive aesthetic qualities, Sirén on his part also presented the Italian primitives side by side with, for instance, Byzantine, Chinese, and modern Western art.²⁷⁴ He could bridge all these different artistic phenomena, linking them with one another within a frame that presented primitive art as sharing a common mystical and synthetic expressive formalist character.

In a similar way to Bell, Sirén based the parallel between modern and primitive art on a formalist interpretation of primitivism. Although he maintained that the external view and the figurative representation of material reality had prevailed in the West ever since Raphael up, Sirén claimed that he was, in 1915, witnessing a new aesthetic awareness concerning the essential characters of art.²⁷⁵ He thought that modern artists, working during an era dominated by positivism and materialism, could be nonetheless involved with the abstract mode of representation characteristic of the primitives. While he observed that academicism was still promoted in many ways, modern artists were distancing themselves from intellectualism and materialism and thus discovering a new appreciation of the emotions and imagination.²⁷⁶

Despite his praise for modern art, Sirén's understanding of modernist stances nevertheless remained limited and superficial. Furthermore, his interest in the subject remained marginal and he did not mention modern art in his writings again after 1915. He mostly dealt with modern art at a theoretical level, avoiding getting deeper into single phenomena in the field. Although in 1915 he spoke positively of modern art as a rediscovery of the characteristics of the primitive aesthetic, he thought that only a few artists had been able to put the theoretical premises into practice. In

273 Sirén, *Essentials in Art*, 18.

274 Sirén, "Primitiv och modern konst," 35–47. In his essay on the primitive and modern art, Sirén hints for the first time at the aesthetical connection between Chinese art and primitive art on the basis of his formalist theory.

275 Ibid.

276 Ibid.

this regard, he considered Cézanne as the best example from the 19th century and expressed sympathy also for Impressionism, but dismissed other important modern movements such as Futurism and Post-Impressionism.²⁷⁷ Like Berenson, Sirén's primitivism was not so much directed to support modernist discourses as to promote his aesthetic perspective and collecting choices.

2.4.5 Turning to Chinese Art

The way in which Sirén shifted his interest from Swedish genre painting to the Italian old masters earlier in his career anticipated a further move, towards Chinese art in the 1910s. The exact reasons, circumstances, or moment for this shift are not known, but Sirén's attention drifted towards Chinese art probably between 1913 and 1915.²⁷⁸ However, at least two factors, both partly related to the art market, played an important role in his decision.²⁷⁹ Firstly, Berenson was very competitive and determined to maintain his leadership as the expert on the Italian primitives. Secondly, Italian primitive art had already been collected for a few decades, and it had become more expensive and harder to find samples of good quality and verifiable originality.²⁸⁰ Chinese art, on the other hand, constituted in his eyes a valid alternative. In the same way that he turned to the Italian primitives to boost his career prospects and earnings, he later turned to Chinese art. Chinese art scholarship was exciting "virgin territory" that, besides his personal and professional fascination with the field, would open new possibilities from the academic and financial points of view.²⁸¹

Within a few years, Sirén managed to become an authority in this new field too.²⁸² While Chinese art was mentioned only in passing, in illustrations and footnotes to one of his articles in 1915²⁸³, by 1917 it had become a major focus. In 1917, he began lecturing about Chinese art in America on the eve of his first voyage to Asia.²⁸⁴ Consequently, and thanks to subsequent expeditions in 1921, 1929, and 1935, his reputation as an authority on Chinese art was established internationally. In the 1920s and 1930s, he published catalogues on Chinese art, which showed the extensive photographic material he had collected during his voyages.²⁸⁵ These ency-

277 Ibid.

278 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 15–35.

279 Ibid.

280 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*; Maria Mimmita Lamberti, "Riccardo Gualino. Una collezione e molti progetti." *Ricerche di storia dell'arte*, 12 (1980): 5–18.

281 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 152.

282 Ibid., 15–25.

283 Sirén, "Primitiv och modern kunst."

284 Ibid., 15–35.

285 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 15–35; Osvald Sirén, *Walls and Gates of Peking: Researches and Impressions* (London: John Lane Ltd., 1924); Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Sculptures from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century*, 4 vols (London: Ernest Benn

clopaedic volumes gathered information about a great number of artworks he saw first-hand. Indeed, he used his experience concerning the connoisseurial method in order to approach these new artworks that were so distant from him.

Sirén looked at Chinese art through the lens of a formalist aesthetic perspective. Through the primitivist discursive frame, Sirén could link Chinese art to common aesthetic characteristics such as abstraction, spiritual inspiration, and emotional response. He emphasised the abstract and sensory quality of Chinese art. He indeed claimed that in China the abstract mode was predominant and more developed than in the West.²⁸⁶ He found that Chinese artists were interested in the expressive value of form, rather than in figurative representation. Moreover, he thought that rhythm was essential to Chinese artists, in order to visualise and express spiritual emotions or inner reality.²⁸⁷ According to Sirén's interpretation, Chinese artists were seen as interested in spiritual emotions beyond material forms. A reference to the formalist discourse of primitivism facilitated Sirén's transition, especially for its connection to the Italian art of the 13th and 15th century. The effect of such an association was also successful in regard to collecting practice. Linking Chinese art to Western art through the concept of primitivism, meant a transfer of legacy, similar to that brought about by Berenson in regard to Isabella Stewart Gardner's collection, and thus its increased value.

Although Sirén based the evaluation of Chinese art on a formalist ground – stressing its inclusion in a primitivist frame as other Formalist theorists did at the time – one should recognise that Sirén was the only one among them who made it his main focus. He viewed Chinese artworks first-hand, documenting them thoroughly. His knowledge was based on original information, and he had studied Chinese theoretical treatises on art and tried to understand the Chinese aesthetic from within, as many of his publications show.²⁸⁸ Although Berenson, Fry and Bell had been interested to a certain extent in Chinese art, in Sirén's work it became the dominant area of attention.

Sirén played an important role in influencing Venturi's aesthetic ideas in the 1920s. He indeed gave Venturi access to the strand of Formalism and primitivism emerging from Fry and Bell's theoretical contributions. However, it was in relation to Chinese art that he had the most relevant influence, both in relation to aesthetic and collecting matters, as I will elaborate on in the third chapter. Sirén was an important link in the development of Lionello Venturi's interest in Asian art, not only in

Ltd., 1925); Osvald Sirén, *Imperial Palaces of Peking*, 3 vols (Paris and Brussels: G. van Oest, 1926).

286 Sirén, *Essentials in Art*, 1–8.

287 Ibid., 29–32.

288 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*. Sirén attempted to give an insight into Chinese art from within Chinese aesthetics.

reference to formalist aesthetic theory and in connection to primitivism, but also in regard to a direct access and acknowledgement of Chinese artworks. Venturi indeed became acquainted with Asian art, studying directly under the advice and supervision of Sirén from the beginning of the 1920s.²⁸⁹

2.5 Lionello Venturi and *The Taste of the Primitives*

The evolution of Venturi's theory between the 1910s and the 1920s absorbed influences from various aesthetic traditions and yet resulted as something original and personal. When looking at the definition of Venturi's aesthetic background and of his approach to art-historical examination, one should keep in mind that they were associated with his desire to reform the discipline. He aspired to introduce a methodological approach, assuring a conceptual and aesthetic ground to the analysis of artistic phenomena.²⁹⁰ Moreover, he intended his theory to be the basis for his active involvement in contemporary cultural debate as an influential authority in Italy. He pushed his work as a theorist and art historian beyond the boundaries of academic scholarship, as cultural debate during the 1920s developed under the influx not only of intellectual factors, but also of political, social, and economical circumstances.²⁹¹

Looking at Venturi's theoretical and methodological claims through the perspective of the primitivism highlights the importance and the implications of formalist aesthetics for him during the 1920s. His connections with Formalist scholars had a strong impact on the definition of his aesthetic theory. Venturi embraced the fundamental formalist principle of considering form more important than content. He thought that the formal appearance of artworks was to be examined, not for what it represented but for what it expressed. He conceived form as a pure visual element, which expresses and stirs emotions in a sensory way. In this regard he distinguished between *ordinary forms* and *artistic forms*.²⁹² He defined *ordinary forms* as directed at representing objects faithfully and objectively and regarded them as the result of an intellectual approach, and thus detrimental to the creative process. He thought that the intellectual approach prevails when an artist is preoccupied with conveying information or naturalistically describing something, thus escaping the aesthetic

289 Letters from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, 28 May 1926 and 1 June 1926 (VT V1 b45 19 and VT V1 b45 20), in FAV.

290 Venturi, "La Pura Visibilità e l'estetica moderna"; de Luca, *Lionello Venturi*, 7–16; Ragghianti, *Profilo della critica d'arte in Italia*, 101–102; letter from Lionello to Adolfo Venturi, 9 June 1926 (VT V1 b45 21), in FAV. Venturi claimed that he aimed to bring together connoisseurship and aesthetics.

291 Ragghianti, *Profilo della critica d'arte in Italia*, 101–102. Ragghianti pointed out that Venturi's work found a wide audience because of his particular and academically unorthodox style, being simple, didactic, and in some instances polemic.

292 Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, 13–15, 168–181.

ground of the creative process. *Artistic form* instead referred to the practice of representing objects in a synthetic way, abstracting them from material existence in order to achieve a spiritual and universal significance. This was considered to be the fundamental aspect of art creation.

Venturi's definition of *artistic form* reminds one of Berenson's *decorative form*, Bell's *significant forms*, and Sirén's *abstract form*. With regard to form, Venturi especially focused on quality, in terms of an ability to appeal to the emotions, rather than to stylistic matters.²⁹³ Moreover, he suggested that because forms appeal to the emotions, they are independent from a material, cultural and historical context. Therefore, he considered *artistic forms* as a universal means of visual expression, independent from the function of conveying information or of being naturalistically descriptive. The universality of artistic forms is a crucial point of Venturi's Formalism. Venturi claimed that, while material aspects, such as style, technique, and subject, are defined by time and culture and are specific to individual artworks, spiritual and emotional aspects are equally shared by every art experience. According to Venturi the spiritual aspect (creative process) of an artwork is independent from its material elements. He described the creative process as an individual spiritual revelation or intuition and also as a mystical experience.

This was an important point in Venturi's theory, where it is possible to notice the intermingling of influences from both Formalism and Neo-Idealism. He thought that artists could better express mystical emotions, or *revelation*, through artistic forms when they are not conditioned by a practical function. For Venturi this meant that artists use an *interior eye*, or introspection, leading to a transcendental experience resulting in synthetic formal abstraction, as opposed to the *external eye* presiding over the observation of natural phenomena and their plastic representation.²⁹⁴ In his opinion, as a consequence of the engagement with the *interior eye*, artists were able to reduce reality into purely formal relations, stirring the emotions of those who look at the artwork produced.²⁹⁵

Venturi explained the formal expression of a mystical revelation in terms of the oriental principle of emanation, showing the influence of Croce's Neo-Idealism.²⁹⁶ Like Sirén, Venturi focused on art's mystical nature, maintaining a clear distinction between spirituality and religious devotion.²⁹⁷ He believed that spirituality concerned an individual mystical experience, while religion involved following the dogma of an established Church. He exemplified this point with a comparison between Simone Martini's (1284–1344) work *San Ludovico di Tolosa incorona Roberto d'Angiò* (1317)

293 Ibid., 9–14, 212–220.

294 Ibid., 38, 44.

295 Ibid., 6, 11–15.

296 Ibid., 35.

297 Ibid., 196.

and Titian's (1488–1576) *Pala di Pesaro* (1519–1526).²⁹⁸ (Figs. 5–6) The first work, in his opinion, resulted from a mystical revelation expressed through abstract and significant form, which was capable of stirring an emotional response, while the second aimed at a naturalistic representation of a religious iconographic theme.

As with Bell's primitive and *Christian slopes* and Sirén's spiritual epochs, Venturi believed that the creative process was enhanced during times in which spirituality and mysticism became part of the dominant discourse. Venturi claimed that such epochs were dominated by the *taste for the primitive*, which he explained in terms of a kind of *Zeitgeist*, clearly referring to Riegl's theory, and translated in terms of a preference for spiritual intuition, mystical emotion, and formal synthesis and simplification, which he deemed essential to artistic creation.²⁹⁹ However, he did not exclude the possibility of creating art during epochs that instead favour an intellectual and materialist perspective, as Western art history proves with many cases of artists who in his opinion stood out of the main discourse, as in Michelangelo's case.³⁰⁰ Like Bell and Sirén, he believed that artists could pursue and achieve the spirituality and abstraction necessary to the creative process, despite the circumstances of their cultural, historical, and aesthetic backgrounds.

Venturi's association of the concept of the primitive with *artistic forms* and an *interior eye*, reflects a formalist notion of primitivism. In a similar way to the other Formalists, in Venturi's work the term primitive coexisted as a reference to Italian art from the 13th and 15th century and also as a concept summing up essential aesthetic characteristics belonging to every "true" artwork.³⁰¹ This parallel employment of the term emerged during the 1920s, following the initial turn in Venturi's aesthetic premises and art-historical practice, which became manifest in his inaugural speech in 1915 at the time of his appointment to the art history professorship in Turin. In those years, he cultivated a discourse of formalist derivation that was grounded on the concept of the primitive in order to promote and disseminate his aesthetic ideas.

This initiative not only involved the academic context. For instance, in 1924 Venturi gave a series of public lectures that were attended by as many intellectuals as high-society ladies.³⁰² His original approach, his eloquence as a lecturer, and the unusual argumentation did not fail to attract a vast audience. The event also received a positive review in national newspapers.³⁰³ Moreover Venturi, who at the time wrote a cultural column in the newspaper *Il Secolo*, demonstrated his intentions to popu-

298 Ibid., 205.

299 Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, passim.

300 Ibid., 172–174.

301 Ibid., 222–226.

302 Iamurri, "Un libro d'azione?," 115–141.

303 Newspaper cuttings of the positive reviews of Venturi's lectures are kept in the Lionello Venturi Archive. 'Lecture e conferenze,' *L'Ambrosiano*, 18 January 1924 and January 1924, in ALV. The conferences were also published. Lionello Venturi,

larise his discourse beyond the academic context and participate in a more general cultural debate through writing unscholarly articles.³⁰⁴ In some of these the connection to a primitivist discourse appears clearly as a framing tool of appropriation, interpretation, and valuation. In other words, he relied on the concept of the primitive as the basis for developing a discursive frame that explained, promoted, and branded his aesthetic claims. Venturi's texts and practices function as a self-explanatory and empowering frame.

Venturi's discourse was grounded on the identification between the concept of the primitive and his aesthetic perspective. Venturi not only adopted the Formalists' strategy of appropriation to reinforce their aesthetic background, but he also relied on their conceptual premises in relation to primitivism. The overlapping of Venturi's selection of artworks with those included in the discourse of Formalist theorists in relation to primitivism indeed suggests similar aesthetic premises. Although Venturi used the term primitive mainly to refer to Italian art from the 13th and 15th century, in this new dimension it began to apply to other artworks as well. The primitive frame also included Byzantine and Chinese art and modern artists like the Italian group Macchiaioli and the Impressionists. Venturi described them as sharing a common aesthetic ground based on the formalist concept of the primitive.

The conceptual use of the term primitive and his association with a formalist aesthetic background is also clear in *The Taste of the Primitives*, Venturi's major text written in the 1920s. The book reflects an aesthetic outlook as he had defined it since 1915. *The Taste of the Primitives* is an extremely complex text corresponding to Venturi's polyhedral methodological approach to art-historical discourse, which included documentary research, connoisseurial practice and a critical and aesthetic overview.³⁰⁵ It constitutes a profoundly original project compared to his father Adolfo Venturi's art-historical account, which was rooted in a strictly positivist and documentary approach.³⁰⁶ Another of Lionello Venturi's innovations was his decision not to follow a chronological series and he also chose to venture beyond the national boundaries. He brought together in his art-historical account artworks chronologically, geographically, and culturally distant, spanning from the antiquity to the 19th century.

Venturi analysed the history of art from within a frame that took the concept of the primitive as a reference point for the evaluation of artworks. He presented

"Il valore attuale dei primitivi," *L'Araldo dell'istituto d'arte e alta cultura* 1, no. 2 (1924).

304 Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 217; Lionello Venturi, "Novità sull'arte cinese," *Il Secolo*, 18 March 1926; Lionello Venturi, "I mercati artistici," *Il Secolo*, 26 June 1926; Lionello Venturi, "La scultura cinese," *Il Secolo*, 12 October 1926.

305 Valeri, *La storia critica dell'arte nel magistero di Lionello Venturi*, 13–16.

306 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*.

the concept of the primitive as coincidental with his aesthetic premises.³⁰⁷ Every real artwork, he claimed, contains the aesthetic and formal elements associated with the primitive. Consequently, he thought that every artwork from any time or place should be considered in the light of the concept of the primitive. Moreover, his primitivist discourse focused particularly on an anti-classical perspective. He indeed associated classicism with an intellectual and material approach to making art, which he believed was detrimental to the creative process. For example, Venturi presented Michelangelo (1475–1564) as a primitive artist, responding to a formalist conception of form. He thought that the artist's work was characterised by forms with a spiritual content, although he lived during a time when a classicist view dominated. The value of his work, Venturi believed, did not reside in its anatomical perfection, but its ability to express a spiritual intuition.³⁰⁸ Venturi interpreted the anatomical interest of Michelangelo in terms of a necessity imposed by the cultural context and the dominant strand of aesthetics.³⁰⁹

Anatomical accuracy was among the aspects that Venturi associated with classical aesthetics, which represented opposing values to the concept of the primitive. Nonetheless he thought that true artists could rise above the limitations posited by classical aesthetics, by following their mystical intuition instead of focusing on representation as demanded by the aesthetical norm of the time. Those artists, such as Michelangelo, could be included in a primitive frame and interpreted according to a formalist aesthetic principle. Piero della Francesca (1416–1492) is among these examples. Piero's works made great use of scientific perspective, one of the key elements of classical naturalism. (Fig. 7)

However, Venturi claimed that through this, the artist did not aim at depicting an illusionary three-dimensional space, but wanted to express his mystical intuition, giving an abstract value to the geometrical forms of his paintings. Venturi indeed described his work in parallel to the intuitive perspective displayed in Giotto's (1267–1337) work and interpreted as the outcome of the artist's mysticism.³¹⁰ In contrast, Venturi presented Pietro Perugino (1446–1524), another artist of the Renaissance, as an example of a painter who used perspective with the mere intent of naturalistic representation, and was completely lacking mystical inspiration.³¹¹ These examples

307 Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, 222. “Poiché il gusto dei primitivi è un aspetto essenziale e quindi eterno dell'arte, ogni autentica opera d'arte presenta sempre quell'aspetto. E ciascuno può ritrovare tracce nelle migliori opere di artisti della Grecia, del Rinascimento, del Barocco. La coscienza dell'autonomia del gusto dei primitivi, della sua perfezione tecnica, della sua insuperabilità morale, non può limitarsi a interpretare le opera d'arte di un periodo storico particolare.”

308 Ibid., 172–174.

309 Ibid., 178–181.

310 Ibid., 214.

311 Ibid.

reveal the extent to which Venturi's considerations of artworks were based on a primitive frame, which projected an interpretation based on formalist ideas in opposition to classical aesthetics. Moreover, they throw light on the fact that Venturi's primitivism differed from modernist discourse in not associating it with specific epochs or stages of development but instead pointed to more general aesthetic principles.

Apparently, Venturi was aware of the clash between his anti-classical stand and the claim that art is essentially a universalistic phenomenon, beyond cultural and historically determined elements of artworks. He explained that his criticism of the classical tradition addressed its historical meaning and formal choices directed to the imitation of nature. He indeed thought that artists could produce art also in contexts dominated by classical taste. However, he also considered classicism from a philosophical point of view, referring to both eternity and universality. This distinction is interesting, especially as his text reveals the idea of a coincidence of historical and philosophical meanings in the case of the term primitive. This means that he did not distinguish between the conceptual implications of the term and its reference to actual historical phenomena, i.e. the Italian primitives. This aspect of theoretical ambivalence explains the coexisting references in regard to primitivism to both conceptual categories (aesthetic principles) and to empirical phenomena (artworks).³¹²

Venturi's notion of primitivism is also indebted to Formalism in regard to modern art. However, in a similar way to Berenson and Sirén, Venturi's relation to modern art was complicated. He could understand the modernist discourse in relation to an anti-materialist and anti-academic position. He saw these aspects overlapping with his aesthetic idea of art as a mystical and expressive experience. Independence from tradition, universality, and individual freedom were the features in modernist discourse that came closest to Venturi's thinking. In theory, Venturi praised modern art's detachment from a descriptive function and its emotional inspiration, but nonetheless his interest and understanding of actual artworks and formal results was limited. His interest in modern art remained quite conservative and restricted to theoretical considerations, overlooking and misunderstanding actual examples of artworks of modernist derivation. For instance, although Venturi had advocated the broadening of art-historical scholarship to include modern art, his interest did not extend beyond Impressionism. While Post-Impressionism, at least at a theoretical level, was embraced by Formalist theorists, a practical aversion to avant-garde movements, and in particular to Futurism, was quite common among them.

Impressionism had been a controversial topic among Formalist theorists. All the other Formalists examined here, while viewing Impressionism sympathetically, considered it as the expression of a descriptive approach, concerned with material reality and neglecting a spiritual, or emotional, introspective inspiration. It was generally

312 Ibid., 6–15, 222–240.

interpreted as the extreme consequence of realist naturalism, employing scientific techniques and principles of vision in order to represent in an illusionistic mode a perfect rendering of nature.³¹³ Bell, for instance, stated that Impressionist aesthetics were often misunderstood because of the contradiction between their faithful transcription of visual phenomena and the dominant ideal reality based on *intellectual superstructures*. According to Sirén too, Impressionism was a form of realism, taking it as the extreme consequences of attempting to register pure visual impressions according to individual perception.³¹⁴ In his opinion, although Impressionist artists aimed at representation, their work was a good example of how meaningless was the idea of an objective naturalism in academic art.

Venturi instead saw Impressionism as the result of an introspective and mystical creative process.³¹⁵ He thought that Impressionist artists were inspired by an individual mystical vision, which they genuinely instilled into the artwork. Venturi saw their work as conditioned by emotions and spiritual sensibility. On a similar premise the art historian also appreciated the Italian art group Macchiaioli. He considered the Macchiaioli, a 19th century Italian realist movement, to have aesthetic parallels to French Impressionism and thus he regarded them as modern primitive artists.³¹⁶ Appropriating the Macchiaioli artists within the primitive frame, Venturi stressed their lack of interest in intellectual content and naturalistic representation. Moreover, he emphasised the synthetic nature of their formal expression characterised by a formal simplification and by flat and intense brush strokes. These artists were presented as expressing in their paintings a mystical inspiration, or *revelation*, aroused from the observation of nature through an *internal eye*.

Venturi's interpretation of the Macchiaioli stands as an example of how the process of appropriation within the primitive frame would work. Within this frame an artwork acquired a meaning that did not depend on an objective truth, but on Venturi's interpretation in the light of the concept of the primitive according to formalist theory. The inclusion of the Macchiaioli in this discursive frame therefore made Venturi's claims about them self-evident. His view on Macchiaioli appears as distorted because it is based on a selection of artworks that support his own aesthetic perspective. He privileged drafts and sketches over finished works, which indeed were

313 Bell, *Art*, 196–198, 201–203.

314 Sirén, “Primitiv och modern konst,” 35–47.

315 For an analysis of Venturi's position in regard to Impressionism during the 1910s and 1920s, see Maria Mimita Lamberti, “Lionello Venturi sulla via dell'Impressionismo,” *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Classe di Lettere e Filosofia* 1, no. 1 (1971): 257–277; for an analysis of Venturi's position in regard to Impressionism during the 1930s, see Laura Iamurri, *Lionello Venturi e la modernità dell'Impressionismo* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2011).

316 Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*.

mostly academic in style and historical in content.³¹⁷ Moreover, he supported his interpretation by juxtaposing the Macchiaioli group with the Pre-Raphaelite movement. As with Bell and Fry concerning the Pre-Raphaelites and with Sirén in regard to Romantic art, Venturi had been against the Italian Romantic movement of the Nazarenes. He especially condemned the contradiction of an aspiration to medieval sentiment expressed through an academic style. In his opinion, the Romantic paintings constituted copies that were devoid of mystical inspiration. He thought that copying formal elements from past artistic traditions required an intellectual approach that prevented the creative process.³¹⁸ Fry, likewise, condemned the Pre-Raphaelites' practice of dragging inspiration from previous formal results.³¹⁹

Looking at Venturi's work in the light of the concept of the primitive, it is possible to see his point of contact with formalist theory and to understand the role of his version of primitivism as a strategy of appropriation within a primitivist frame that reinforced his aesthetic perspective. In this sense one can see how the concept of the primitive becomes normative both in the definition and the recognition of art. While the connection with formalist primitivism explains theoretical influences and the origin of the strategy of appropriation, it does not completely answer the questions concerning anti-classicism and anti-nationalism of Venturi's use of a conception of primitivism expressed in the book that I will examine further in the fourth chapter. Before doing so, it is still important to analyse how the Gualino Collection functions in relation to Venturi's primitivist discourse.³²⁰

Venturi's discourse informed the introduction he wrote for the catalogue of the Gualino Collection, which was published in the same year as *The Taste of the Primitives*. In his text, all of his fundamental aesthetic principles are evoked: universalism, formalism, spiritualism. They are indeed presented as the criteria behind collecting practice. The connection between the artworks and Venturi's theory also becomes explicit because some of this collection's artworks are mentioned in *The Taste of the Primitives*.³²¹ The Gualino Collection appears in this context as a material appendix and illustration of Venturi's book. As a result, it assumed the role of a frame that reflected and reinforced Venturi's primitivist discourse. While the collection gained meaningfulness and homogeneity through Venturi's theory, individual artworks were

317 Norma Broude, *The Macchiaioli: Italian Painters of the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 1–12, 266, 281; Ragghianti, *Profilo della critica d'arte in Italia*, 30.

318 Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, 217–221; Lionello Venturi, "Del purismo nelle arti Lionello Venturi," *La cultura* no. 9 (15 July 1924): 394–397.

319 Bullen, "Introduction," xi–xxv.

320 Lionello Venturi, *La collezione Gualino* (Torino–Roma: Casa Editrice d'Arte Bestetti e Tumminelli, 1926).

321 Lionello Venturi referred to and illustrated two paintings from the Gualino Collection by Giovanni Fattori, *Riposo*, 1887 (fig. 70) and *Ritratto della cugina Argia*, 1861 (fig. 72), in *The Taste of the Primitives*.

appropriated and processed according to a formalist interpretation. The collection represented the material and visual counterpart of his discourse in reference to a conceptual use of primitivism. The many elements of contact between Venturi's theory – in particular *The Taste of the Primitives* – and the Gualino Collection suggest a correlation. I think that the analysis of the Gualino Collection from the perspective of the concept of the primitive, contributes to a more thorough understanding of the meaning and use that Venturi made of the discursive practice in his work during the 1920s.

3 The Gualino Art Collection in the Light of Lionello Venturi's Primitivist Discourse

3.1 The Gualino Collection and Primitivism

In 1928 an exhibition opened at the Galleria Sabauda in Turin, which attracted a vast audience and even included the Royal family, who attended the vernissage.³²² The artworks displayed were part of a private collection belonging to the art lover and entrepreneur Riccardo Gualino. This selection of immensely valuable pieces must have puzzled the audience for the apparent lack of obvious connections between those objects. The event gained a particular importance because Gualino subsequently donated some of the artworks from the exhibition to the museum. The works included in the donation corresponded to those illustrated in the first catalogue of his collection.³²³ This catalogue, published in 1926, presented works that had been

322 The exhibition opened on 29 April 1928. Francesca Ponzetti ed., *Il caso Gualino*, accessed February 25, 2019, http://www.teatroestoria.it/materiali/Il_caso_GUALINO.pdf; Beatrice Marconi, "Cesarina Gualino musa mecenate pittrice. Quasi un'auto-biografia," in *Cesarina Gualino e i suoi amici*, eds. Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco e Beatrice Marconi (Venezia 1997), catalogue to the exhibition, 115–183.

323 Venturi, *La collezione Gualino*; Rosalba Tardito Amerio, "La donazione Gualino alla galleria Sabauda," in *Dagli ori antichi agli anni Venti. Le collezioni di Riccardo Gualino* (Milano: Electa, 1982), 35–37; Anna Imponente, "Dal 1933 al 1958," in *Dagli ori antichi agli anni Venti. Le collezioni di Riccardo Gualino* (Milano: Electa, 1982), 38–42; Noemi Gabrielli, "Le fortunate vicende della donazione Gualino alla Sabauda," *Studi piemontesi*, no. 4 (November 1975): 412–419. Gualino donated some of the artworks from his collection, namely those published in the catalogue in 1926, with the exception of two artworks – see Appendix 2, in 1928. However, the artworks were transferred to the museum only in 1930 (20 September–3 October 1930). Initially Gualino kept the donated artworks at his home in Turin because the museum did not have space to exhibit them. He not only had the artworks in his care at home, but he also planned to build a new space for the museum, so that they could remain in Turin and displayed together, as he had wished and expressed in his bequest. However, there was not enough time to fulfil this ambitious project. Gualino's financial and legal problems led to the confiscation of all his assets. It is unclear what happened to the donated artworks after 1930, but in 1933 some of them – 49 among the best pieces – were sent to London on the request of Ambassador Dino Grandi in order to

brought together under the supervision and advice of his friend, the art historian and critic Lionello Venturi, since 1918.

At first glance, it was not obvious what criteria had been used to purchase this unusual ensemble of works. The fact was that Gualino had entrusted Venturi with forming a collection that would not only be of great value, but would also become an outstanding example of modernity and progressivism. The collection indeed reflected the aesthetic perspective Venturi had been branding through the concept of the primitive. In this sense the collection also came to work as a frame for appropriating artworks in the light of Venturi's primitivist discourse, gaining meaning and value as a result of his interpretation and authority.

Venturi made contact with Riccardo Gualino in 1918, at the time of his return to Turin to resume his academic position, and soon became the exclusive advisor on his art collection.³²⁴ (Fig. 45) The collection that resulted from their work together reflects many aspects relating to Venturi's theory. In 1926 the catalogue of the collection was published in tandem with *The Taste of the Primitives*, reinforcing the idea of a shared aesthetic background. The art collection had indeed grown in parallel with the development of Venturi's ideas, as the chronological order of the purchases suggests.³²⁵ The publication of Venturi's theoretical book and the collection's catalogue underlines that the two projects were considered as completed at the same time.

decorate the renovated Italian Embassy (11 artworks, which included four Chinese sculptures, were sent back to Italy in 1934 because they did not fit the décor of the Embassy). Later, during the War, 21 artworks were moved back to Italy to secure them from the bombings. Eight of them were then moved again to London at the end of the War, while the others remained in Rome until 1947, when they were returned to Turin. In 1958, finally, all the artworks were reunited at Galleria Sabauda, as Gualino had wished. The entrepreneur had an important role in securing the recovering of the artworks donated. On the one hand he agreed to pay for new artworks filling the gaps left on the wall of the Embassy in London and on the other hand he threatened to reclaim the artworks if the conditions of his bequest to keep the artworks together and in Turin were not met. The recovery of the artworks was particularly challenging, especially considering the diplomatic role they were invested with since they were first acquired by Dino Grandi.

324 Letter from Riccardo Gualino to Lionello Venturi, 17 July 1918, in ALV. Gualino replied to Venturi by inviting him to visit his art collection. "Di ritorno da una breve assenza trovo qui la pregiata sua dell'8 corr.... Non occorre davvero la presentazione che Ella mi fa, essendo in Italia troppo noto il di Lei nome e quello di Suo padre. Le collezioni che da qualche anno vado facendo sono certo inferiori alla fama e alle di Lei aspettative; tuttavia, quali cose siano, sarà per me un vero piacere fargliele vedere e udire il di Lei parere...Nella speranza di presto avere il piacere di conoscerLa personalmente...".

325 Ponzetti, *Il caso Gualino*, 2–7; Cesarina Gualino's diaries (1923–1932) and documents regarding the purchase of the artworks (i.e. temporary import and notification of national importance) were useful tools for studying the time and the place of provenance of many of the collection's artworks. While parts of the diaries have

This connection between the collection and Venturi's aesthetic perspective is also mentioned in Gualino's memoirs, where the entrepreneur underlined their common intentions.³²⁶ He wrote that he shared with Venturi a common aesthetic conception that made them appreciate art in its multiple forms. Gualino also stated that through Venturi's influence he had been able to appreciate artworks that prior to his encounter with the art historian he would have rejected according to the traditional valuation of art based on iconographic, stylistic, and historical aspects.³²⁷ A continuous thread of cross-references connects the two catalogues with Venturi's book. Gualino's artworks were published and references to many of the artists he collected were included in *The Taste of the Primitives*. In turn the collection and its catalogue responded to and illustrated the ideas expressed in the book and it functioned as an appendix to it.³²⁸

In the introduction to the catalogue the theoretical link to Venturi's aesthetic discourse emerges clearly, revealing a common aesthetic ground. Venturi's discourse based on primitivism declared that the universal spiritual aesthetic content of art would manifest itself beyond the works' formal aspect. Venturi's introduction underlined the fact that the chronological and geographical variation of these artworks related to the principle of universality and gained meaningfulness within it.³²⁹ This reference not only contributed to identifying and defining the common character of those artworks, but it also presented the collection as an exemplification of his theoretical principles. The introduction to the catalogue places the collection in connection with the principle of anti-historicism, which also evoked the eternal value he associated with the primitive conception of art.

This anti-historicism was also an important part of the project of academic disciplinary and methodological reform. In his introduction, Venturi indeed stressed that the collection was put together with the mere love for art in mind, and dismissing pieces that would have only a historical significance.³³⁰ Venturi claimed that the collection avoided a chronological sequence and was devoid of intellectual interest; the purchases were motivated solely on the basis of aesthetic criteria. Following

been published, the other documents are a primary source kept at the Fondo Riccardo Gualino, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome (FRG).

326 Riccardo Gualino, *Frammenti di vita e pagine inedite* (Roma: Famija Piemonteisa, 1966), 87–88.

327 Gualino, *Frammenti di vita*, 87; Venturi, *La collezione Gualino*.

328 Venturi, *La collezione Gualino*; Lionello Venturi, *Alcune opere della collezione Gualino esposte nella R. Pinacoteca di Torino* (Milano–Roma: Casa editrice d'Arte Bestetti & Tumminelli, 1928). Venturi edited two catalogues for the Gualino Collection in the 1920s. The first was published in 1926 (see Appendix 2) and a second volume was planned, but not realised. The second catalogue was published at the time of the first public exhibition of the collection at the Galleria Sabauda (then known as Pinacoteca di Torino) in 1928.

329 Venturi, *La collezione Gualino*.

330 Ibid.

the theoretical terms presented in *The Taste of the Primitives*, Venturi defined each one of the artworks acquired by Gualino as an expression of an individual *artistic personality*.³³¹ He had claimed that art should be appreciated beyond its practical and material aspects, such as historicism, thematic interest, iconography, historical context or nationality, looking instead for its spiritual content, intimate quality, and creative sparkle. To appreciate art in this way, Venturi thought that it was necessary to approach the analysis of artworks with criticism, from a perspective that would take into account their aesthetic aspects. Artworks that were historically and culturally distant from each other in his opinion could stand well side-by-side, if considered as simply aesthetic experiences.

By reflecting Venturi's theoretical background, the collection and the catalogue contributed to reinforcing the art historian's discourse. The collection as a collaborative and strategic project began to grow under Venturi's supervision at time when Venturian primitivism was emerging as a tool to promote his theory and argumentations. The collection constitutes a sort of visual and tangible counterpart to the discourse based on primitivism and a context, a frame, for the artworks, which are absorbed in the discourse of the primitive gaining significance within it.³³² Regarding this phenomenon, Mieke Bal has pointed out that "museum expository agents put into effect discursive strategies suggesting a process of meaning-making", and of argumentation based on the value of truth intrinsic to discourses.³³³ I think that the Gualino Collection bore a similar discursive function in which the selected artworks participated collectively in the discourse, but lost their individual identity. They contributed in producing a meaning that concurred in reflecting and expressing Venturi's concept of the primitive, which became crucial in mediating his theory and claims during the 1920s. This particular framing became even more explicit with the 1928 exhibition.

The selection of artworks from the collection included in the catalogue is also significant. The 1926 catalogue displayed a quite diverse array of works, ranging from antiquity to the Romanesque, from the Italian "primitives" to Asian art, from Titian to 17th century Flemish paintings. The collection's modern artworks were left out of the catalogue, while nevertheless playing an important part of *The Taste of the Primitives*, but one should bear in mind that a second volume had been planned, but was never realised. Instead in 1928, a second catalogue was published, which also

331 Ibid.

332 Paul Mattick, Jr., "Context," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 110–127; MacLachlan and Reid, *Framing and Interpretation*, 11.

333 Bal, *Double Exposures*, 7–9; Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and Discourse on Language*; Carol Duncan, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship," in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 280.

included modern art. In this regard it is useful to remember that Gualino was among the first collectors in Italy to own works by Édouard Manet and Amedeo Modigliani and had acquired several artworks of the Macchiaioli, which all found a special position within Venturi's discourse in connection to his concept of primitivism.³³⁴

For the second catalogue, Venturi had become more selective and accurate, deciding to omit all artworks that, despite their good quality and recognised value, did not fit precisely into his discourse. For instance, Dutch art and 18th century Venetian painting were probably not considered a perfect match with his concept of the primitive.³³⁵ The second catalogue indeed focused on the old masters, Oriental art, and modern paintings, reinforcing references to formalist primitivism. As a whole the catalogues presented a visual illustration of the universal primitive character of art beyond historical and cultural specificity, which Venturi promoted. The framing of works according to his discourse on primitive art gave them legitimacy and an aesthetic value. The originality of the collection was not so much in the single artworks acquired, but in its organisation, displaying side by side very different art, and furthermore in its functional relation to Venturi's discourse reflecting his new aesthetical and methodological ideas.

The collection is also useful in following and increasing the understanding of the development of Venturi's aesthetic theory and notion of primitivism because it shows steps that are not manifest in his scholarly publications. This allows a deeper look into Venturi's thinking and networks. Between 1918 and 1931, the collection had evolved through various stages that complied with the theoretical evolution of Venturi's thinking and aesthetic background. Particularly important in this sense is the reference to Chinese art, which was not included in *The Taste of the Primitives*.³³⁶ However, Venturi had made reference to Oriental art at least since 1915, albeit as part of a generic aesthetic reference in line with other Formalists' discourses, as we have seen in the previous chapter.³³⁷ The collection, and the catalogues, instead came to include a great number of Asian artworks, which gained both meaning and value in the light of Venturi's primitivist discourse.³³⁸

Chinese art, through the profiling of the collection, was absorbed in the context of Venturi's primitivist discourse, thus suggesting its connection too to formalist theory.

334 Emily Braun, "The Faces of Modigliani: Identity Politics under Fascism," in *Modern Art and the Idea of the Mediterranean*, ed. Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutyński (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 181–205.

335 Iamurri, "L'azione culturale di Lionello Venturi. L'insegnamento, gli studi, le polemiche," 87.

336 The first catalogue (1926) included only four oriental artworks, while in the second catalogue (1928) the number increased to 25.

337 Venturi, "La posizione dell'Italia nelle arti figurative," 223.

338 James Clifford, "Collecting Ourselves," in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 262.

Chinese art was not explained from the perspective of its Chinese cultural, historical and religious background, but it gained its meaning and value within a Western aesthetic frame in relation to the concept of the primitive. Venturi had scarce knowledge of Chinese art, yet introduced it in the context of the collection and his discourse. He legitimised it by connecting it to the concept of the primitive. Through his aesthetic discourse based on the concept of the primitive, Venturi could support at the same time his aesthetic ideas and the collecting choices. Conversely, it is also true that the artworks included in the frame of the collection contributed in orienting his primitivist discourse. If the Chinese art in the Gualino Collection manifests a connection with Venturi's aesthetic guidelines, it also poses a problem concerning the degree to which collecting opportunities in their turn influenced Venturi's thinking and networking. In 1913 it was the fascination for Berenson's books, collection, and trade in old masters that caused Venturi's interest to shift towards these artists in relation to formalist theories.³³⁹ Similarly, it was the encounter with Sirén later on – with his aesthetic theory and with the collecting opportunity he presented – that brought Venturi closer to a mystical interpretation of Formalism.

Through the connections between aesthetic discourse and collection as primitivist framing devices, Venturi laid the ground for explaining the coherence and the legitimacy of the collector's choices. The concept of the primitive, while summarising essential aesthetic characteristics, outlined the acknowledging ground for the rich variety of art in the collection. This diverse selection of works, converging in a collection that Venturi personally curated, was brought together under the aesthetic principle of the universality of art. Venturi could explain and offer guidelines on the appreciation of those artworks through the concept of the primitive. In this context the concept of the primitive served as a tool for presenting, branding, and promoting. He constructed a discursive frame, which supported, justified, and gave value, including monetary value, to the choices made for the collection. It seems as if Venturi's discourse on primitivism aimed to provide a backdrop for promoting the collector's nonconformist choices and consequently worked as a tool to legitimise their value. His aesthetic discourse emerged as the background for the collection itself, which likewise reflects and illustrates the theoretical stance with its examples of art displayed as an organic ensemble. Therefore, a look into the collection serves to enlighten us on some aspects of the evolution of Venturi's discourse, especially in regard to his notion of primitivism and its subtle meanings and functions.

339 Letters from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 22 January 1913, 10 April 1913, 1 March 1915, in BBL.

3.2 The Art Market

When Venturi began to take an interest in the Gualino Collection in 1918, the Italian art market had been undergoing significant developments. There had been several factors affecting the art trade at the turn of the century, such as social and economic changes following Italian unification and the rising interest of collectors in Italian old masters. In general, the new economic and social situation in Europe from the end of the 19th century on, a result of the collapse of the Ancien Régime, meant that an increasing number of valuable artworks were becoming available. In post-unification Italy many old masters appeared on the market from dismantled aristocratic or ecclesiastic collections.³⁴⁰ However, at the beginning of the 20th century, the art market in the country was still largely unregulated and, in spite of the developing legislation for the guardianship of the artistic heritage, such norms were rarely applied.³⁴¹

Particularly influential was the rising interest in European art among American collectors, which boomed from the 1880s to the 1910s.³⁴² From the 1890s their interest slowly turned towards the Italian old masters and their wealth had a remarkable impact on the European art trade.³⁴³ American collections were different from aristocratic European ones that were based on a long line of additions and successions from generation to generation. By contrast American collections were often the result of a single individual's initiative with the availability of a newly made economic fortune. The fresh and mobile capital realised by American entrepreneurs and bankers was readily invested to include the artworks coming from the European aristocracy, which was at the time losing its influence and economic resources.³⁴⁴ This transfer of possession marked the polarization of powers in the hands of a new ruling class.³⁴⁵ The art they acquired was considered a means to gain prestige and to claim an influential position in society.³⁴⁶ Art collections were not only a matter of a financial investment, but were seen as potential signifiers within the social context.

According to Krzysztof Pomian, collected artworks can assume the role of “semi-ophores”, establishing meaning that reinforces the social status of the owner. This

340 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 99; Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*.

341 Francis Haskell, “La dispersione e la conservazione del patrimonio artistico,” in *Storia dell'arte italiana. Situazioni, momenti, indagini, conservazione, falso, restauro*, ed. Federico Zeri (Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 1981), 15–38; Silvana Pettenati, “Le raccolte antiquariali,” in *Dagli ori antichi agli anni Venti. Le collezioni di Riccardo Gualino* (Milano: Electa, 1982), 21–22; Iamurri, “Art History in Italy,” 393–396.

342 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 118. James Jackson Jarves began to collect Italian primitive art when it was not popular in America. Isabella Stewart Gardner started the trend for collecting this kind of art among American collectors.

343 Lamberti, “Riccardo Gualino,” 7.

344 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 91.

345 Kartio, “Introduction,” 26–35.

346 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 1; Lamberti, “Riccardo Gualino,” 6–7.

kind of semiophore stressed not only financial wealth, but also the fine taste of the collector.³⁴⁷ Art objects stood as a sign of hierarchical superiority. In this sense, in a context of social transformation, they were collected as a means for the emerging class to reclaim the recognition of their new leading role. With their symbolic meaning, the works contributed to the definition of a collector's position on the hierarchical ladder. As a consequence of the high demand for traditionally symbolic art, new "semiophores" were gradually introduced.³⁴⁸ I find that the intervention of scholars was particularly effective in pursuing new semiophores introduced on the basis of an aesthetic analogy and transfer of meaning among artworks. This would apply to Venturi's contribution in making particularly significant the value of Chinese artworks collected by Gualino.

In America, at the end of the 19th century, the acquisition of artworks as semiophores was common practice. In order to function as identifiers for social status the collectors' choices had to be compliant and adhere to criteria imposed from above. Collectors would compete over the purchase of single works that were not easily available.³⁴⁹ Everybody raced for the same artworks because of their nature as semiophores, capable of embodying and transferring the meaning that sanctioned the success of a family.³⁵⁰ In North America, collecting among industrialists became competitive terrain reflecting one's leading role in the art market, and thus society.³⁵¹ Collectors wanted to excel, to state their uniqueness through the singularity of their collection and the high value of their artworks. They aspired to own unique artworks and commonly desired objects as a way of demonstrating their primacy.³⁵² For emerging industrialists the engagement in art collecting was a way of social advancement.³⁵³ Investing in art was perceived as a means to express one's wealth and power that had been achieved through one's business success.³⁵⁴ However, collecting was not only a way to show one's economic accomplishment, but it also a way to assert one's cultivated taste.

347 Krzysztof Pomian, "Collezione," in *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, vol. 3 (Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1978), 330–364.

348 Pomian, "Collezione"; Lamberti, "Riccardo Gualino".

349 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 46, 70, 92–104.

350 Lamberti, "Riccardo Gualino," 16.

351 Frederick Baekeland, "Psychological Aspects of Art Collecting," in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 206, 212.

352 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*; Susanna Pettersson, "Suspense and Jubilation: The Sinebrychoffs as Art Collectors," in *Sinebrychoff: From Collectors' Home to Art Museum*, ed. Minerva Keltanen (Helsinki: Sinebrychoff Art Museum Publications, 2003), 71–83.

353 Baekeland, "Psychological Aspects of Art Collecting," 206.

354 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 59.

For American collectors, over and above the objects themselves, it was their symbolic value that mattered. They identified themselves with their collection in order to define their own identity.³⁵⁵ “The definition of self can depend on one’s possessions”, and the collection can be considered concretely as a visible extension of the self.³⁵⁶ The industrialists wanted to shine through their collection, which functioned as a symbol of their magnificence and power. Collections were built as a symbol of the collector and his person, a function more important than their monetary value.³⁵⁷ Often collectors also looked at the provenance of an artwork; the more titled a previous owner, the more the purchaser was interested in the piece. In this sense they believed that possessing the artwork would transfer with it the aristocratic aura of the original owner.³⁵⁸ For instance, in the 1880s and 1890s, the most popular artworks among American collectors were paintings by the British artists Thomas Gainsborough and Thomas Lawrence – a direct link to the English aristocracy – or by the French Barbizon school.³⁵⁹ Through those artworks the American collectors meant to identify themselves with Europe’s leading aristocratic classes.³⁶⁰ To confirm the symbolic value of a collection, they were frequently bequeathed to museums or turned into a private gallery in honour of the owner’s memory. The donations were meant to spread collectors’ reputations on account of their philanthropy. Similarly, collectors would produce luxury catalogues that could better frame and amplify the significance of their collection.³⁶¹

The reason for seeking out alternatives to the most popular artworks and established semiophores was not always their limited availability. While the majority of the collectors focused on acquiring the most sensational and renowned pieces, others instead would purchase artworks that were not yet in fashion, becoming forerunners in the field. They would therefore contribute to making these artworks popular, turning them into new semiophores. When Mrs Potter Palmer (1826–1902) brought French Impressionist works to Chicago, it was her status that benefitted the collection, and not the other way around.³⁶² Even as early as 1893 the family could confidently present their modern artworks alongside Chinese artworks.³⁶³ Similarly Isabella Stewart Gardner’s (1840–1924) interest in the Italian “primitives” opened the way to

355 Baekeland, “Psychological Aspects of Art Collecting,” 206.

356 Russell W. Belk, “Collectors and Collecting,” in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 321–322.

357 Belk, “Collectors and Collecting”, 321–322; Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*.

358 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 103.

359 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 205–206.

360 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 102–104; Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 24, 205–206.

361 Iamurri, “L’azione culturale di Lionello Venturi”; Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 105.

362 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 3–24.

363 Lamberti, “Riccardo Gualino.” Gualino’s Veronese painting came from the Palmer collection in 1924. The family bought the painting in 1909 through Berenson.

a wave of collecting of old masters in the following decades. For Gardner collecting was a way to distinguish herself from her wealthy peers through her sophistication in investing her fortune in art and culture rather than in “gowns, parties, food and drinks.”³⁶⁴

When Gardner began collecting Italian and Dutch old masters, she attended lectures by art professor Charles Eliot Norton (1827–1908) at Harvard and her collection aimed at illustrating his theories.³⁶⁵ In 1897, she bought *Lucretia* by Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510), making her among the first collectors in America to own a work by the artist at a time when the most popular art among the country’s collectors was French and British landscape painting.³⁶⁶ Italian primitive art was at that time largely overlooked.³⁶⁷ For instance, in 1811, a painting by Botticelli was difficult to sell, while a few decades later it became invaluable because Italian Renaissance art was revaluated.³⁶⁸ Similarly, the University of Harvard and several museums declined the donation of the first extensive collection of Italian primitives in North America, the Jarves Collection, because they regarded it as being of no interest. Consequently, it remained largely neglected for years before being revaluated.³⁶⁹ The role of the advisor became essential in evaluating artworks and in steering the collecting trend. The advisor, through the employment of discursive frames, backed in some cases by certain narratives, and through persuasiveness, was able to gain an influential role over the art trade.³⁷⁰ In Gardner’s case, for instance, it was Berenson’s publications that introduced the Italian old masters to American audiences and collectors.³⁷¹ It is thanks to his support that her investments became extremely valuable and her collection unparalleled.³⁷²

364 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 151–152, 155–156.

365 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 25–55.

366 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 120.

367 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, i; Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*.

368 Francis Haskell, *Riscoperte nell’arte. Aspetti del gusto, della moda e del collezionismo* (Milano: Edizioni di Comunità, 1990), 63; Haskell, “La dispersione e la conservazione del patrimonio artistico,” 26–30.

369 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, xxxiii.

370 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 205–206, 221–226; Baekeland, “Psychological Aspects of Art Collecting,” 212. Colin Simpson described Duveen’s strategy of sending American collectors to Italy in order to see the country’s old masters and meet with Berenson and thus being influenced to buy Italian artworks. Simpson, *The Partnership*, 208, 232.

371 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 191; Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 45–46.

372 For “...what she paid 3 million dollars for was then offered to be bought by Duveen for 15”. Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 115–128, 155–156.

3.3 The Roles of an Art Advisor

The role of the advisor had been evolving in the years around the turn of the century in parallel with the transformations involving art collecting and art trade. The role became more complex and it was taken on more often by the new figure of the professional scholar. The role of the professional advisor gained primary importance in becoming oriented within a growing collecting market.³⁷³ The large demand for artworks resulted in stiff competition and thus increased the risk of forgeries or illegally transferred artworks coming on the market.³⁷⁴ Nevertheless collectors were keen to purchase artworks of established value and notoriety, despite the substantial risks involved.³⁷⁵ The advisor had the commitment to scout for original artworks and guarantee their authenticity, aesthetic quality, and economic value.³⁷⁶

For many collectors, the acquisition of artworks was both thrilling and enervating.³⁷⁷ They would easily put pressure on their advisors or intermediaries to obtain the objects of their desire.³⁷⁸ The problem of authenticity was especially acute in relation to Medieval and Renaissance art due to the lack of signatures, poor documentation, and lack of available studies.³⁷⁹ Also, over the centuries, some works would have been heavily restored or several copies made as a study practice. Moreover, it was common among the old masters to be at the head of workshops where the final products were the result of multiple hands rather than of a single individual. However, the market pressure to find authentic and valuable artworks of appreciated masters had the effect of influencing attributions, and in some cases making over-optimistic claims.³⁸⁰

Collectors were ready to pay extraordinary sums of money in order to obtain the works of great masters, and antiquarians were encouraged or pressed into making such discoveries.³⁸¹ In this situation the opinion of a scholar became a major

373 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 226. “Their opinions, not only about which paintings were authentic, but about which paintings it was important to own”.

374 Haskell, *Riscoperte nell'arte*; Pettenati, “Le raccolte antiquariali,” 21–22.

375 Haskell, *Riscoperte nell'arte*; Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 25–46, 70, 92–117; Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 115–17.

376 Pettenati, “Le raccolte antiquariali,” 21; Pettersson, “Suspense and Jubilation,” 71–83.

377 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 115–117; Pettersson, “Suspense and Jubilation,” 71–83.

378 Pettersson, “Suspense and Jubilation,” 71–83; Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 218. “The newly vociferous demands of the market put enormous pressure on those middlemen who were still supposed to guarantee not only the authenticity but the significance of the paintings in their charge...”

379 Simpson, *The Partnership*, 54–56.

380 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 40–41; Pettenati, “Le raccolte antiquariali,” 21–24; Kartio, “Introduction,” 26–35; Eugenia Bianchi, “Adolfo Venturi tra collezionismo e ricerca. Un caso milanese,” *Arte lombarda*, Nuova serie, 160, no. 3 (2010): 94–108.

381 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 218–221; Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 56–91; Ernest Samuels, *Bernard Berenson: The Making of a Legend* (Cambridge, MA and London:

authority for attributions and authentication.³⁸² Nevertheless, in the context of the highly competitive art trade, with its rivalries and machinations, advisors were often expected to be ruthless and cynical.³⁸³ Some would not be averse to attending someone's deathbed in order to purchase a painting before it could be lost in a legacy.³⁸⁴

The situation became even more complicated with the emergence of national protection laws aiming at controlling the art market.³⁸⁵ This was especially true in Italy where, because of the increasing interest in the Italian old masters, there had been a massive movement of Italy's artistic heritage abroad. The art market was for the most part divided between foreigners buying, with a significantly increasing number of American collectors, and Italians selling.³⁸⁶ Gualino was indeed one of the few Italian collectors competing in this market as a buyer. It is significant that several of his Italian old artworks came from abroad, for instance from Paris, London, or New York.³⁸⁷ Since the end of the 19th century the art market in Italy had been populated by intermediaries working on behalf of European and American museums and collectors, antiquarians, skilful forgers, and unscrupulous traffickers.³⁸⁸

While already in the aftermath of unification there had been some feeble attempts to preserve the art heritage, at the beginning of the 20th century it began to be perceived as a matter of national identity.³⁸⁹ Artworks could be declared of national interest, *de facto* limiting the right of private possession of goods. A listed artwork could not be sold on the free market and its transfer abroad was forbidden. The first law aiming at preserving the Italian artistic, cultural, and historical heritage was

Harvard University Press, 1987), 166.

382 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 92–117.

383 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, passim; Pettersson, “Suspense and Jubilation”, 71–83.

384 Pettersson, “Suspense and Jubilation”, 71–83.

385 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*; Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*; Haskell, “La dispersione e la conservazione del patrimonio artistico”.

386 Pettenati, “Le raccolte antiquariali,” 21–24.

387 Imponente, “Dal 1933 al 1958,” 38–42; documents temporary import in FRG. The declaration of temporary import of artworks is made to the Italian state when importing art objects. Several artworks, imported at the same time, could be declared in one document only. In practice this meant that the imported objects enjoyed a special status, which would have made it easier to move, sell, and export them. The status of temporary importation was valid for 5 years (a term that could be subsequently renewed) during which the artwork could be freely transported inside and outside the national borders. See, Law 1 June 1939 no. 1089. Abstract of the law, Segretariato, Pratt. 1455, fasc. 2, sfasc. 1, in Archivio storico della Banca d'Italia, Villa Huffer (ASBI). “Le cose...che siano state importate dall'estero non sono soggette alla tassa di esportazione qualora la loro importazione sia temporanea, risultati da certificato dell'ufficio di esportazione e la riesportazione avvenga nel termine di anni cinque. Detto termine sarà prorogato di cinque in cinque anni su richiesta dell'interessato”.

388 Pettenati, “Le raccolte antiquariali,” 21–24.

389 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*; Haskell, “La dispersione e la conservazione del patrimonio artistico,” 15–38; Iamurri, “Art History in Italy”.

enacted in 1909 (*Legge Rosadi*).³⁹⁰ It focused particularly on regulating the market, limiting exportation and guaranteeing to the State the right to reclaim works declared of national interest that had been sold. However, it was not until 1939 that Italy would institute a comprehensive set of laws directed to protect the Italian heritage.³⁹¹

The debate over the problem of this haemorrhage of Italian artworks abroad grew even hotter during the interwar years. At the time it was also accompanied by resentment towards advisors, dealers, and collectors, who were seen as a threat to the preservation of the Italian heritage. Many lamented the ease with which precious artworks, and even entire collections, were given away through the sly behaviour of ruthless antiquarians and intermediaries.³⁹² Even Adolfo Venturi, from the standpoint of his institutional roles in state organisation, museums, and university, had a conflicted opinion about the international art market. Initially, at the time of his employment at the Ministry, he thought that the state should do its best to protect the national artistic heritage, also enforcing legislative measure. However, in view of his personal involvement in the art trade, he later embraced a more liberal position, expressing his opposition towards measures limiting the right of private possession of certain artworks.³⁹³ For instance in regard to the presence of many Italian artworks in England, that he had personally observed, he commented that while he regretted the departure of the paintings, he was satisfied that the works were passing into caring hands. Instead of a protectionist policy, he suggested the State could pass measures that would encourage and support Italian collectors.³⁹⁴

Although the new law provisions were slowly introduced and only loosely enforced, their impact on the market, and especially on international transactions, became gradually more important.³⁹⁵ Complications also arose from across the Ocean, especially for the increase in import taxation on artworks coming from Europe. John Piermont Morgan (1837–1913), for instance, preferred to hold his treasures acquired in Europe in his English mansions in order to avoid such levies.³⁹⁶ As a consequence of these changes it became necessary to find loopholes in order

390 Law 364/1909 (20th of June), accessed February 25, 2019, www.archeologia.beniculturali.it/getFile.php?id=429. The new Italian state had nevertheless initially confirmed the Editto Pacca, enacted by the Papal State in 1820. Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 99.

391 Raffaele Tamiozzo, *La legislazione dei Beni Culturali e Paesaggistici. Guida ragionata* (Milano: Giuffrè, 2009); Iamurri, “Art History in Italy”.

392 Pettenati, “Le raccolte antiquariali,” 21–24; Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 131–134, 143–146.

393 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 103, 131–134, 143–146. His involvement with art trade was among the causes of his removal from the Directorate General in the Ministry.

394 *Ibid.*, 113, 143–146.

395 Iamurri, “Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiano,” 69–90.

396 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 82.

to dodge the regulations.³⁹⁷ This aspect often impacted on the advisor's duties, and resulted in colluding with antiquarians and forgers. Collectors would press their intermediaries and advisors to bypass obstacles, through bribing, offering replicas, or smuggling works.³⁹⁸ Copies were offered to monasteries or parishes to replace a valuable original, or were hung on the walls in order to cover up the disappearance of an illegally transferred work.³⁹⁹ Sometimes in exchange of unique old masters' paintings, owners were offered modern artworks that were in vogue, but of far less importance and value.⁴⁰⁰ Moreover, dealers were able to bribe authorities to turn a blind eye. Lionello Venturi, for instance, considered Joseph Duveen (1869–1939), the charismatic and ruthless leading international art dealer in Italian old masters, to be very influential in the Italian art market for his ability to find his way through Italy's still loose protection of its art heritage.⁴⁰¹

In this evolving context, scholars got the better of the art trade. As a result, art collections came to claim a more professional basis. The art scholars distinguished themselves from the traditional advisor – who was often an artist or an antiquarian – with their academic or institutional status. The figure of the scholar was reinforced as a consequence of the professionalisation of art history and began to occupy institutional roles in museums and universities.⁴⁰² Art-historical scholarship at the beginning of the 20th century underwent a substantial evolution. The new figure of the scholar, operating within scientific and academic boundaries, came into conflict with the existing role of the connoisseur, which was gradually relegated to the realm of the amateur.⁴⁰³ Art historians became the best-equipped force in attributing or authenticating artworks and in evaluating their artistic quality, because they could back their opinions with aesthetic discourse and with scholarly authority. They indeed could define the very boundaries of the definition of art. From this standpoint, they achieved a great influence over the art trade. In this regard their power not only derived from the authority of their appraisals, but also from their potential to steer preferences in art collecting. This also meant that scholars had the advantage of being in a position to transfer the semiophore function to new artworks. This

397 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 115–116.

398 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*.

399 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 88; Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*; Simpson, *The Partnership*.

400 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*; Pettenati, "Le raccolte antiquariali"; Simpson, *The Partnership*.

401 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, 10 September (1925?) (VT V1 b45 11), in FAV. "...esportazione voluta da Duveen e che sicuro ottenne a Roma a suon di milioni".

402 Elizabeth Mansfield, "Introduction," in *Art History and Its Institutions: Foundations of a Discipline* ed. Elizabeth Mansfield (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 1–8.

403 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 71.

aspect was convenient both for those collectors who could not afford the most highly valued works in vogue and for those who sought a leading role as influencers of taste and as leaders.⁴⁰⁴

This dynamic became especially common in North America, where collecting standards were less rigid, and the art trade in general was more fluid and flexible, and the collections newly gathered.⁴⁰⁵ Moreover, these collectors were not subject to the tight traditional guidelines of the academies dominating Europe. It is significant that French modern art was collected earlier in North America than it was in Europe.⁴⁰⁶ The practice of collecting, outside of a tradition and without precedents, enhanced the possibility of embracing or establishing new trends and mixing artworks from different epochs and cultures. It was the job of the advisor to make the collecting decisions acceptable, backing them with aesthetic reasoning.⁴⁰⁷ The potential behind the figure of the scholar advisor was particularly alluring for those tycoons who aspired to a leading role in the collecting scene, as in the case of Isabella Stewart Gardner, Palmer Potter, and later J. P. Morgan. The initiative of collectors who had strong personalities and who aspired to a leading role in the field, along with the support of competent scholars, resulted in unusual ensembles of artworks.

The scholar advisors' responsibility for legitimising the value of artworks in the broad sense was even more important than his role of advising and securing a purchase. This happened through a process of appropriation of the artworks within a frame that linked them to a convincing aesthetic discourse. This frame had the function of bridging and blending the artworks together, while projecting onto them a shared aesthetic meaning. In this sense an art collection could be presented as a unitary project and receive theoretical validation. The advisor worked as a "taste maker" and was at the forefront of the powerful forces at the root of recognition of art. All in all, the perks of having an advisor alongside, who was at the same time a scholar, connoisseur, and intermediary, resided in his power to project value and recognition of the artworks and the collection. The greatest part of his influence, however, lay in the indisputable acceptance of the authority of his opinions and critical insight. To him was ascribed the gift of intuition, which could not be contradicted by sheer logic or evidence. Adolfo and Lionello Venturi were aware that their influential position over authentications and appraisals would carry the power to raise the price of a piece just for a mere, undocumented, expression of personal opinion.⁴⁰⁸

404 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*. For instance, in the case of the John G. Johnson Art Collection.

405 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 151.

406 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 6–15, 19.

407 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*.

408 Letters from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, 2 July 1922 (VT V1 b44 67) and 1 December 1922 (VT V1 b44 77), in FAV. "Io ti dirò che ho fatto due bei colpi per la collezione Gualino. C'era da Christie una maschera del Laurana...Ma era stata

Adolfo Venturi, besides being a scholar, had been an internationally renowned connoisseur who had worked as an intermediary and advisor for public galleries, museums and private collectors since the end of the 19th century.⁴⁰⁹ His fame and the authority of his appraisals especially, derived from his work for the Italian government on the classification of the Italian artistic heritage in 1887 that, after unification, had aimed at publishing a national catalogue.⁴¹⁰ Moreover, this enterprise gave him the opportunity to see personally a large number of artworks across Italy, both in public and private collections, thus turning him into an authority in the field.⁴¹¹ Lionello Venturi grew under the influence of his father's multiple roles in the art trade and collection, developing an interest of his own.⁴¹² In their activity as advisors and intermediaries, both of them tightened ties with an international network of prominent art dealers, such as Joseph Duveen, the Agnew family, the antiquarian Paolo Paolini, and Alessandro Contini-Bonacossi (1878–1955).⁴¹³ Father and son did not work together, but relied on each other's support in terms of advice, appraisals,

incorniciata da un bronzo moderno, e quindi non faceva un buon effetto. Tolto il bronzo la maschera apparirà in tutta la sua pienezza... L'altro bel colpo è di un quadro ch'io credo un Cosmè Tura: molto bello, ma non oso fare un'attribuzione a Tura senza il tuo parere” and “...hanno il dovere di pagare tutta la somma residuale...hanno venduto per 600.000 lire un quadro che senza di noi sarebbe stato ancora conservato in cantina e venduto per 600 lire. Siamo noi che abbiamo regalato loro intanto 600.000, senza contare quello che loro guadagneranno in seguito sul nostro giudizio. È ora che ce lo paghino. Se ci siamo adattati a non prendere subito l'intera somma, fu appunto perché non ci dessero denaro se non tratto dai loro guadagni sui quadri. Ora il guadagno c'è a usura; non è corretto ch'essi ci impediscano di realizzare il nostro guadagno”.

- 409 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 133–134, 143–146; Bianchi, “Adolfo Venturi tra collezionismo e ricerca”.
- 410 Dalai Emiliani, “Morelli e la questione del catalogo nazionale,” 107–119.
- 411 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 81–102, 223–225.
- 412 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 143–45; letters (1913) from antiquarians to Lionello, in ALV. Scatola 1, Nuove accessioni; letters from Joseph Duveen to Adolfo Venturi, in FAV.
- 413 “Contini Bonacossi Alessandro,” in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, 28 (1983), [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/alessandro-contini-bonacossi_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/alessandro-contini-bonacossi_(Dizionario-Biografico)/). Alessandro Contini Bonacossi was a businessman operating for some time in the United States of America who later turned to art collecting and art dealing. He had several clients in America, the most notable of whom was Samuel H. Kress, and when the scale of his business began to increase, clashed with the art dealer Joseph Duveen. He also provided a number of artworks for Riccardo Gualino as well. The connection however came to a halt because of the difficult relationship he had with Lionello Venturi and his rivalry with Roberto Longhi, who was the main advisor of Contini Bonacossi and who was close to Bernard Berenson. Bonacossi, along with Gualino, was among the biggest private art collectors in Italy and Maria Mimmita Lamberti suggests that it would be profitable to examine the two collections in parallel.

and publicity.⁴¹⁴ They co-operated with exchange of expertise and publications, and exploiting each other's networks to place a sale with a commission. They had no qualms in trying every possible channel in order to place a good sale. They would even resort to hidden plots in order to put dealers in competition. They were recognised as ruthless, resourceful, and cunning competitors.⁴¹⁵

Antiquarians and dealers were reluctant to recognise the scholars' recently acquired authority and shared consensus. It was considered unfair of them to use their position to influence the art market and to affect values. Moreover, scholars were criticised because of the intuitive nature of their opinions, which were not always grounded on objective and documented sources.⁴¹⁶ A number of controversies and trials can be seen as proof of a resistance on the part of the antiquarians to the scholars' authority and influence. In one instance, in 1922 Adolfo Venturi, aware of the weight of his appraisal, insisted on a full economic recognition from the art dealer, who had profited from the sale of artworks authenticated by the art historian. He expected to be paid his share because he thought that his opinion was behind the extraordinary profit.⁴¹⁷ Another example shows that antiquarians also tried to question if it was appropriate for an art historian to use their scholarship and authority for personal gain. In this regard, in 1923, Adolfo Venturi had been involved in a judicial case of malpractice in the sale of artworks and was taken to court.

An antiquarian had tried to sue him because the art historian had bought a painting from him and later sold it for almost 100 times the price he had paid. The increase was a consequence of Adolfo Venturi's appraisal that shifted the authorship from Bartolomeo Schedoni to Correggio. The antiquarian claimed it was unfair that the art historian did not disclose the attribution in the first place, as would have been expected from a scholar. The argument in Adolfo Venturi's defence was that his connoisseurship was the result of hard work and study. Consequently, he called for the recognition of the right to dispose of his knowledge freely. Moreover, it is important to notice here that the reason for the dispute was the undisclosed opinion on reattribution – which in this context was tacitly accepted as having authority, despite

414 Many of Lionello's letters addressed to his father concerned their cooperation in the art trade, e.g.: 20 July 1922 (VT V1 b44 69), 1 December 1922 (VT V1 b44 77), 13 December 1923 (VT V1 b44 84), 17 September 1926 (VT V1 b45 24), 26 April 1927 (VT V1 b45 30), 9 January 1928 (VT V1 b45 35), and s.d. (VT V1 b45 32), in FAV.

415 Simpson, *The Partnership*, 97–98; Samuels, *Bernard Berenson*.

416 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 226–28; Bianchi, "Adolfo Venturi tra collezionismo e ricerca"; Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 241. "Something was certainly lost when the art market moved away from experienced sensibility as the basis for determining attributions."

417 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, 1 December 1922 (VT V1 b44 77), in FAV. Lionello estimated that a painting's value went from 600 Liras to 600.000 thanks to the appraisal made by he and his father.

the lack of documentary evidence – in determining the artwork's value. The court accepted this argument and, discharging the art historian from the accusation, established a precedent for the recognition of scholars' right to exploit their knowledge for personal profit.⁴¹⁸

Art dealers found more and more challenges in facing art scholars' involvement in the art trade, not only in terms of appraisals, but also in determining the desirability of artworks among collectors. Co-operation with them became inevitable. Some antiquarians had come to terms with the situation by directly hiring scholars or co-operating with them, but quarrels and controversies continued to exist among art advisors, scholars, and dealers. Berenson, for instance, had signed a secret partnership deal with Joseph Duveen for over 25 years, which had been stormy from start to end.⁴¹⁹ Moreover, despite Adolfo Venturi's victory in establishing the right of scholars to employ their knowledge and authority in art dealing, scholars were reluctant to give too much publicity to their involvement in the art trade. It was seen as degrading for them to intermingle with the art trade.⁴²⁰ Although collectors had welcomed the figure of the scholar advisor, as several successful partnerships prove, it was regarded with suspicion within scholarship circles.

In this concern, it was emphasised that there was a serious conflict of loyalties when a scholar, who with his knowledge and research outcomes, had a duty to protect the national heritage, yet was in fact behind the flow of artworks into private hands and abroad in circumstances that were not always straightforward.⁴²¹ Therefore, scholars became discreet in their practice as advisors and authenticators and were keen to preserve their reputation as independent judges of taste. Their connections with dealers were often kept secret or at least maintained a low profile.⁴²² In this regard the exchange of correspondence between Contini-Bonacossi and Venturi (1920–1923) is a prime example – the letters look like masterpieces of coded language, similar to the exchange of letters between Berenson and Duveen.⁴²³

418 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 226–227.

419 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 182.

420 Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiano," 69–90; Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 218.

421 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 131–134, 143–145.

422 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 184–185, 218

423 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*; Letters from Alessandro Contini-Bonacossi to Lionello Venturi, in Nuove accessioni, Scatola 14 and 15, in ALV. For instance, letter from Contini-Bonacossi to Lionello Venturi, 4 May 1920, in ALV ("se Ella crede può mostrare la presente al sig. G. viceversa è da considerarsi strettamente confidenziale nei riguardi dei comuni amici."); letter from Contini-Bonacossi to Lionello Venturi, 26 May 1920, in ALV ("Sarebbe indispensabile che ella potesse concretare la venuta del suo amico al più presto possibile...in quanto alla visita del suo amico inglese credo che per il momento è possibile soprassedervi...in questi giorni ho venduto i Rembradt a un grande collezionista italiano."); letter from Contini-Bonacossi to

Moreover, scholars involved in collecting and trading felt that they had to justify their connection with the art trade. When, around 1898, Adolfo Venturi began making his expertise about artworks known through the scholarly journal *L'Arte*, his intention was to make the publication more appealing to a larger audience. However, he had to justify his choice of including matters related to the art trade in an academic context through his son's intervention, who claimed that his father did not mean to serve commercial reasons, but to present exhibitions organised by antiquarians that in his opinion were of the best quality at the time.⁴²⁴

Later, Lionello Venturi openly declared that the contemporary art market, in following the advice of scholars and professionals, had become a qualified platform for studying art, thus endorsing the connection between scholarship and commercial purposes.⁴²⁵ Access to private collections and antiquarians constituted the opportunity to see artworks that were not publicly displayed. Similarly, Lionello Venturi's involvement in the Gualino Collection, with all its commercial implications, was not hidden. He did not appear to be embarrassed about his cooperation and it actually came to stand for a progressive way for academic professionals to participate and affect the contemporary cultural scene. For Venturi in particular this also meant that he could realise his vision about bringing together art history and art criticism. These are signs that the partnership between competent scholarly art advisors and collectors, as it emerged in North America, paid off as a model that aimed at dignifying the trading practice as part of scholarship.

In regard to scholars' involvement in the art trade, despite cases of suspected deliberate deployment of superior appraisals, that were later downgraded, and other subterfuges, it is not possible to come to any final conclusion when it comes to the evaluation of the scholars' objectivity and independence.⁴²⁶ Likewise, in the case of incorrect, or over-optimistic attributions it is hard to establish to what degree they were a question of genuine misjudgement or intentional deviation from truth. Berenson firmly denied that he would give in to Duveen's pressures.⁴²⁷ However,

Lionello Venturi, 14 January 1922, in ALV ("Conto dunque anche sulla sua vigile cooperazione per indurre l'avvocato a fare una volata qui al più presto.").

424 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 113, 223–226; Bianchi, "Adolfo Venturi tra collezionismo e ricerca," 98.

425 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 131–134, 143–145; Bianchi, "Adolfo Venturi tra collezionismo e ricerca," 96; Venturi, "I mercati artistici". It is interesting that in this article written for a daily newspaper, Venturi praises the lack of traditional prejudices in the art trade, where a great range of very different artworks are given a similar economic value (in recognition of aesthetic value). He claimed that the art trade was at the time assisted by professional figures thus making it a source of reliable evaluations and useful to academic research too.

426 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 218–221; Simpson, *The Partnership*, 88.

427 Samuels, *Bernard Berenson*, 166; Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 221. "There is a significant difference between making a painting out to be beautiful and making it a

there were also other mechanisms regulating the recognition of artistic value beyond deception.⁴²⁸

Art advisors would use their persuasive power to convince collectors to buy a certain artwork. They might, for instance, provoke their client's urge for primacy by raising the prospect of competitors; or they could formulate their opinions about an attribution in terms that would foster hopes in regard to the name of the artist. This power came from the authority of scholarly frames and discursive practices. Berenson's authority, for example, was based on his knowledge, erudition, and memory, as much as for his being excessive, charming, unscrupulous, and persuasive. Duveen often demanded "better" authentications and, although being little inclined to comply with the risk of endangering his credibility, Berenson was generous in giving exciting descriptions of artworks of interest for the collector, or giving testimony in trials, or making use of the benefit of the doubt.⁴²⁹

The matter of conflicting interests was also particularly delicate, especially in the case of scholars working for public institutions, museums or galleries. Their private role as an art advisor indeed implied personal profit. There are cases that would suggest that Adolfo Venturi favoured his private interest over his commitment to purchasing artworks for public institutions.⁴³⁰ For instance, in 1893 he tried to sell an artwork by Signorelli to the American collector Robert Benson that after his refusal was acquired by the Uffizi Gallery in 1894.⁴³¹ This is an example of how he exploited the advantages of his position in acquiring prior information for private gain over the sale of artworks to private collectors rather than to State galleries. Lionello Venturi apparently got into similar cases of a conflict of interest. In 1915, for instance, he contacted Berenson with a view to selling him a painting by Gentile da Fabriano (1370–1427) in the hope of receiving a better purchase price compared to the one offered by the State, even though he knew that the painting would probably be sent overseas.⁴³²

Raphael.”

428 Baekeland, “Psychological Aspects of Art Collecting,” 212.

429 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*; Simpson, *The Partnership*, 208, 232. One of Duveen's strategies to persuade American collectors into buying Italian old masters was to send them off to Italy and meet Berenson in the fascinating setting of his Villa I Tatti.

430 Adolfo Venturi, whose career had begun at the Galleria Estense in Modena, became ministerial officer at the General Directorate of Antiquities and Fine Arts. He was later removed from the ministerial position and moved to the direction of the National Gallery of Ancient Art in 1898. Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 133–134.

431 Ibid.

432 Silvia Scarpacci, “Lustro della patria. Riscoperta e conservazione dei dipinti urbinati di Federico Barocci nel terzo centenario della morte,” *Il capitale culturale* 9 (2015): 99–121, accessed February 2, 2019, <https://riviste.unimc.it/index.php/cap-cult/article/viewFile/1074/867>; letters from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 2 February 1915 and 16 February 1915, in BBL. The letters did not reveal the name of the owner

3.4 Bernard Berenson's Influence: Partnerships

At the beginning of the 20th century, it became more frequent for collectors to require the direct involvement and advice of professional advisors, establishing a partnership.⁴³³ In these cases the advisor, often a scholar, working specifically for a collector, would suggest purchases according to a systematic and strategic approach. Berenson is a prime example of such practice. He gained his recognition mainly as a connoisseur of Italian old masters. However, his connoisseurship stood out for its aesthetical foundation. His work explored the aesthetic ground of the artworks and was not limited only to its material identification. This approach resulted in a discourse that was capable of raising the value and the popularity of the Italian old masters on the base of formalist principles. His connoisseurship and aesthetic discourse both influenced collecting choices. However, these were not the only basis for Berenson's influential role. His persona and charisma, his house and his collection were important factors too.⁴³⁴ All of these aspects contributed to the definition of the frame giving value and meaning to the artworks included in the collection.

In 1897 Berenson advised Isabella Stewart Gardner to purchase an artwork by Botticelli which might have seemed a bit unusual. In 1894, when he wrote his first book about Italian art, *The Venetian Painters of the Renaissance with an Index to Their Works*, this artist was still considered a minor figure and had remained relatively unknown.⁴³⁵ This was generally true of other Italian old masters too. Still in 1889, when Berenson bought an artwork in Italy for the first time – a painting by Bronzino for the American art collector and author Edward Perry Warren (1860–1928) – the market for Italian art was very small.⁴³⁶ Stewart Gardner had sponsored Berenson to visit Europe when he was a young Harvard graduate and their relationship had developed into a personal friendship.⁴³⁷ In return Berenson assisted the lady in acquiring artworks from Europe. Berenson not only offered a valid connoisseurship, scouting for artworks and guaranteeing their authorship, but also an aesthetic discourse that could favour the fascination for a new trend: the Italian primitives.

Because Berenson was an authority both as a connoisseur and as an art scholar, he not only provided the authentications of the artworks he recommended, but he also set the aesthetic frame for their appreciation. The theoretical support of a

and he generally referred to the ministerial Direzione Generale delle Belle Arti rather than to specific museums. However, it is important to remember that Venturi had been at the head of the National Gallery of Marche in Urbino (1913–1915) until short before and had only recently settled in Turin after his academic appointment.

433 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*; Pettenati, “Le raccolte antiquariali”.

434 Simpson, *The Partnership*, 208, 232.

435 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, i; Haskell, *Riscoperte nell'arte*; Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*.

436 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 69.

437 Ibid.

discourse pointing to the significance and value of Italian old masters created a wider acceptance of those artworks. He had been behind the myth that had contributed to directing and spreading collectors' interest in the "primitives" and the aesthetic qualities associated with them. Indeed, the popularity of Berenson's books affected Isabella Stewart Gardner's collection as the resulting increase in quotations of her artworks suggests.⁴³⁸ This rising value not only meant economic gain, but also, and more importantly, the recognition of an intellectual leadership that many wealthy industrialists longed for.

The publication of Berenson's books, which attracted attention to the Italian old masters, and the purchases he recommended to Isabella Stewart Gardner show the instrumental role of the art historian's definition of a context that would accord significance to the artworks. Moreover, because the advisor would work with the collector on a larger scale and with strategic vision, he provided legitimacy, meaning, and value to the collection as a whole. Berenson's theory, as reflected in Isabella Stewart Gardner's collection, also served to bridge connections with other forms of art, such as Oriental and modern art, by according value through appropriation and association, thus extending the semiophore function from one artwork to another.⁴³⁹ It was Berenson's theory that allowed her to keep the collection homogenous, despite of its variety.⁴⁴⁰ This was also the case for Berenson's own collection, which brought together old masters' paintings with Asian and modern art.

Although the collection benefited from Berenson's circumstantial advice, it also reinforced his authority as an expert in the field, contributing to the shaping of his professional identity.⁴⁴¹ Berenson's respected career as a connoisseur and his influential position grew hand in hand with his role as an advisor. He was renowned within the international art trade as an authority in matters of trade.⁴⁴² Through his role as an advisor he gained wealth and connections that resulted in his identification with a cultural aristocracy. He cultivated a legendary reputation and a special position as a charismatic arbiter of taste in art, inspiring a reverence and lifestyle worthy of a royal.⁴⁴³ He exercised his patronage from his home, Villa I Tatti, near Florence, which became a reference point for scholarship as much as for art collecting and

438 Ibid.

439 Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiano," 69–90; Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 103; Roberts, *The Bernard Berenson Collection of Oriental Art at Villa I Tatti*; Strehlke, "Berenson, Sassetta, and Asian Art," 37–49; Berenson, "A Siense Painter of the Franciscan Legend," 3–35, 171–184. In his texts Berenson often refers to the association between old masters and modern art.

440 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 25–55. Isabella Stewart Gardner collected modern and contemporary art as well but insisted on keeping these works separate from the nucleus of old masters, despite of Berenson's advice to do otherwise.

441 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*.

442 Ibid., 224

443 Ibid.

trading.⁴⁴⁴ Berenson's preeminence among scholars, dealers, and collectors is proven by the continuous flow of people coming and going to his home in order to discuss aesthetic matters, authentications, and deals.⁴⁴⁵ His wife, Mary Berenson, noted that they were compelled to receive those visits not always as a matter of pleasure, but mostly out of convenience or respect, as work or courtesy.⁴⁴⁶

Nevertheless, Berenson's recognition as an expert connoisseur was gained at the expense of his recognition as a scholar. Despite his influential position, he had been hanging in between the role of an independent scholar and that of a connoisseur. His books, although reprinted several times and translated into several languages, were coolly received by the community of academic scholars, who did not recognise him as one of their peers.⁴⁴⁷ He represented a new kind of art historian, blending together aspects of connoisseurship and criticism who became more successful among the younger generation of academic art historians.⁴⁴⁸ Adolfo Venturi, who had known Berenson since the end of the 19th century and entertained a life-long lasting correspondence with him, had been one of his most severe critics.⁴⁴⁹

The Italian colleague considered Berenson detached from the academic legacy of scholarship he himself had contributed to shaping. He deemed his work to be that of an amateur, especially for the lack of a thoroughly documented motivation for his assumptions. He considered his books to be catalogues enriched with a personal aesthetic and critical observations.⁴⁵⁰ He thought that they were too opinionated and seldom grounded in science and therefore irrelevant.⁴⁵¹ Nevertheless, Venturi recognised the value of Berenson's contribution as a connoisseur.⁴⁵² In the 1910s, Adolfo Venturi began to recognise Berenson's merits and to address the American scholar with a more friendly and equal way.⁴⁵³ He especially recognised his merits in

444 Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiano," 69–90; Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 4–6, 160.

445 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 4–6, 160.

446 Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiano," 78.

447 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 147–148, 218.

448 Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana".

449 Letters from Berenson to Adolfo Venturi, 1910–1941, in FAV; letters from Adolfo Venturi to Berenson, 1910–1924, in BBL.

450 Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiano," 69. Iamurri noticed that in fact the clash of views between Adolfo Venturi and Berenson was in part caused by the different approach the American scholar introduced into art studies, which went beyond the documentary research.

451 "Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana"; Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*.

452 Agosti *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 187–188; Adolfo Venturi, *Storia dell'arte italiana del Quattrocento* 4 (Milano: Hoepli, 1915).

453 Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana," 85–86.

spreading knowledge about Italian art abroad and in studying the Italian artworks in American collections.⁴⁵⁴

Berenson, however, continued to be regarded suspiciously because of his reputation as a sagacious, subtle, and well-informed connoisseur.⁴⁵⁵ For instance, his co-operation with *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* was short-lived and Berenson withdrew from it mainly because he did not feel respected.⁴⁵⁶ Also his hopes of gaining scholarly recognition as Director of the Metropolitan Museum in New York faded when Roger Fry was selected instead.⁴⁵⁷ Moreover, Berenson had to live with the disappointment of being excluded from the tenth International Conference of Art History of the CIHA (Comité International de l'Histoire de l'Art), held in Rome in 1912, organised by Adolfo Venturi. The younger and competing scholar Osvald Sirén had been invited instead.⁴⁵⁸ In evaluating his position among the academic community one should bear in mind that, despite the groundbreaking importance of Berenson's contributions to scholarship, his theoretical contribution had been limited for the most part to his first publications until the 1910s.⁴⁵⁹ Writing did not come easily to him and his manuscripts always required extensive revision.⁴⁶⁰

Berenson's involvement in the art trade, which was considered inferior to intellectual scholarly work, has been suggested as a reason for his rejection as a scholar.⁴⁶¹ He was seen as driven by conflicting interests and acting under the pressure of the art market.⁴⁶² Adolfo Venturi, for instance, openly reproached Berenson for his involvement in the international art market. He had held the American scholar responsible for the continuous flow of Italian art abroad under obscure circumstances. He even stated provocatively that Berenson could help clarify where to find most of the lost Italian treasures, alluding to an involvement in art trafficking to North America.⁴⁶³ Berenson also considered his involvement in the art trade as detrimental to his scholarly career, although from a different perspective.⁴⁶⁴ He especially thought that the time dedicated to the art trade took him away from his studies and his writing. As

454 Ibid., 86.

455 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*.

456 Ibid., 147–148.

457 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 152; Spalding, *Roger Fry*, 81–107.

458 Iamurri, “Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana,” 78; Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 191–194; “Storia del CIHA Italia,” accessed January 30, 2019, <http://www.ciha-italia.it/florence2019/storia-del-ciha-italia-2/>.

459 “Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiano,” 73; Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 100. *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance* (1895) was the volume in which Berenson made his best-known aesthetic pronouncements and began to discuss the formal qualities of painting, using the terms “tactile values” and “life-enhancement”.

460 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 207.

461 Ibid.

462 Iamurri, “Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana”.

463 Ibid., 69.

464 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 207.

Mary Berenson also noted, his advice was so much in demand that it completely absorbed his time and energy.⁴⁶⁵ Berenson, however, saw this involvement in the art trade as an inevitable step in granting him the opportunity to better his life. If one compares Berenson's social status – born to an immigrant family from Lithuania – with the Venturis' middle-class family, one can see how they started off their careers from different social positions and with different expectations.⁴⁶⁶

However, if one considers how much Berenson shared with other scholars – such as the Venturis, Fry, and Sirén, just to mention those related to this research – in terms of their involvement in the art trade, this alone would not explain fully his rejection by the community of scholars. From studying Berenson's archive, especially the photographic collection, one finds he had been actively co-operating with a number of scholars in his deals, or in terms of the exchange of appraisals or opinions about authentications.⁴⁶⁷ (Figs. 32, 37) Adolfo Venturi's condemnation of Berenson's work appears to be hypocritical and suggests an intention to exploit the situation in order to discredit a powerful competitor. Berenson indeed worked on different occasions in direct contact with him and they both had connections with the Duveen brothers.⁴⁶⁸ While the American art historian was aware of Adolfo Venturi's contact with Duveen, he also suspected with dread the connection between Lionello Venturi and art dealer Alessandro Contini-Bonacossi⁴⁶⁹, who was also involved in American art trading and collecting.⁴⁷⁰ Berenson saw the Venturi family as a threat, and their relationship was sometimes filled with tension.⁴⁷¹

However, what distinguished Berenson from other scholars was the fact the latter could disguise their involvement in the art trade under the cover of an institutional role. Compared with the relatively common practice among scholars of being involved in the art trade, it is significant that Berenson had been the one who was most exposed to criticism and to accusations of commercialisation in making his judgments, whereas Adolfo Venturi even defended his own right to earn income from

465 Ibid.

466 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 207; Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio".

467 Pagliarulo, "Photographs to Read"; Historical and Photograph Archives at I Tatti, The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, accessed March 21, 2018, <http://itatti.harvard.edu/berenson-library/collections/historical-archives> and <http://itatti.harvard.edu/berenson-library/collections/photograph-archives>.

468 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*; Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana".

469 Simpson, *The Partnership*, 232–233; Lamberti, "Riccardo Gualino," 8.

470 Berenson's preoccupation about Venturi's cooperation with Contini-Bonacossi emerges from the letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 31 January 1926, in BBL. Letters from Joseph Duveen to Bernard Berenson point out his awareness about the connection of the American dealer with the Venturis, e.g. 9 August 1920 and 5 November 1921, in BBL.

471 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*; Simpson, *The Partnership*, 97–98.

his expertise in court.⁴⁷² Another factor that might explain Berenson's unpopularity among the academic scholar community was his innovative approach to the discipline, which emphasised the inclusion of aesthetics and critical insight, thus constituting an alternative, or even a threat, to traditional institutional scholarship.⁴⁷³ This split can be well illustrated in terms of a clash between the rigorous archivist⁴⁷⁴ and the mundane and independent amateur, the connoisseur.⁴⁷⁵

Although Berenson's approach was disparaged among the old school that had contributed to shaping academic scholarship, nevertheless it became an inspiration among the younger generation of art historians.⁴⁷⁶ He offered a methodological alternative to the positivist approach that had characterised the professionalisation of art-historical scholarship. Berenson presided over the evolution of Italian scholarship into a discipline that was more attentive to and mindful of aesthetic matters and critical reflection, and also involved itself in discussing modern and contemporary art.⁴⁷⁷ Through his example he also revealed the potential behind the interconnections between scholarship and art trading and collecting and their resulting reciprocal advantages.

The new generation of Italian art critics, scholars and intellectuals, such as Lionello Venturi, Roberto Longhi, Emilio Cecchi (1884–1966), and Ugo Ojetti (1871–1946), who all enjoyed his charismatic company first hand at his place, took his work as a model for disciplinary and methodological reform, where connoisseurship was accompanied by an aesthetic reflection and a critical evaluation as a background for making attributions.⁴⁷⁸ Lionello Venturi was also among those who held Berenson's work in high esteem. Berenson had been inspirational in shaping Venturi's theory, his areas of interest, and his discourse. Besides influencing his general aesthetic ideas, he inspired the younger Venturi's plan to reform methodologies. Similarly, the openly displayed partnership of a respected scholar like Lionello Venturi with Riccardo Gualino was the result of Berenson's example.

Lionello Venturi's connection to Berenson became personal in 1908, when a direct exchange of correspondence was established between the two of them.⁴⁷⁹

472 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*.

473 Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana".

474 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 113, 140. Berenson described Adolfo Venturi as a "éminent archiviste".

475 Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana," 69. Adolfo Venturi described Berenson as a "bungustaio" and "amatore".

476 Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana".

477 *Ibid.*, 80.

478 *Ibid.*

479 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 27 April 1908, in BBL. The correspondence lasted until 1956. Lionello Venturi, "Il consigliere dei miliardari," *La Nazione*, 8 October 1959, 3. In Berenson's obituary, Lionello recalled that he had befriended Berenson in 1905.

The tone Venturi employed in his letters was always respectful and reverential, even during times of tension.⁴⁸⁰ Venturi confided to Berenson both professional and personal matters.⁴⁸¹ He often requested his advice and submitted his work to Berenson's judgment, aspiring to gain his approval.⁴⁸² Venturi also expressed the importance of his visits to I Tatti. In particular, he recognised the powerful effect of his first visit at Berenson's place in 1913, resulting in a profound influence on the development of his theoretical work.⁴⁸³ Venturi's shift of interest towards the "Italian primitives" in 1913 was one of the earliest outcomes of their encounter, and it was a shift, which

480 Many letters from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson show his deferential attitude, eg. in the letter dated 2 May 1913 "...l'orgoglio per essere così stimato da lei..."; 7 April 1913 "...mi inchino ad un'esperienza e una provata sagacia come la sua..."; 26 July 1922 "...la sua lettera è tanto amichevole e gentile che io mi vedo costretto a ringraziarla malgrado il rifiuto a collaborare al catalogo; 18 July 1923 "...ciò che in ogni modo mi fa particolarmente piacere è che il nostro disaccordo non turbi la sua benevolenza per me né la mia devozione per Lei"; 3 November 1956 "la sua lettera mi ha dato molta gioia. La sua approvazione è il miglior compenso alla mia fatica," in BBL. Lionello Venturi's regard for Berenson emerges also in his letters to Adolfo Venturi, eg. in the letter from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, 14 July 1922 (VT V1 b44 68), in FAV.

481 Letters from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 1 March 1915 and 16 February 1915, in BBL, are a good example of how Venturi also described personal issues: "Ormai quando pubblico qualcosa, io penso sempre come un diapason, al giudizio del signor Berenson...Anche mi ha molto interessato il suo giudizio per cui 30000 lire offerte dal Governo sono sufficienti per il quadro di Gentile...mi trovo bene a Torino perchè posso lavorare liberamente...sono lieto e fiducioso vedendo attorno a me i segni della prossima guerra liberatrice"; in letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 4 November 1918, in BBL, Venturi thanked Berenson for being close to him during the difficult period of the war.

482 Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana," 78; for example: letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 27 April 1908 (thanking Berenson for his appreciation of his article on Antonello da Messina); letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 26 March 1913 (asking for opinions about his book on Giorgione); letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 2 May 1913; letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 23 December 1919 (thanking for his card regarding Venturi's publication on Leonardo), in BBL.

483 Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana," 85; letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 22 January 1913, in BBL. "Il mio primo pensiero stamane è quello di dirle come le ore passate con Lei rimarranno nella mia memoria le più eloquenti verso la contemplazione dell'arte, come poche ore ho avuto nella mia vita passata. L'entusiasmo derivato dalla contemplazione e dal suo commento di tanti grandi e di tanto diverse opere d'arte; e la benevolenza affettuosa che Ella mi ha prodigato di continuo: mi hanno compensato di varie amarezze sofferte nei mesi scorsi, mi hanno incoraggiato straordinariamente a cercarmi con maggiore intensità che non abbia fatto finora, quel grande enigma che è la coscienza dell'arte...". Coincidentally it is interesting to note that Sirén was in Italy more or less at the same time, and in contact with Berenson, whom he also visited. It would be interesting to know if Sirén and Venturi had had chance to cross path at Villa I Tatti. Letter from Osvald Sirén to Bernard Berenson, 21 December 1912, in BBL.

he saw as a need to “go back to the origin” and “purify his spirit”.⁴⁸⁴ Berenson was not only behind Venturi’s switch in focus to the art of the 14th century, but also the consideration of such art in association with Asian and modern art on the basis of spirituality, universality, and other formalist principles.⁴⁸⁵ In this sense Berenson’s work also contributed to Venturi’s thinking in terms of the conceptualisation of the primitive on a formalist ground.

Berenson’s theoretical ground had certainly played a substantial role in inspiring Venturi. The subtle effect of the charismatic and fascinating personality of the independent scholar had a part too. Berenson’s collection also impressed the younger scholar. His personal collection, although being mainly composed of Italian primitive artists, also included some Oriental artworks and modern paintings.⁴⁸⁶ The Asian artworks, collected between 1911 and 1917, were displayed side by side with the Italian old masters in his collection.⁴⁸⁷ All these aspects, Berenson’s theory, persona, environment, collection, came together in defining his discourse, which attributed meaning and value to the artworks.

Venturi was struck by the harmony of such different artworks placed one next to the other.⁴⁸⁸ He had been especially fascinated by its bringing together art of the West and the East.⁴⁸⁹ He for instance gave credit to Berenson for his interpretation of Sienese pictures in the light of Oriental art.⁴⁹⁰ Similarly, he expressed his gratitude towards the connoisseur for his understanding, as revealed in his texts and collection, of the need to bring together modern and primitive art, such as works by Cézanne

484 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 7 April 1913 “...ora penso di abbandonare completamente gli studi veneziani...”; 10 April 1913 “...ho deciso di rifare la mia cultura da capo e di studiare a fondo Giotto e l’arte del Trecento in Toscana...Proprio per essere arrivato alla soglia di Tiziano, ho sentito il bisogno di purificare spirito e fantasia, e mi sono rivolto perciò a Firenze...passare da Venezia a Firenze con i miei studi significa purificarmi, rinnovarmi, irrobustirmi, ritornare alle origini,” in BBL.

485 Lionello Venturi, “La posizione dell’Italia nelle arti figurative”. “Debbo a Bernardo Berenson le idee sul valore plastico della pittura fiorentina e del carattere asiatico e mistico della pittura senese...”. Letters from Lionello to Berenson, 22 January 1913 (see above) and 1 March 1915, in BBL. “...trovarmi vicino a Lei, di respirare quella sua atmosfera d’arte che alita dall’estremo occidente all’estremo oriente”. Venturi, “Il consigliere dei miliardari”. “Soprattutto ho ammirato e cercato di continuare l’universalità della sua cultura compresa tra l’arte orientale e l’arte moderna”.

486 Strehlke, “Berenson, Sassetta, and Asian Art,” 37–49; Roberts, *The Bernard Berenson Collection of Oriental Art at Villa I Tatti*; letters and invoices for the purchase of oriental art pieces from Charles Vignier, 28 October 1911–20 January 1917, in BBL.

487 Roberts, *The Bernard Berenson Collection of Oriental Art at Villa I Tatti*; letters and invoices from Charles Vignier, in BBL.

488 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 22 January 1913, in BBL; Venturi, “Il consigliere dei miliardari”.

489 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 1 March 1915, in BBL.

490 Venturi, “La posizione dell’Italia nelle arti figurative”.

and other Impressionists along with Giotto and the Italian primitives.⁴⁹¹ Indeed the inclusion of modern artists did not remain limited to his theoretical contributions,⁴⁹² but also entered his art collection. This aspect had a certain resonance at the time in Italy, if one thinks that Berenson's paintings had been requested for loan to the First Italian Exhibition of Impressionism, held in Florence in 1910.⁴⁹³

The experience of seeing old masters coming together with Chinese and modern artworks in the context of art collections had been presented as inspirational by other art scholars too. At the time there were several collections on the New Continent that combined Asian art, European old masters, and modern paintings that had been recognised as inspirational by scholars, for example the one in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Stewart Gardner Collection, also in Boston, as well as the Palmer Potter Collection in Chicago.⁴⁹⁴ There are many reports – including those of Bernard Berenson and Osvald Sirén – of the enlightening and inspiring effect of seeing Asian art displayed alongside Italian old masters.⁴⁹⁵ They each stated how much seeing Asian art had changed their way of looking at Italian old masters; the association of Asian art with Italian artworks had encouraged its interpretation according to formalist premises, while justifying its value and meaning. A mystical atmosphere, reminiscent of a kind of initiation ritual, surrounded these stories of a revelatory moment, thus emphasising the spiritual, universal character of art.

491 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 23 November 1939, BBL. "...Lei è stato il primo storico dell'arte ad apprezzare l'arte moderna. Ero ragazzo quando lessi il suo cenno sul rapporto estetico tra Giotto e Cézanne. Ci pensai a lungo e alla fine capii che Ella aveva ragione. Oggi sono sempre più convinto che senza aver compreso la pittura moderna non si può intendere la pittura antica". Venturi, "Il consigliere dei miliardari". "Ricordo con gratitudine che Berenson capì prima del 1900 il rapporto esistente fra Giotto e Cézanne." Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana"; Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 103.

492 Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana".

493 *Ibid.*, 72; *Prima mostra dell'Impressionismo in Italia* (Firenze: Stabilimento tipografico Aldino, 1910), accessed February 25, 2019, <https://dlc.mpg.de/dlc/view/escidoc:66854:3/recto-verso>.

494 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*; Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 21–33.

495 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*; Strehlke, "Berenson, Sassetta, and Asian Art," 37–49; Roberts, *The Bernard Berenson Collection of Oriental Art at Villa I Tatti*; letter from Charles Lang Freer to Gookin, 28 January 1904, in BBL (copy: correspondence, Charles Lang Freer, Letterpress Books, 30 vols. 1852–1910, vol. 12 fols. 439–440, Freer-Sackler Gallery of Art, Washington). Freer writes about Berenson's first encounter with Chinese art in 1904. "Mr. and Mrs. Berenson spent the better part of two days with me recently. Professor Fenellosa was also my guest at the same time. I liked them all very much but regret that I was not well enough to enjoy their visit as thoroughly as I would like to have done. Mr. Berenson sees very deeply into the finest periods of Chinese and Japanese painting and I doubt not that within a few years, the world will hear from him most appreciatively on the subject."

However, these encounters were probably not as impressive as reported. As Törmä reasonably argues in regard to Sirén's narrative of the enlightenment, it probably was the result of a combination and reshaping of a series of minor events that had affected the scholar's thinking.⁴⁹⁶ Consequently the resulting story, exaggerating the real events, was far more impressive and influential. It could contribute more effectively to a common framing employed as an explanatory ground. At the same time, within this frame, the Italian primitive artworks would pass on their function as semiophores, thus turning them into equally desirable collectors' objects. At the turn of the century, Asian art was not the only "Other" art that had been appropriated within a frame that would prove innovative theoretical directions more comprehensible and acceptable. This was the case of "ethnic art" within modernism. In this sense the appropriation of Asian art within a Western perspective played an important part in the process of building a discourse supporting and legitimising formalist aesthetic ideas.

At the same time, these stories underlined the need for the art historian to go beyond academic boundaries, libraries and archives, to experience a variety of artistic phenomena first hand and to immerse himself with all the senses. This challenged the strictly academic nature of art-historical discipline at the beginning of the 20th century. It also justified, to a certain extent, the intermingling of scholarship and art collecting, suggesting the reciprocal influence between the two areas of expertise, Berenson being an example of this complex relationship. Aesthetic theory, connoisseurship, and art collecting gained meaning as part of the same discourse, which was then invested with branding potential. The process of inclusion or appropriation gave value to the artworks, but at the same time reinforced and resonated with the aesthetic discourse.

Berenson's influence on Venturi was not only theoretical, but practical too, involving the art trade. Venturi's new interest in the Early Renaissance was not limited to aesthetic matters. When he turned his attention towards the Italian primitives, following Berenson's example, it not only affected his studies, but also his expertise in art dealing, thus shifting his interest. The growing popularity of art collecting and Berenson's success in the art market probably also played their part in determining Venturi's new enthusiasm. The Gualino Collection reflected this new area of Venturi's specialisation as well. Most of the first artworks that were included on the advice of Venturi were indeed Italian old masters. In 1920 the correspondence between Lionello Venturi and Alessandro Contini-Bonacossi, indicates that Venturi, acting as Gualino's intermediary, was interested in buying Italian old masters.⁴⁹⁷ More or less at the same time, in the years between 1919 and 1922, the contact with Bernard

496 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*.

497 Correspondence between Lionello Venturi and Alessandro Contini-Bonacossi (1920–1923), *Nuove accessioni*, in ALV.

Berenson and Lionello Venturi, as the correspondence suggests, became particularly intense in regard to the Gualino Collection, with requests of advice and exchange of photographs.⁴⁹⁸ Some of the artworks that Gualino purchased indeed came from abroad, some clearly from the United States, were mentioned in Berenson's correspondence with Duveen and their photographs with commentaries in the American scholar's library.⁴⁹⁹ The impact of Berenson's influence also emerged more generically

498 Letters from Lionello to Bernard Berenson, 23 December 1919 ("Le mando secondo il suo desiderio alcune fotografie della collezione Gualino di Torino. L'avv. Gualino è stato molto lusingato di udire che Ella si interessa alla sua collezione e ha intenzione di fare eseguire altre fotografie degli oggetti della sua collezione per mandarle a Lei."), 20 January 1920 ("Farò presto la sua commissione all'avv. Gualino."), 17 August 1920 ("L'avv. Gualinomi ha dato un incarico di qualche importanza, per adempiere il quale ho bisogno di conferire con Lei. E quindi conto sulla sua benevolenza perchè Ella mi concede un'intervista. Io verrei a Parigi o a Londra o dove Ella si trovi."), 19 April 1922 ("Le mando la fotografia del Piero della Francesca della collezione Gualino. L'avv. Ha fatto fare la fotografia appositamente per Lei... Le intenzioni dell'avvocato mutano rapidamente; e per ora egli non ha più intenzione di alienare gli oggetti d'arte, di cui è incantato. Come Ella può comprendere io sono molto lieto di questo mutamento di intenzioni e quindi la prego di considerare come non avvenuto il discorso che le feci in proposito:"), 14 July 1922 ("Debbo... intratterla ancora una volta sulla collezione Gualino. Questi desidera che io pubblichi il catalogo della sua collezione e vorrebbe arricchirlo del suo giudizio sugli oggetti che le sembreranno degni di un suo giudizio."), in BBL.

499 For example, in the correspondence between Joseph Duveen to Berenson there are references to Cimabue/Duccio's *Madonna with Two Angels* (27 April 1922, 3 March 1923, 18 June 1923, 29 March 1924, 11 July 1924), in BBL.

The artwork by Paolo Veronese, *Venus and Mars*, also appears in their correspondence, (1 March 1917, 9 March 1917, 13 March 1917, 18 June 1924, 4 February 1927), in BBL. In the catalogue to the Gualino Collection (1926) Bernard Berenson is quoted in regard to this painting (pl. 42). The painting was imported from "America" (Paolo Veronese, *Marte e Venere*, document n. 53, 27 January 1925).

Another example is the painting by Lorenzo di Credi, *Bust of a Boy Against a Tree*, (also referred to as *Portrait of a Young Man* or *Ritratto virile*), mentioned in letters between Joseph Duveen and Bernard Berenson, (2 March 1917, 14 March 1917, 15 March 1917, 16 March 1917, 12 March 1917, 24 April 1917), in BBL. While the artwork is shown to be imported from Paris (Lorenzo di Credi, *Ritratto virile*, document no. 57, 27 January 1925), the catalogue to the Gualino Collection (1926) reports the painting as coming from the William Salomon Collection, New York (pl. 14). Berenson is mentioned also in regard to this work.

Photographs of all the mentioned artworks were in the possession of Berenson, who wrote his commentary on the back, in BBL. Pagliarulo, "Photographs to Read"; Photograph Archives at I Tatti.

Other artworks, whose document of temporary import report as coming from abroad are: Sandro Botticelli, *Venere*, document no. 57, 27 January 1925 (from "Parigi"), duplicate of document no. 38, 28 May 1923 and Niccolò Alunno, *Incontro di Gioacchino con Anna dinanzi a Gerusalemme*, document no. 42, 26 April 1924 (from "estero").

in terms of a model of the partnership between a scholarly prepared art advisor and a collector. (Figs. 32, 36–37, 66)

Venturi followed in Berenson's footsteps, bringing together his role as a scholar, connoisseur, and art advisor. The American art historian was indeed inspiring in regard to the ways in which scholarship and art collecting could benefit from each other. For him this kind of partnership meant that art theory and art collecting were part of the same discourse. Venturi followed the partnership model, openly working as an art advisor for Riccardo Gualino, with the intention of promoting his theoretical ideas and his authority. The Gualino Collection is particularly important for gaining an understanding of Venturi's work in the 1920s, because it was part of the definition of his discourse based on the concept of the primitive. In this regard he had been interested in the interconnections between scholarship and collecting as instrumental to the promotion of his ideas, following the example of Berenson. Like Berenson, Lionello Venturi offered to the collector not only his expertise on quality and authenticity, but also provided a frame that would enhance the meaning and the value of the artworks, thus establishing coherence. Conversely, the collection would reinforce his theory and his authority.

3.5 Seeking a Partnership

Soon after his return to Turin, following the First World War, Lionello Venturi met the distinguished entrepreneur and art-lover Riccardo Gualino. At the time, he had already been working on his plans for reforming scholarship, which focused on the inclusion of an aesthetic and critical approach. The city at the time shared many features of American industrial society and was the best place in Italy to create a partnership with a modern kind of collector. Turin, the first Italian capital in the aftermath of national unification (1861–1865), had been the fastest growing industrial centre in the country since the end of the 19th century.⁵⁰⁰

This process of industrialisation attracted emerging entrepreneurs and investors, along with a flow of immigrant workers. It was in Turin that the old aristocratic leadership began to coexist with these emerging new classes. Although the new tycoons did not formally replace the leading class, they were certainly becoming more influential, especially considering their increasing wealth. Gradually, they began to aspire to identify themselves and their families with the aristocratic dynasties. This growth of Turin as an industrial city continued in the first postwar period when it underwent a process of renovation with a reconstruction that was not only physical, but also affected its society and culture, in spite of the resistance to change.⁵⁰¹ However,

500 D'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 34–38.

501 *Ibid.*, 198–216.

the 19th century academic tradition kept dominating the city's cultural landscape up until the first post-war period.⁵⁰²

Gualino was among those self-made businessmen who populated Turin.⁵⁰³ Coming from a provincial petit-bourgeois family, as the eighth of ten siblings, he engaged fully with the new model of economy that offered not only money, but social mobility.⁵⁰⁴ He soon became established as a wealthy industrialist and a prominent figure in the country, renowned both for his bold international investments and for his patronage of the arts.⁵⁰⁵ He had substantial capital wealth to rely on and with which to venture into new enterprises. Soon after his first business successes, around 1905, he began to acquire artworks in bulk for his collection directly from antiquarians who were active in Rome.⁵⁰⁶ He had been interested in poetry and since a young age had been an avid collector conscious of art's promotional power.⁵⁰⁷ Like American industrialists, with whom he shared a similar social position, Gualino aimed at identifying himself with his collection.⁵⁰⁸ Through it he claimed a leadership on the basis of his wealth and sophisticated modern culture.

In matters of education and manners, he showed natural talent. When young, Gualino was often noticed for his gentle demeanour and literary talent and had been encouraged either to take up the ecclesiastic life or to pursue a career as a literature teacher. However, despite his love of poetry and art, he also valued economic independence and wealth, which he thought he could achieve through business.⁵⁰⁹ After an early experience in the trading of wood with North America, Gualino emerged as a young entrepreneur, thanks to the support of the Gurgo Salice family, who invested in his initiatives. His first company dealt with importing wood from the United States and selling cement. America's society and economy had a great influence on young Gualino. Since his first encounter with it during his apprenticeship for his

502 Ibid., 199–203; De Luca, *Lionello Venturi*, 225; Dragone, “Lionello Venturi a Torino. Gualino e i ‘Sei’,” 88; Giorgio Boatti, *Preferirei di no. Le storie dei dodici professori che si opposero a Mussolini* (Torino: Einaudi, 2010).

503 D’Orsi, *La cultura a Torino fra le due guerre*, 219.

504 Gualino, *Frammenti di vita*, 1931, 9; Omar Ronda, *Riccardo Gualino. Industriale, finanziere, mecenate, motore economico del 900*, accessed January 30, 2018, <http://www.noibiellesi.com/varie/RICCARDO%20GUALINO.pdf>; Beppe Anderi and Elena Bocchietto, *Sulle tracce di Riccardo Gualino* (Biella: Video Astolfo sulla Luna, 2003).

505 Marco Fini, “Per una biografia di Riccardo Gualino come capitano di industria,” in *Dagli ori antichi agli anni Venti. Le collezioni di Riccardo Gualino* (Milano: Electa, 1982), 253–256; Anderi and Bocchietto, *Sulle tracce di Riccardo Gualino*; d’Orsi, *La cultura a Torino fra le due guerre*, 219–239.

506 Pettenati, “Le raccolte antiquariali,” 21.

507 Gualino, *Frammenti di vita*; Anderi and Bocchietto, *Sulle tracce di Riccardo Gualino*.

508 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessor*; Lamberti, “Riccardo Gualino,” 6–7.

509 Gualino, *Frammenti di vita*; Anderi and Bocchietto, *Sulle tracce di Riccardo Gualino*.

brother-in-law, Attilio Bagnara (1896–1901), he had admired it and tried to adopt as many of its innovative examples as he came in contact with.⁵¹⁰

The key to his success was experimenting in emerging fields and on an international scale. Before the war he bought woods in Russia, Romania, and Hungary, developed a large housing project in Saint Petersburg, and bought a fleet, operating under American flag, in order to import coal from North America.⁵¹¹ Later, after the war and following the example of what he had seen in the United States, he founded SNIA Viscosa, a company producing semi-synthetic fibres for clothing, which during the 1920s became one of the major firms in Italy and one of the major exporters in the world.⁵¹² It is through this company that Gualino's business flourished and largely expanded until 1925. During his career, he also experimented with new complex models of financial economy, for example creating one of the first trusts in Italy.⁵¹³

He easily made and dissolved coalitions and had stakes in the financial sector, acquiring and taking over banks and institutes of credit. After 1926, his businesses became more troublesome and he needed to raise capital abroad, especially in France. This was not well regarded by the Fascist government, which was at the time preaching nationalism and autarchy, thus favouring national companies.⁵¹⁴ Nevertheless, in the years between 1905 and 1926, Gualino had achieved a huge success, having almost limitless financial resources to bring to any project he was minded to support. In the 1920s, he had a great influence over industry and the financial sector, but also on society and culture in Turin.⁵¹⁵ Although Gualino was ruthless in carrying out his business, he had been well disposed and generous towards the arts.

Still in 1918, Gualino collected according to the fashion of his time relying on antiquarians.⁵¹⁶ For instance, before 1913, he had purchased an old castle from the

510 Claudio Bermond, *Riccardo Gualino finanziere ed imprenditore. Protagonista dell'economia italiana del Novecento*, 2nd ed. (Torino: Centro Studi Piemontesi, 2007); Anderi and Bocchietto, *Sulle tracce di Riccardo Gualino*; Ronda, *Riccardo Gualino*.

511 Fini, "Per una biografia di Riccardo Gualino," 253–256.

512 Vera Zamagni, *The Economic History of Italy, 1860–1990* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 276; Ronda, *Riccardo Gualino*.

513 Fini, "Per una biografia di Riccardo Gualino," 253.

514 Fini, "Per una biografia di Riccardo Gualino," 255–256; Bermond, *Riccardo Gualino finanziere ed imprenditore*.

515 Marziano Bernardi, "Riccardo Gualino e la cultura torinese," in Riccardo Gualino, *Frammenti di vita e pagine inedite* (Roma: Famija Piemonteisa, 1966), 163–165; Fini, "Per una biografia di Riccardo Gualino," 255.

516 Pettenati, "Le raccolte antiquariali," 21–24; Maria Mimita Lamberti, "Lionello Venturi e Riccardo Gualino. Frammenti 1918–1936," in *Quaderni del seminario di storia della critica d'arte*, ed. Alessandro Conti et al. (Pisa: Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, 1966), 295–319. The quality of Gualino's purchases and of his collection grew remarkably after 1918. In the introduction to the Catalogue of the Gualino Collection (1926), Venturi stated that Gualino began to collect art in 1916 and that until 1922 he

nearby hills at Cereseto Monferrato, some 40 kilometres from Turin, and had it renovated in the Quattrocento style.⁵¹⁷ The renovation or construction of castles in the style of the Renaissance was fashionable among wealthy industrialists at the end of the 19th century, and not only in Italy. In America too, the reconstruction of medieval castles partly using original pieces and partly replicas, became a widespread practice among industrialists. Potter Palmer had his building constructed in 1883 in the shape of a Renaissance castle, as did Isabella Stewart Gardner later on.⁵¹⁸ These castles also contributed to the function of building an aristocratic identity and constituted a statement of one's wealth, power, and taste. The renovation in the Quattrocento style of the castle, furnished and decorated with objects and artworks of the same style, made visible the patron's identification with aristocratic leadership as mentioned earlier.

Gualino's art Collection contributed to his image as a modern prince. He had his castle decorated with medieval furniture and old masters' paintings, complementing the style of the architecture. However, in order to recreate a coherent medieval setting, Gualino was ready to include reproductions, forgeries or in-style works.⁵¹⁹ At this stage, Riccardo and Cesarina Gualino collected both decorative items and artworks avidly, often acquiring entire sets from previous collectors, such as Count Gregorio Stroganoff's collection.⁵²⁰ As a result Gualino's collection became glamorous and well known in Turin, especially as he did not make any attempt to hide his wealth.⁵²¹ On the contrary, it was meant to be a celebration of his success. The collection was always at the centre of the social events he hosted at his place. For Gualino, the castle – as later other residences too – was a kind of representative residence meant for the family's pleasure and for entertaining his guests, including his industrialist peers.⁵²²

3.5.1 The Gualino Collection: Collecting as a Collaborative Project

When Lionello Venturi visited Gualino and saw his collection, he was as interested in meeting the collector as he was in seeing the artworks, probably already imagining

only did so in the spirit of decorating his home. Since 1922, Venturi reported, Gualino began instead acquiring artworks in search of an aesthetic satisfaction.

517 Giovanna Castagnoli, "La casa museo," in *Dagli ori antichi agli anni Venti. Le collezioni di Riccardo Gualino* (Milano: Electa, 1982), 13–14; Ronda, *Riccardo Gualino*.

518 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 6; Lamberti, "Riccardo Gualino," 6–7.

519 Lamberti, "Riccardo Gualino," 6.

520 Pettenati, "Le raccolte antiquariali," 21.

521 Anderi and Bocchietto, *Sulle tracce di Riccardo Gualino*.

522 Castagnoli, "La casa museo"; Anderi and Bocchietto, *Sulle tracce di Riccardo Gualino*; Ronda, *Riccardo Gualino*; Maria Mimita Lamberti, "La raccolta Gualino d'arte moderna e contemporanea," in *Dagli ori antichi agli anni Venti. Le collezioni di Riccardo Gualino* (Milano: Electa, 1982), 30.

he might become his personal art advisor.⁵²³ Eventually the collection would come to follow a strategic development that reflected Venturi's aesthetic discourse, which took shape in parallel with his project of reforming art historical scholarship he had already had in mind for few years. Venturi's involvement with the Gualino Collection should be seen in the light of Berenson's model of a partnership associating scholarship and art collecting. The influence and authority that seemed to be attainable through the association of a theoretical discourse with a collecting scheme fascinated Venturi. In relation to the Gualino Collection, he tried to affect the aesthetic trend in the same ways as Berenson, through the incorporation of the artworks in a discursive frame. On this ground the art historian could emphasise the uniqueness of the collection, its particular aesthetic meaning, and economic value.

The partnership between scholars and collectors in terms of the links between aesthetic ground and transfer of semiophore function was not one that was exclusive to Berenson. This kind of co-operation had been a fairly common practice since the end of the 19th century, not only in America, but also to some extent in Europe. A few examples close to Berenson's circle include: the partnership between the scholar and curator of Japanese art Ernest Fenellosa (1874–1908) and the industrialist and collector Charles Lang Freer (1854–1919); Roger Fry and financier J. P. Morgan; and Osvald Sirén and the Finnish entrepreneur Paul Sinebrychoff (1859–1917).⁵²⁴ At the turn of the century in Italy, Adolfo Venturi, had been advising the wealthy industrialist Cristoforo Benigno Crespi (1833–1920).⁵²⁵

The art historian had helped Crespi to acquire artworks through international auctions abroad and facilitating the transfer of artworks from ecclesiastic collections in churches under state tutelage.⁵²⁶ The Milanese entrepreneur was interested in collecting Lombard Renaissance art and later paintings from the area. His collection included art from the 15th century up to Correggio, Titian, and Tintoretto.⁵²⁷ The inclusion of *The Nativity* by Correggio that Adolfo Venturi had authenticated and studied, reveals the importance of the contribution the advisor made to the collection.⁵²⁸ The catalogue, compiled by the scholar, aimed at ennobling Crespi's industrial and commercial enterprises through the elegance, sophistication, and erudition of the art he had collected. In the book, the images of Crespi's industrial

523 Gualino, *Frammenti di vita*, 85–89; letters from Riccardo Gualino to Lionello Venturi, 17 July 1918 (see above) and 8 August 1918 (“...io andrei a Cereseto oggi nel pomeriggio...potremmo fare oggi la gita intesa.”), in ALV.

524 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*; Strehlke “Berenson, Sassetta, and Asian Art,” 37–49; Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*; Kartio, “Introduction”.

525 *La Galleria Crespi in Milano. Note e raffronti di Adolfo Venturi* (Milano: Hoepli, 1900).

526 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 143–146.

527 *La Galleria Crespi in Milano*, xxv.

528 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 143.

plants were included along with the old masters' artworks.⁵²⁹ However Crespi and Adolfo Venturi's relationship lacked an extensive and strategic depth. Lionello Venturi's involvement in the Gualino Collection deepened as it became a project that was not only based on advice and expertise. The collecting project also contemplated the association with a discursive practice, constituting a frame of appropriation and interpretation of the artworks and supporting the creation of new semiophores.

Berenson had a notable and privileged role in inspiring Venturi's partnership with Gualino. Besides being a practically and personally closer example, Berenson had influenced Venturi in relation to his theoretical ideas and the old masters, both from the scholarly and the art market point of view. Venturi's changed interests also fuelled his desire to pursue a method that would affect the development of academic scholarship on the basis of formalist ideas and by including an aesthetic perspective, as stated in his inaugural speech as a newly appointed professor at the university of Turin, in 1915.⁵³⁰ Berenson's discourse had proven to be effective in promoting aesthetic ideas that played a part in the development of scholarship and the re-evaluation of the Italian primitive masters in the beginning of the 20th century. The Stewart Gardner Collection had reflected Berenson's ideas and expanded his influence.

Similarly, Venturi saw the potential benefits of advising and curating an art collection from scratch, which would grow to comply completely with his discourse and become a visual manifestation of his aesthetic principles. He was aiming at following Berenson's path of establishing new aesthetic criteria as a basis for collecting. He had gained authority through his discourse and collecting practice in order to orient scholarship in general towards the appreciation of the Italian primitives in the context of formalist primitivism. The Gualino Collection was a more comprehensive project for Venturi. He conceived it as a suitable platform for his aesthetic and scholarly ideas. As a systematic, unitary project, Gualino's collecting activity had the potential to reflect and reinforce Venturi's discourse. This connection can be seen in the introduction to the Gualino Collection catalogue from 1926, which stressed the preference for an aesthetic perspective rather than traditional historical criteria in selecting the artworks.⁵³¹ Through Venturi's aesthetic premises, artworks within the frame of collection, reflecting Venturi's concept primitivism and universalism, would achieve added meaning and value.

Gualino fitted into the stereotype of the American industrialist, and apparently Venturi emphasised his admiration for the New Continent's liberal society in order to charm him into his project.⁵³² When Venturi contacted the entrepreneur, Gualino had already become acquainted with American society. The collector was inclined

529 *La Galleria Crespi in Milano*.

530 Venturi, "La posizione dell'Italia nelle arti figurative".

531 Venturi, *La collezione Gualino*.

532 Gualino, *Frammenti di vita*, 85–89.

to identify himself with the self-made businessmen who were building America and who saw the practical advantages of investing in art.⁵³³ Therefore Venturi must have been confident that he would be ready to leave the old path of collecting and experiment with what he presented as new ways of gathering artworks, relying on the partnership with a scholar advisor. Gualino responded positively to Venturi's initiative, entering into a relationship that would eventually lead to the remarkable donation to the Galleria Sabauda.⁵³⁴ The businessman invited Venturi to his castle for the first time in 1918, marking the beginning of a friendship that would be lifelong.⁵³⁵ Gualino recalled this in retrospect as an awakening experience for both men and as a remarkable turning point for the collection.⁵³⁶

In his memoir, Gualino dedicated an entire chapter to the description of his relationship with Venturi, whom he called a dear friend. His story builds a picture of both himself and the art historian – a story of two men complementing and inspiring each other: on the one side the practical man, social and adventurous and on the other the shy and reserved intellectual. Gualino viewed himself as a man inclined to art and poetry, literary, skilled but, considering economic independence as a personal moral success, sacrificing his talent for the sphere of private enjoyment.⁵³⁷ He also pictured himself as ambitious, resourceful, independence-loving, a *leader of the new things*.⁵³⁸ It is worth noting that he set qualities such as originality, open-mindedness, and interest in new adventures, in relation to his ability to appreciate and support an alternative aesthetic discourse.⁵³⁹ In Venturi's introduction in the catalogue of the collection a similar narrative emerged, presenting Gualino as far-sighted and sensitive to the profound aesthetic qualities of the artworks, collecting in the spirit of elevating and affecting Italian culture, rather than as a matter of investment or domestic decoration.⁵⁴⁰

Gualino gave a narrativised version of the events that brought Venturi from a more traditional art-historical scholarship grounded in a documentary approach to the consideration of new aspects, such as personal experience and individual sensations. If, on the one hand, Gualino took the credit for literally drawing Venturi away from books to experience life, on the other he expressed his gratitude towards Venturi about the understanding of the contradiction between Gualino's audacious

533 Anderi and Bocchietto, *Sulle tracce di Riccardo Gualino*; d'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 34; Bermond, *Riccardo Gualino finanziere e imprenditore*.

534 Tardito Amerio, "La donazione Gualino alla Galleria Sabauda," 35–37.

535 Letter from Riccardo Gualino to Lionello Venturi, 8 August 1918, in ALV.

536 Gualino, *Frammenti di vita*, 85–89.

537 Ibid.

538 Ibid., 21.

539 Ibid.

540 Venturi, *La collezione Gualino*.

character and his domestic environment built as a reconstruction of the past.⁵⁴¹ He then recounted how Venturi had lured Gualino into a new collecting project with flattering words, revealing the contrast in his life, being so innovative in big business, and yet falling asleep surrounded by antiquities that were for the most part reproductions in the medieval style.⁵⁴² According to Gualino, Lionello Venturi convinced him of the prospect that his adventurous temperament would find satisfaction in following an aesthetic sensibility in collecting, rather than a historicist reconstruction.⁵⁴³ Venturi offered Gualino the chance to shape an original collection that would reflect his identity as progressive, modern, brave and bold – his whole life and personality – instead of pursuing pre-defined and fixed semiophores.

However, events did not take place in exactly the way they were described either in Gualino's memoir or in Venturi's text. Although the core of the events leading to the new strategic and systematic collecting practice was largely true, the narrative tended to exaggerate and condense the events. One should keep in mind that those texts had a "functional" aspect. While the introduction was used to stress the connection between the collection and Venturi's aesthetic discourse, Gualino's memoir, written during his years of confinement, might have been at least in part influenced by his need to respond to the accusations of causing damage to the Italian economy and portray a positive, selfless, and progressive image of himself. Qualities such as modernity and originality were partly overstated in this narrative, when one compares Gualino's collecting practice with the general artistic and aesthetic landscape of the 1920s.⁵⁴⁴

One should bear in mind that, while his collecting project might have appeared to be unusual within the Italian scene – which was then characterised by a conservative society and a traditional economy – the effect of formalist ideas on collecting choices had been widely explored, especially in North America from the beginning of the 20th century. Italian old masters – Gualino's first purchases made under the supervision of Venturi – and their juxtaposition with Chinese art and modern art had been typical of several collections. In the context of the 1920s, Venturi's aesthetic ideas could not be considered original and innovative. Moreover, Gualino did not purchase much contemporary art during the 1920s, and of those they were mostly artworks by Felice Casorati, Ardengo Soffici, Felice Carena, and Armando Spadini.⁵⁴⁵ (Figs. 64–65)

541 Gualino, *Frammenti di vita*, 85–89. "Venturi asserisce che io gli ho mutato la vita, che ... gli che gli feci aprire gli occhi sul vasto mondo, togliendoli dai libri sui quali prima li aveva tenuti troppo fissi."

542 Ibid.

543 Ibid.

544 Pia Vivarelli, ed., *Lo specchio. Scritti di critica d'arte, Carlo Levi* (Roma: Donzelli, 2001), 99–104.

545 Lamberti, "La raccolta Gualino d'arte moderna e contemporanea," 25–34.

Towards the end of the decade, he added several artworks from the young artists of Casorati's school. Post-Impressionist paintings, avant-garde artworks, and African sculptures, although circulating in Italy at the time, were not of interest to Gualino.⁵⁴⁶ Moreover, he kept his contemporary artworks separate from the historical works, with the only exception being the Modigliani paintings he purchased in 1928.⁵⁴⁷ The contemporary paintings were not displayed on the walls in his house and therefore they did not play a role in contributing to the shaping of his public identity.⁵⁴⁸ Instead the 19th century art of the Macchiaioli – together with one French Impressionist painting – came to be part of the historical collection.⁵⁴⁹

The partnership with Gualino might have reinforced Venturi's deviation from a traditional art-historical methodological approach, favouring instead a more subjective critical experience of artworks. However, Venturi's methodological inclination for a personal observation and aesthetic interpretation of artworks had been earlier inspired by the influence of formalist theorists. With regard to the first-hand examination of artworks, Venturi had been originally influenced by connoisseurship and the experience of the travelling with his father on his research tours as a young scholar.⁵⁵⁰ What instead was more decisive for Venturi's work with Gualino was the connection to contemporary cultural life. Venturi was a regular in Gualino's intellectual circle and became involved in several projects intended to support progressive culture in Turin.⁵⁵¹ Counselling Gualino also meant an increased chance of travelling, extending his network, and visiting exhibitions and antiquarians across Europe and North America. Venturi indeed often travelled on behalf of Gualino or accompanied him on his business trips, assisting him in purchasing artworks or simply visiting museums or monuments with him.⁵⁵² (Fig. 46) The importance of these journeys is underlined

546 Ibid.

547 Lamberti, "La raccolta Gualino d'arte moderna e contemporanea," 25–34; Marconi, "Cesarina Gualino," 141–142. It is possible that Gualino purchased his first Modigliani painting earlier, in 1923, in connection to Cesarina's entourage of modernist artists in Paris. At the time, during her staying in the French city, she had come in contact with Leopold Zborowsky, who dealt Modigliani's paintings. Moreover, a retrospective of Modigliani's work had been presented at the Venice Biennale the previous year (1922).

548 Lamberti, "La raccolta Gualino d'arte moderna e contemporanea".

549 Edouard Manet, *La Negresse*, Pinacoteca Giovanni e Marella Agnelli, Turin.

550 D'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 171, 114, 200.

551 Cesarina Gualino's diaries, in FRG; Beatrice Marconi, "Jessie Boswell e Cesarina Gualino. Affinità elettive," in *Jessie Boswell*, ed. Ivana Mulatero (Torino: Bolaffi Editore, 2009), 74–78; d'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 204–218.

552 Boatti, *Preferirei di no*, 166; Cesarina Gualino's diaries, in FRG; Marconi, "Cesarina Gualino," 141–142; in two letters dated 8 November 1921 and addressed to the heads of the Niederoesterreichische escompte ges. Vienna and Berliner Handels Gesellschaft, Gualino stated that he gave to Venturi cheques to make deals on his behalf. "Mi permetto di presentarvi nel latore della presente il sig. prof. Lionello

by the foreign provenance of the majority of Gualino's artworks. These trips are a good example of how scholarly work and collecting practice worked together.

When Gualino and Venturi travelled to the United States for three months in 1928, their main aim was to purchase artworks for the collection, but it also offered Venturi a rare opportunity to study, research, and extend his networks.⁵⁵³ Their trip to Egypt in 1924 and to Spain in 1927 had certainly had an impact on Venturi's theoretical thinking.⁵⁵⁴ However, the most significant destination for art-lovers at the time was Paris. Venturi followed Gualino, who had connections and business interests in the city, on several occasions – in 1923, 1924, and for a longer stay in 1926.⁵⁵⁵ Paris was one of the main international centres of the art trade and a melting pot of progressive developments in art. Venturi was also familiar with the local milieu

Venturi che si reca a Vienna per pratiche che mi riguardano. Vi sarò grato se vi compiacerete facilitargli il compito in quanto vi sarà possibile. Egli avrà probabilmente bisogno di negoziare cheques su Parigi, che io gli ho consegnato. Vi sarò grato se procurerete ottenergli le migliori condizioni di cambio,” in ALV.

- 553 Iamurri, “L'azione culturale di Lionello Venturi,” 96–97. One of the reasons Venturi claimed he would profit from his journey to America was because he would find inspiration on how to organise a private collection, The ‘Museo Gualino’. Marconi, “Cesarina Gualino,” 142. Venturi and Gualino visited some of the major American collections, such as those of Wildstein, Bache-Duveen, Hover Yung, the Morgan collection, the Goldman collection, the Frick collection, and the Rockefeller collection in New York, the Holmes collection in Philadelphia, and the Stewart Gardner collection in Boston. Letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson (from New York), 3 February 1929, in BBL. Venturi tells Berenson about his visits to art collections in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago (to come). He congratulates the senior colleague, recognising his merits in making those art collections great. In the Lionello Venturi Archive there are two folders with a collection of Venturi's travelling notes from his first American tour. Faldone XXX/1 and XXX/2, in ALV. Part of the material dates from the 1940s and later, part is not dated, but some of the notes belong to his first journey to the country with Gualino. Some of the subfolders can be dated thanks to the letters they contain: letter from the Art Institute of Chicago 20 February 1929 (in Busta XXX, 39); letter from the Gardner Museum in Boston to Venturi 13 February 1929 (in Busta XXX, 42); letter from the American Wholesale Corporation 12 February 1929 (in Busta XXX, 70). During the trip with Gualino, Venturi's work was not limited to the role of art advisor. For instance, like Berenson and Sirén before him, Lionello published the results of his survey on Italian art in North America in a book. During his three-month long sojourn in the United States, he visited some of the most renowned art collections in the country, both public and private. Lionello Venturi, *Pitture Italiane in America* (Milano: Hoepli, 1931). The journey was also useful for developing a network that would make his expatriation easier in the 1930s.
- 554 Marconi, “Cesarina Gualino,” 142.
- 555 Ponzetti, *Il caso Gualino*, 72–154; Cesarina Gualino's diaries, in FRG; letter from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, s.d. (1926), in FAV. Lionello Venturi told his father about his plan to be in Paris for one month.

of scholars and in 1921 was invited to present lectures in Paris at the Sorbonne and at the CIHA conference.⁵⁵⁶

The shifts in Gualino's collecting practice, reported as a sudden consequence of the encounter with Venturi, is another aspect that was exaggerated in the author's narrative. The first encounter between Lionello Venturi and Gualino took place in 1918, but for a few years the tenure of the purchases continued on the antiquarian side. Venturi's first interventions were probably limited to providing expertise, giving more secure access to the old masters' market in terms of attributions and quality. It was only at a later stage that their connection became collaborative rather than sporadic. Berenson's direct inspirational role model for a partnership between advisor and collector is also suggested by the early involvement of the American art historian with the Gualino Collection. Berenson and his ideas played a part in Venturi's first advisory work for Gualino between 1919 and 1922 in relation to the purchase of Italian old masters' artworks. Moreover, the correspondence with Venturi shows that Berenson had a personal involvement and interest in the collection because, on several occasions, at least from 1919, he requested information about and photographs of the collection's artworks.⁵⁵⁷ Even as late as 1920, he visited the collection personally as well.⁵⁵⁸ Not long after, Venturi wrote to Berenson that he needed to discuss in person at short notice some delicate and urgent matters concerning the collection and he was ready to reach him abroad if necessary.⁵⁵⁹

It is hard to determine the exact nature of Berenson's interest in the Gualino Collection. However, it is probable that at some point he became involved in the selling of the collection or a part of it. Regardless of what Berenson's role had been in this regard, he had certainly been aware that Gualino had been considering selling the artworks, because Venturi subsequently, in 1922, informed him that the collection was no longer available for purchase, as Gualino had changed his mind.⁵⁶⁰ How did this decision mature is difficult to establish from the existing documents. However,

556 Letters from Lionello to Adolfo Venturi, 21 January 1921–2 October 1921, in FAV, discuss their participation in the conference; Lionello mentioned his recurring visits to Paris to Adolfo Venturi on several occasions, eg. in letters 20 June 1922, s.d (post September 1926), 22 October 1926, 28 March 1926, 7 May 1926, in FAV; *Storia del CIHA Italia*.

557 Letters from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson from 23 December 1919 to 19 April 1922, in BBL.

558 Letter from Bernard Berenson to Lionello Venturi, 18 June 1920, in ALV. "You could take us to signor Gualino's collection, to any other private collection that you like."

559 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 17 August 1920, in BBL. "L'Avvocato Gualino mi ha dato un incarico di qualche importanza, per adempiere il quale ho bisogno di conferire con Lei. E quindi conto sulla sua benevolenza perché Ella mi concede un'intervista. Io verrei a Parigi o a Londra o dove Ella si trovi."

560 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 19 April 1922, in BBL. "Le intenzioni dell'avvocato mutano rapidamente e per ora egli non ha più intenzione di alienare gli oggetti d'arte di cui è incantato. Come Ella può comprendere, io sono

in a few years of co-operation under the influence of Venturi's advice, who was at the same time defining his discourse founded on primitivism, and in contact with Berenson, Gualino became interested in embarking on the partnership project. From 1922 onwards, the collection indeed began to grow rapidly, bringing together a series of eclectic but high-quality artworks that corresponded to Venturi's concept of the primitive.⁵⁶¹

Therefore, it is only from 1922 onwards that a partnership project modelled on Berenson's example began to take shape, inaugurating the strategic and collaborative stage of the Gualino Collection. It is then that the acquisitions changed focus, becoming carefully thought through as part of a meaningful project. Under Venturi's influence, the Gualino Collection was turned into a manifesto for a particular aesthetic discourse. Venturi was the sole advisor to Gualino in his collection practice and had a quite broad range of tasks in this respect. He was in charge of finding artworks, of guaranteeing their originality and authorship, of taking care of the branding. As a consequence, Gualino engaged with Venturi's advice and strategic plans, purchasing those artworks he recommended and which would illustrate and reinforce the scholar's theory. Gualino could rely on the advice of an expert with ample experience in the art trade and with a solid network, who could not only guarantee the authenticity and attribution of acquisitions, but who could also place them in a meaningful aesthetic frame, giving a specialist value to the collection. Over the years their partnership evolved into a trusting and long-lasting relationship. Venturi became not only his advisor, but also an intellectual partner with whom he had the pleasure of frequently discussing aesthetic matters and sharing cultural and artistic projects.⁵⁶²

Part of the project was the publication of the catalogue that would underline the discursive function of the collection's framing, appropriating, and projecting of meaning onto the artworks that would reflect and support Venturi's theory. From 1922 onwards, Venturi planned and then edited a luxury edition, which was distributed in order to spread the image of the collector and the legacy of the collection as a semiophore, as was the case of many American collections.⁵⁶³ (Figs. 9–12) In

molto lieto di questo mutamento di intenzioni e quindi la prego di considerare come non avvenuto il discorso che le feci in proposito.”

561 Venturi, *La collezione Gualino*.

562 Information about the nature of Lionello Venturi's relationship with Gualino's household can be found, for instance, in Cesarina Gualino's diaries.

563 The catalogue was printed in a limited edition, with a gilded leather cover and colour illustrations. The book received positive reviews in many newspapers and journals and especially stressed the value of single items and the overall originality of the collection. Many also welcomed the purchase of several Italian artworks which were thus repatriated, while no negative impact emerges about the collection of Chinese art. Newspaper cuttings from September 1926 to November 1927 in ALV. In particular see, Pompeo Molmenti, “La collezione Gualino,” *Il Resto del Carlino*, 26 June 1926. The author described Gualino as an example of new men, new tycoons, inclined

order to support the value and the meaning of the collection, Venturi had planned to involve the major authorities in the field in contributing to the catalogue. Although the collection mainly gained its legitimacy through Venturi's aesthetic discourse, the art historian also sought the endorsement of other scholars, experts in the field of the collected artworks.

He was aware that the authority of well-established scholars could at times make up for a lack of documentation. With regard to the Italian old masters, he considered Berenson and his father – along with the German art historian Wilhelm Bode – as the major authorities and relied on them for appraisals or other forms of advice, as well as the authentication of Gualino's artworks.⁵⁶⁴ Therefore Venturi attempted to include both of his mentor figures as contributors to the catalogue.⁵⁶⁵ It is not surprising that Adolfo Venturi declined the invitation, if one considers the theoretical and methodological gap between the two scholars.⁵⁶⁶ Nevertheless, he wrote a positive critical review of the collection in *L'Arte* – the journal he ran – which appeared at the same time as the publication of the Gualino Collection catalogue.⁵⁶⁷

to the appreciation and promotion of art. He stated that the collector showed through his collection “an aristocratic temperament that does not need any coat of arms or title – like in the Renaissance – and against the degeneration of the old aristocracy selling the treasures collected by their ancestors.” It is also significant that Francesco Saporì described the catalogue of the Gualino Collection along with other foreign catalogues of private collections, especially American ones. Francesco Saporì, “Un libro monumentale,” *Lavoro d'Italia*, 26 November 1926.

- 564 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, 14 July 1922 (VT V1 b44 68), in FAV. “Ho veduto ieri sera l'avv. Gualino, il quale desidera ch'io concluda un primo volume sulla collezione, e mi ha chiesto s'io avessi avuto difficoltà di corroborare le mie attribuzioni con giudizi delle massime competenze artistiche. Io gli ho risposto che non avevo difficoltà, anzi avevo piacere della cosa, purché le competenze fossero davvero individuabili, e palesemente superiori alla competenza mia. Non accetterei cioè giudizi se non di te, di Berenson e di Bode. Gualino ha aderito volentieri e quindi io ti prego a nome suo e mio di fermarti al tuo viaggio di ritorno da Parigi per scegliere e giudicare le opera che meglio risponderanno al tuo gusto... e perché tu accetti aggiungo qui un abbraccio più forte del solito.”
- 565 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 14 July 1922, in BBL. “Debbo...intrattenerla ancora una volta sulla collezione Gualino. Questi desidera che io pubblichi il catalogo della sua collezione e vorrebbe arricchirlo del suo giudizio sugli oggetti che le sembreranno degni di un suo giudizio. Ella comprende che anche io sarei felice di poter riportare nel catalogo le sue parole così autorevoli”. Venturi quindi invita Berenson a visitarlo a Torino “affinché veda la nuova collezione e ci conforti, come spero, a preservare nel grande lavoro intrapreso.”
- 566 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, 4 August 1922 (VT V1 b44 71), in FAV. “Per quel che mi dici circa il catalogo la tua decisione mi spiace, anche se è espresso con tanta benevolenza affettuosa verso di me. Naturalmente comprendo la ragionevolezza delle tue osservazioni; e mostrerò senz'altro la tua lettera all'avv. Gualino.”
- 567 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, 11 August 1922 (VT V1 b44 72), in FAV. “Ho mostrato la tua lettera all'avv. Gualino ieri sera. Egli desidera molto che

Berenson declined Venturi's invitation too, but the reason might have instead been his recent disappointment about Gualino changing his mind on a possible deal.⁵⁶⁸ Moreover, the change of direction in Gualino's collecting practice might have been perceived as a threat.⁵⁶⁹ Venturi, who had already made incursions into his territory in 1913, by focussing on the old masters and competing in the art trade, was now exploiting Berenson's strategy of mixing the roles of theoretician, connoisseur, trader and advisor. Berenson's reaction might have been one of resentment towards the growing influential position of the younger scholar, who he began to perceive as a dangerous rival.⁵⁷⁰ For instance, Berenson was preoccupied with the connection between Lionello Venturi and Contini-Bonacossi, one of the major Italian dealers who had ties in America.⁵⁷¹ The resentful nature of Berenson's refusal to write for the catalogue should be considered along with other signs that point to an overall cooling in his relationship with the younger art historian, as the decline in their correspondence between 1922 and 1926 suggests.

Once their communication was resumed in 1926, Venturi recalled their estrangement as motivated by rumours, reported by Casorati, that Berenson had discredited the Gualino Collection. Venturi was particularly offended, considering

tu parli dei suoi quadri, e non gli spiace che tu ne parla ne L'Arte. Pensava se fosse possibile unire al catalogo l'estratto de L'Arte o qualcosa di simile... in una forma o in un'altra desidera che tu scriva dei suoi quadri. La tua proposta quindi è stata accolta: questione di definire poi il modo." Although the catalogue was published much later, Adolfo Venturi indeed waited for it to be ready before publishing his article. Adolfo Venturi, "Recensione a L. Venturi, La collezione Gualino, Roma-Torino, 1926," *L'Arte. Rivista di storia dell'arte medievale e moderna* 29, (1926): 90-93. Letter from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, 27 January 1926 (VT V1 b45 14), in FAV. "Il volume ritarderà ad uscire. Ma tu l'avrai senza ritardo, e avrai le tricromie che ti servono per l'articolo. Così il tuo articolo uscirà forse prima e almeno contemporaneamente al volume. Questo ti dice quanto il Gualino tiene al tuo articolo. Mi avevi detto di mandare le seguenti tricromie: Botticelli, Cimabue, Antonello, Tiziano."

568 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 26 July 1922, in BBL. "La sua lettera è tanto amichevole e gentile che io mi vedo costretto a ringraziarla, malgrado il rifiuto a collaborare al catalogo. L'amico Gualino non vuol darsi per vinto tuttavia: al suo ritorno in Italia verrà a trovarla e a pregarla almeno di una visita a Torino."

569 Simpson, *The Partnership*, 211-212.

570 Letters from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 18 July 1923 ("Comprendo che Ella veda il disaccordo più profondo fra le nostre concezioni artistiche, e cerco anche di capire come Ella possa oggi considerare come uno stato d'animo superato il filosofare d'arte. Ella può permettersi questo oggi, ma non venti anni fa". Moreover, this letter announced that the catalogue to the collection would be published by the end of the year, while in fact it came out only in 1926. I see this as a further evidence that Gualino's collecting policy changed between 1922 and 1923 according to a new project and vision.) and 15 January 1927, in BBL. Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 110.

571 Letter from Joseph Duveen to Bernard Berenson, 18 June 1923, in BBL; letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 31 January 1926, in BBL; letters from Alessandro Contini-Bonacossi to Lionello Venturi, April 1920-September 1923, in ALV.

his knowledge about Berenson's previous positive appraisals.⁵⁷² In this regard one should bear in mind that Berenson's professional opinions did not always match his personal comments that guests might have heard at I Tatti.⁵⁷³ Nevertheless, such a captious attitude aiming at discrediting his competitors was in line with Berenson's temperament. Osvald Sirén had also been on the receiving end of this kind of attitude from Berenson.⁵⁷⁴ In 1926, Venturi and Berenson resolved their differences, and the American art historian once again visited the Gualino Collection, "becoming excited and confirming all the attributions" suggested by the Italian art historian.⁵⁷⁵ Although again friendly and supportive, their correspondence remained less frequent than it had been before 1922. Nevertheless, in his last letter written to Berenson in 1956, Venturi, by then a well-established and influential art historian, expressed once again his devotion and gratitude to Berenson, recognising him as his mentor.⁵⁷⁶

The decline in Berenson and Venturi's relationship, however, might also have been simply due to the shift in their collecting interests. After 1922, Gualino and Venturi began to look with increased interest at Oriental and modern art. It is interesting to note how adhering more closely to Berenson's theoretical perspective and more generally to his partnership model, resulted in Venturi moving away from his mentor with regard to the more pragmatic aspects relating to the selection of artworks. Venturi began to search for other authorities who would support his ventures into new areas of interest. The years of the break between Lionello Venturi and Berenson (1923–1926) were indeed also a time when Venturi explored new sources of influences that marked a change in his discourse and the collection. What emerged in those years was the co-operation with another scholar nurtured under Berenson's

572 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 26 January 1926 in BBL. Lionello refers to having heard that Berenson would have defined the artworks in the collection as "ugly fakes". "Il pittore Casorati è tornato da Monaco a riferire di aver saputo da Lei che tutti i quadri della collezione Gualino sono falsi e, quando non falsi, brutti, con la sola eccezione del Paolo Veronese. Naturalmente io ho capito che Casorati esagerava, se non altro perchè di pareri sui quadri della collezione Gualino conserve giudizi di Lei scritti o stampati di tenore assai differente. Tuttavia attraverso la palese esagerazione, avevo creduto d'intravedere un atto nemico a mio riguardo, che appunto mi aveva dato non poca amarezza."

573 Lamberti, "Riccardo Gualino," 8, 17.

574 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*; Samuels, *Bernard Berenson*, 223, 288, 293.

575 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, 1 October 1926 (VT VI b45 25), in FAV. "È qui a Torino Berenson che entusiasta della tua attività. È molto gentile anche con me, e mi ha dato soddisfazione di esaltarsi per la collezione Gualino e confermare tutte le mie più importanti attribuzioni: I due Tiziano, Tintoretto, Mantegna, Antonello – 'il più bel ritratto di Antonello' –, Bartoli, Lorenzo Veneziano, Melozzo. Anche il Piero della Francesca lo crede del maestro. Tutte le malignità degli amici compiacenti sono così sfumate tutte. Meno male."

576 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 3 November 1956, in BBL. "La sua lettera mi ha dato molta gioia. La sua approvazione è il migliore compenso alla mia fatica".

influence: that of Osvald Sirén. Sirén's influence is behind the more mystical emphasis in Venturi's concept of the primitive, an emphasis that became characteristic of his discourse in those years, leading to the inclusion of Chinese art in the Gualino Collection.

3.5.2 A New Phase in the Gualino Collection: Chinese Art

In those years, from 1923 onwards, Gualino began to purchase Chinese artworks.⁵⁷⁷ (Fig. 33) The exact circumstances of this change of direction are not clear. However, one explanation can be found in the context of Venturi's discourse grounded on the ideas of primitivism and universalism that he had developed following his inaugural address in 1915. On that occasion he had spoken about the importance of understanding Buddhist art along with Donatello's artworks.⁵⁷⁸ He later suggested that a chair of Oriental studies be established to complement the professorship of Western art that was customary in Italian universities.⁵⁷⁹

Since the end of the 19th century, the inclusion of Chinese art along with the Italian primitives and modern art on a wider scale had constituted a typical topos of formalist discourse that highlighted the universal validity of their aesthetic principles. This phenomenon was also reflected in other collections that were formed by academic scholars under the influence of Formalism. Venturi engaged with the formalist discourse, which not only affected his aesthetic theory, but it also came to influence the selection of the artworks for the Gualino Collection. Moreover, at the time, the market situation might have also contributed to pushing Venturi and Gualino towards Chinese art. In the 1920s, the value of Italian artworks and the demand for them kept rising and the competition with other collectors might have become too much even for Gualino's pockets. In the postwar years the quotations for Italian primitives continued to rise steadily and were much higher than before the war.⁵⁸⁰

The situation with the trade in Chinese art was more complex. Interest in Chinese art developed more or less concurrently with the increase in status of the Italian primitives. The developing diplomatic and economic relations between North America and Japan and China since the end of the 19th century resulted in a major availability of Asian art and therefore in a growing interest in it.⁵⁸¹ Japan's opening to the West and the consequent wave of social and cultural reform caused the collapse

577 Document of temporary import no. 52, 27 December 1925 (duplicate of document no. 47, 12 January 1923), in FRG.

578 Venturi, "La posizione dell'Italia nelle arti figurative".

579 Letter from Lionello to Adolfo Venturi, s.d. (VT V1 b45 10), in FAV.

580 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*; Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 46, 70, 92–104; Lamberti, "Riccardo Gualino," 7.

581 Between the 1910s and 1920s collectors were increasingly interested in Chinese art in North America and Europe. Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*; Sirén, "A

of the traditional feudal structure and the dispersion of many collections. The American market benefited more from this new situation because, as a consequence of the First World War, many art dealers moved their main offices from Europe to the New Continent.⁵⁸² Another factor contributed to the positive perception of Asian art. It was associated with mysticism and esotericism, which were attracting interest, especially within American society, as an alternative to the country's dominating frenetic and materialist culture.⁵⁸³ At the turn of the century it was possible to buy Japanese artworks in Boston and in New York. The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston had a large department of Eastern art, which had been curated first by Ernst Fenollosa and later by Kakuzo Okakura, both key figures in introducing Oriental art to the West.⁵⁸⁴

Collecting Chinese art became a well-established practice in the 1910s, and in the 1920s it became increasingly difficult to find good quality artworks – and the quotations for this type of art kept rising, especially in North America.⁵⁸⁵ In those years, however, an increased number of experts specialised in dealing in Oriental art were able to bring some order regarding the quality and originality of artworks.⁵⁸⁶ Meanwhile, in the 1920s, scholarship regarding Chinese art was also evolving, thanks to numerous Western archaeological expeditions.⁵⁸⁷ In Italy the nationalistic approach dominated art-historical scholarship, and it was not until the 1930s that Sinology as an academic discipline began to develop, as the foundation of ISMEO – Istituto Italiano per il Medio e l'Estremo Oriente indicates.⁵⁸⁸ Nonetheless the circulation of

Reconstruction of a Great Collection of Chinese Sculpture,” 75–76; Suriano, “La collezione di culture cinesi,” 34.

582 Wang, “The Louvre from China,” 28–30.

583 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 133–139.

584 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 133–139; Strehlke, “Berenson, Sassetta, and Asian Art,” 37–49.

585 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*; Suriano, “La collezione di culture cinesi,” 34.

586 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*; Wang, “The Louvre from China”; letter from Charles Lang Freer to Bernard Berenson, 10 May 1918, in BBL. Freer, in partnership with Ernest Fenollosa, was among the first and greatest collectors of Asian art. When Freer died his collection included 30.000 pieces.

587 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*.

588 Francesco d'Arelli, “In cerca di una nuova memoria,” in *Caro Maestro... Scritti in onore di Lionello Lanciotti per l'ottantesimo compleanno*, eds. Maurizio Scarpari and Tiziana Lippiello (Venezia: Ca' Foscara, 2005), 15–34; Fabrizio de Donno, *Italian Orientalism. Nationhood, Cosmopolitanism and Cultural politics of Identity* (Oxford et al.: Peter Lang, 2019); Antonella Perna, “A Satisfaction to the Heart and to the Intellect: A Note on Osvald Sirén's Connections with Italy through his Epistolary,” *FNG Research*, no. 1, 2019, accessed March 21, 2019, https://fngresearch.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/fngr_2019-1_perna_antonella_article1.pdf; Enrica Garzilli ci racconta Giuseppe Tucci, Pangea, 2019, accessed March 21, 2019, https://www.academia.edu/38344690/Interview_ENRICA_GARZILLI_CI_RACCONTA_GIUSEPPE_TUCCI?email_work_card=title. The new interest in Oriental Art in Italy also had political dimensions, as Mussolini saw it as a chance to undermine the British colonialist policy.

Asian artworks in the country and its collectability and desirability remained limited. The market for Chinese art could offer good opportunities to alert and well-advised collectors, as it was less popular and quotations were lower than those for the Italian old masters.⁵⁸⁹

The concomitant rediscovery of Italian old masters and Chinese art as collectibles, and the growing mystical sensibility in the West, became the basis for their association as similar aesthetic phenomena. At the turn of the century, it had been possible to see both kinds of artworks within the same collection in public museums, such as the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, as well as in private collections, such as the Potter Palm Collection and Isabella Stewart Gardner Collection.⁵⁹⁰ It has already been mentioned that their combination had been presented as inspirational to the re-evaluation and re-interpretation of Italian old masters in terms of formalist aesthetics, engaging with the spiritual nature of art creation. This aspect was also highlighted in several publications, such as Berenson's 1903 article on Sassetta, which pointed to the similar aesthetic ground behind Chinese art and the Italian primitives on the basis of formalist values.⁵⁹¹ Another example is the series of articles by Sirén on Chinese and European painting, published in 1918, which followed his piece on primitive and modern art in 1915, where for the first time he had introduced Chinese art in a context dedicated to Western art.⁵⁹²

3.5.3 A New Influential Connection: Osvald Sirén

In the 1920s, Sirén was among the scholars who made an important contribution to the understanding of Chinese art, becoming one of the major experts in the field. While living in Stockholm at the beginning of the 20th century, Sirén's interests shifted from 18th century Swedish art to the Italian old masters.⁵⁹³ In 1902, the year he released his research on the Swedish painter Carl Gustaf Pilo, he also published a survey about Italian Renaissance artworks in Swedish collections.⁵⁹⁴ Sirén's interest in Italian art emerged alongside his activity as an art advisor to the Finnish art collector Paul Sinebrychoff. This experience might have contributed to shifting his attention to the Italian primitives. Quotations for the old masters were indeed rising among

589 Sirén, "A Reconstruction of a Great Collection of Chinese Sculpture," 75–76.

590 Saarinen, *The Proud Possessors*, 3–55, 133–139.

591 Strehlke, "Berenson, Sassetta, and Asian Art," 37–49; Berenson, "A Sieneese Painter of the Franciscan Legend," 3–35, 171–184.

592 Osvald Sirén, "Studies in Chinese and European Painting," *Theosophical Path* 14, no. 2 (February 1918): 163–176; no. 3 (March 1918): 229–482; no. 4 (April 1918): 337–343; no. 5 (May 1918): 431–452; no. 6 (June 1918): 530–549; no. 1 (July, 1918): 56–65.

593 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 9–13.

594 Sirén, *Carl Gustaf Pilo*; Osvald Sirén, *Dessins et tableaux de la renaissance italienne dans les collections de Suède* (Stockholm: Hasse–W. Tullberg, 1902).

collectors and antiquarians. Moreover, his association with Sinebrychoff also meant an increased possibility of travelling. It is indeed in those years that Sirén started his tradition of annual tours of Italy.⁵⁹⁵ The collector also sponsored Sirén's first publication on the Italian Renaissance and allowed him to travel more extensively across Europe.⁵⁹⁶

Sinebrychoff was a wealthy beer manufacturing tycoon and represented one of the richest families in Finland at the time. He could rely on a huge wealth amassed by generations of successful businessmen and fortunate investments.⁵⁹⁷ He began collecting art from an early age, and although art might have functioned as a means of social advancement for him, as was common at the time, he also collected with a genuine passion and an extraordinary competence.⁵⁹⁸ Moreover, Sinebrychoff and his wife Fanny had envisioned donating their collection to the Finnish nation from an early stage, before the Finnish state gained full independent status in 1917.⁵⁹⁹ They projected onto the artworks a public and educative role, aimed at offering the Finnish people access to a collection of old European masters that would have been typical of royal and aristocratic art collections, yet which were previously unseen in the country.⁶⁰⁰

Sinebrychoff wished to follow the developments of his collection personally, and to the best of his abilities. He dedicated much of his free time, during the night, to learning more, he followed auctions and sales, and he participated in an international network of collectors.⁶⁰¹ Nevertheless, he had to rely on intermediaries because the management of his business at home limited his possibilities to be at the forefront of the art market, which was very small at that time in Finland.⁶⁰² Sinebrychoff had relied for his purchases on the art dealer Henryk Bukowski (1839–1900) in Stockholm. After Bukowski's death, the industrialist had to search for a new contact in the Swedish capital, the art market closest to Finland. Sirén, the young Finnish art historian living in Stockholm, a specialist in Swedish genre painting, one of Sinebrychoff's favourite genres, appeared as the most suitable choice.⁶⁰³ However, the new advisor was not an antiquarian, but a professional scholar, and he came to work directly and exclusively for the collector. The partnership with Sinebrychoff, which ran between

595 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 9–13.

596 Ibid.

597 Sakari Heikkinen, "The Money behind the Art: A History of the Sinebrychoff's Wealth," in *Sinebrychoff: From Art Collectors' Home to Art Museum*, ed. Minerva Keltanen (Helsinki: Sinebrychoff Art Museum Publications, 2003), 104–123.

598 Pettersson, "Suspense and Jubilation," 71–83.

599 Ibid. Finnish Independence was gained in December 1917, after Paul Sinebrychoff's death.

600 Kartio, "Introduction," 26–35.

601 Pettersson, "Suspense and Jubilation," 71–83.

602 Ibid.

603 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 9–13; Kai Kartio, "Introduction," 26–35.

1901 and 1909, reflects the model of partnership between professional advisors and collectors that had been especially influential in North America at the turn of the century.⁶⁰⁴

Sirén's initial role was mainly to work as Sinebrychoff's contact person, to be his eyes and hands in lieu of the patron's inability to attend sales and follow the international art market first-hand. Sinebrychoff had a clear picture of which artworks he wished to include in his collection.⁶⁰⁵ Later, he began to trust Sirén more and rely on his advice as an expert. At that stage, Sirén's role had evolved into that of the scholarly advisor, not only scouting for good artworks and guaranteeing for their authentication, but also actively guiding the taste of the collector. Thus, for example, he influenced Sinebrychoff's shift in focus from Swedish 18th century painting to the Dutch school of the 17th century.⁶⁰⁶ Although Sinebrychoff was a very demanding collector, Sirén managed to satisfy him and entertained a friendly relationship with him. Through Sirén, Sinebrychoff could acquire a large number of artworks of very good quality from collectors and dealers across Europe.⁶⁰⁷

Sirén gained professional advantages from his partnership with Sinebrychoff too. His first experience as a young professional advisor was empowering in terms of opportunities, financial support, and personal confidence. The young art historian could rely on a substantial extra income as well as having the chance to be in contact with the major dealers and collectors of the time and thus to grow into the role of a professional advisor.⁶⁰⁸ Having launched his career in art dealing, in 1902, on one of his first visits to Italy, Sirén met Berenson, who was an inspirational figure both in connoisseurial practice and in his involvement in the art trade.⁶⁰⁹ Although Sirén was at the time just beginning to shift his attention to Italian old masters, he soon became an internationally recognised and undisputed authority in the field of the Italian primitives, thanks to his network and his first-hand contact with artworks. In the following decade, he would be in assiduous contact with Berenson regarding his dealings in Italian old masters through an exchange of advices, appraisals, expertise, and photographs, and gradually Sirén would become his peer.⁶¹⁰ Particularly

604 The relationship between Sirén and Sinebrychoff can be studied through the extensive correspondence kept at the Sinebrychoff archives. "Osvald Sirén," Paul Sinebrychoffin kirjearkisto (Archive of Paul Sinebrychoff's correspondence), accessed August 31, 2017, <http://kirjearkisto.siff.fi/Dealers/OsvaldSirén/tabid/60/Default.aspx>.

605 Pettersson, "Suspense and Jubilation," 71–83.

606 Kartio, "Introduction," 26–35.

607 Ibid.

608 Ibid.

609 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*.

610 Letters from Osvald Sirén to Bernard Berenson, 5 December 1902–13 December 1914, in BBL; Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*; Samuels, *Bernard Berenson*, 181, 223, 288, 293.

interesting is their exchange of notes that accompanied photographs, which reveals aspects of their common practice, based on the connoisseurial process.⁶¹¹

Sirén also began to write authentications and provide expertise to large-scale art dealers, among them Duveen.⁶¹² Sirén's growing reputation as an expert, however, would eventually expose him as a competitor, thus fuelling Berenson's resentment.⁶¹³ Meanwhile, even in 1907, when Sirén was planning his tour of America, he asked Berenson for advice about which museums to visit and requested recommendation letters to get access to private collections.⁶¹⁴ The large number of Italian artworks that were absorbed into American collections from 1897 onwards made the New Continent an attractive destination for scholars of old masters.⁶¹⁵ Similarly to his survey of the Italian art in Sweden, Sirén had in mind the project of publishing a review of the artworks in American collections, both public and private.⁶¹⁶ His journey to America was also a success in terms of gaining international recognition as a scholar, which might have alerted Berenson even further.⁶¹⁷ In 1908, Sirén indeed began to contribute to *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* and, in 1915, he was asked to curate the catalogue of the Jarves Collection of Italian primitive art at Yale, which was published the following year.⁶¹⁸

At the height of his career as an expert on Italian old masters, however, Sirén began to redirect his attention towards Chinese art. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the circumstances surrounding this new interest in Chinese art

611 Pagliarulo, "Photographs to Read".

612 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 81–82; letter from Osvald Sirén to Bernard Berenson, 29 August 1913, in BBL. In this letter, for instance, Sirén writes on behalf of Duveen (who had Berenson sign into a secret partnership) in order to review his opinion about one of the latest antiquarian purchases. "You have seen the picture some time ago, but it was then in a very different state from the one in which it is now...but as now I think very highly of the picture, Mr. Duveen requested me to write you some of my impressions and to ask at the same time to examine the picture again as soon as you come to Florence. As a fact, my impression of the picture was neither entirely favorable, but I have gone back to see it five or six times, and I have got an absolute firm conviction that this picture is an authentic Giorgione, although not in the best state of preservation."

613 Cohen, *Bernard Berenson*, 110; Samuels, *Bernard Berenson*, 223, 288, 293.

614 Letter from Osvald Sirén to Bernard Berenson, 27 March 1907, in BBL.

615 In this regard Lionello Venturi also toured American museums and private collections for the first time in 1928 and Adolfo Venturi expressed the desire to do so too. Iamurri, "L'azione culturale di Lionello Venturi," 96–97; Iamurri, "Berenson, la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana," 86.

616 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 21; Osvald Sirén, "Trecento Pictures in American Collections I–V," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 14–15, no. 68–69, 71, 73, 75 (November–December 1908, February, April, June 1909): 124–126, 188–194, 325–326, 66, 197.

617 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*. Sirén was invited to lecture on several occasions.

618 Osvald Sirén, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Pictures in the Jarves Collection Belonging to Yale University* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916).

remain unclear, although it has been established that the shift might have taken place between 1913 and 1915.⁶¹⁹ Sirén gave his version of the facts. He constructed a fascinating narrative to explain the circumstances of the awakening of his interest. According to his story, it had been the consequence of his shocking first encounter with the Oriental art that was exhibited along with Italian primitive paintings, when he and the American art historian Denman Ross (1853–1935) visited the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. As fascinating as his story was, it probably constituted just a later recollection of events of minor impact, which indeed remained vague, incongruent, imprecise, undocumented, and undated.⁶²⁰ There are many other possibilities as to how, when and where the encounter took place, both in Europe and North America.⁶²¹ For instance, he might have seen examples of Oriental art in some of the many collections he had visited in the early 1900s in the United States, such as works belonging to Isabella Stewart Gardner.⁶²² Or he might have noticed some of Berenson's Far Eastern artworks, which he had acquired since 1911 and which were displayed at his home along with Italian art.⁶²³

The use of a narrative in this sense was not Sirén's exclusive practice. In particular, his story shared a few elements – such the location, some of the protagonists, and even the dynamics of the event – with Berenson's version of his own encounter with Chinese art a couple of decades earlier.⁶²⁴ Also Lionello Venturi re-evoked on several occasions the impact that his first visit at Villa I Tatti in the beginning of the 1913 had on the development of his aesthetic ideas due to the fascination of seeing Chinese and Italian primitive art mixed together.⁶²⁵ These narratives played on highlighting the function of Chinese art as inspirational for scholars in order to see the mystical and emotional nature of art. Therefore, they implicitly contributed to promote the role of the scholar's intuition and emotions, rather than relying only on his intellectual skills.

The most significant part of the story of his encounter was indeed the emphasis on the inspirational effect of seeing Chinese art alongside Italian primitive art, which appeared as outstanding examples of mystical, synthetic, and abstract forms of art that were expressive and evoked profound sentiments. The story about the experience at the Boston exhibition, as mentioned earlier, was intentionally structured to have an

619 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 15–35.

620 Ibid.

621 Ibid., 15–29.

622 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 15–35. Sirén visited the Stewart Gardner Collection in 1908, but there is no evidence that he would also have seen the Asian section.

623 Roberts, *The Bernard Berenson Collection of Oriental Art at Villa I Tatti*; Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 21–25. In 1912 Sirén visited Berenson at a stage when it is plausible that the first Oriental artworks entering the collection were still a vivid topic of conversation. Berenson, “A Sieneese Painter of the Franciscan Legend”.

624 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*; Strehlke, “Berenson, Sassetta, and Asian Art,” 37–49.

625 Venturi, “La posizione dell'Italia nelle arti figurative”; Venturi, “Il consigliere dei miliardari”.

impressive impact and to enlighten the relevant qualities of those artistic phenomena from a formalist perspective.⁶²⁶ While fascinating, the narrative could help support and promote a formalist discourse, which was at the basis of an appreciation of Italian primitives and Chinese art on common aesthetic premises. The artworks were appropriated and interpreted within a formalist and primitivist frame. The shared frame also enhanced the transfer of semiophoric function from one artwork to another.

Sirén's first contact and fascination with Chinese art could have also been just of a theoretical nature and might not necessarily have implied a direct contact with the artworks. The practice of drawing a parallel with Italian art, focusing on synthetic expression and spiritualism, in order to bridge the gap between Western and Chinese art, had been a common thread in many theoretical works since the beginning of the 20th century.⁶²⁷ This was the case with Berenson, who, at the time of his early meetings with Sirén in 1902, was writing his essay on the Italian primitive artist Sassetta, with references to Oriental art.⁶²⁸ The interest in Chinese art had mainly focussed on highlighting the aesthetic qualities within a Western discourse. Chinese art was absorbed and valued within the same frame as the Italian primitives. Sirén's study of Chinese art eventually became autonomous and detached from its Italian counterpart, although the connection to it remained a valid means of making Chinese art approachable to a Western audience. However, in 1915, such references were still vague, marginal, and made exclusively in the context of Western art. Sirén generally spoke of the function that the great masters had as mediators between humankind and God, capable of expressing a perception of the divine.⁶²⁹ In doing so he introduced values connected with primitivism and mysticism with the aim of presenting art as an expression of inner sentiment and of a religious spirit.

Later Sirén, following the example of precedents like Fenollosa and Okakura in North America, was aiming at a concrete understanding of Chinese art and, in spite of an unavoidable Western bias, he tried to see it from within by studying Chinese aesthetic treatises and the Chinese language.⁶³⁰ In 1917 he began a series of extensive tours in Asia in order to study its art first-hand.⁶³¹ From China he brought back an invaluable cache to advance his research in the field of Oriental art: a photograph collection, archaeological findings, and artworks.⁶³² From 1924 onwards, he published his research in lavishly illustrated volumes, which were well received by the scholarly

626 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*.

627 Ibid.

628 Berenson, "A Sieneese Painter of the Franciscan Legend," 3–35, 171–184.

629 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*; Sirén, "Primitiv och modern konst," 35–47.

630 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*.

631 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*. Consequent voyages took place in 1921, 1929, and 1935.

632 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 81–96.

community and translated into several languages.⁶³³ They were catalogues rather than theoretical works and he exploited his previous experience as a connoisseur in compiling them. However, the connection with his earliest, more theoretical books was clear. Books, such as *Rhythm and Form* (1917) and *Essentials in Art* (1920) made explicit references to Chinese art, which had been marginal in *Primitive and Modern Art* (1915). His work gave impulse to Sinologist scholarship and his reputation as authority on Chinese art was established internationally.⁶³⁴

However, besides the aesthetic fascination – based as it might have been on either theoretical or concrete encounter – behind Sirén’s shift of interest towards Chinese art, there might have been limitations with regard to the dealing in Italian old masters, such as for instance for increasing prices, the decreasing availability, and in particular the ruthless competition in the art market. Changing one’s field of studies was also seen by Sirén as an opportunity relating to the art trade. Chinese art was a promising field of scholarship in terms of professional possibilities, both from the academic and trading points of view, in the same way that the Italian primitives appeared to be at the beginning of the 20th century. There was a common pattern in Sirén’s career: he specialised in an emerging art-historical field, researched and published extensively, managing to become an internationally recognised authority in the field, collected a few pieces of his own, had them appraised by other experts, exhibited in a public museum, and sold at the peak value, and eventually, while he could have quietly sat back, he moved onto a new field. During the years of his work as an expert on Italian art, for instance, Sirén had collected old masters, which he later, in 1919, sold, making an extraordinary profit, thanks to the established popularity of the Italian primitives at a time when their work was in high demand, but not much was available.⁶³⁵ Certainly his work, writing, appraising, lecturing, and advising, contributed to increased quotations.

633 *The Walls and Gates of Peking* (1924), *Chinese Sculpture from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century* (1925), and *The Imperial Palaces of Peking* (1926). In 1925 Sirén also tried to have his books published in Italy, but the proposal did not go through. Letter from Lionello Venturi to Osvald Sirén 21 December 1925 (“Sollecitai il Tumminelli perché le desse una risposta telegrafica. Spero che l’avrà fatto. Ma poiché i quattrini mancano, sarà stata una risposta negative”) and letter from Tumminelli to Sirén, 28 December 1925 (“Sono dolentissimo dovervi comunicare che avendo attentamente studiata la vostra proposta non siamo in grado di assumere un impegno così gravoso per la nostra casa e rinunciamo con dispiacere e per il momento a realizzare un così vasto sogno che avevamo accarezzato da tanto tempo. Saremo però sempre letei di mantenere I migliori rapporti con voi nella Speranza che al più presto si presenti l’occasione per pubblicare qualche volume insieme.”), in SA.

634 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*; Perna, “A Satisfaction to the Heart and to the Intellect”.

635 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 81.

In 1923, because his second period of travelling had been so long, Sirén lost his chair at the University of Stockholm and settled in Paris where he lived from 1926. Consequently, when he returned to Europe, he was jobless. This situation forced him into a position as an independent scholar, making a living from his publications, lectures, and appraisals.⁶³⁶ However, this new situation also gave him the opportunity to organise and study the research material he had brought back with him, resulting in the publication of his main volumes about Chinese art. It also allowed him to focus on organising, promoting, and selling the Chinese antiquities and artworks he had collected. He had learned from his practice as an advisor, intermediary, and authenticator, and, like many other colleagues (e.g. Berenson), he had gathered a collection of his own. He knew he could secure valuable artworks for himself by relying as much on his own connoisseurship as on his experience of the market, and of scouting for others, and his growing network. It was also clear by then that his work regarding the aesthetic background and discourse would enhance the value of the collection. His authority on Chinese art and his discourse based on Formalism and primitivism contributed to contextualisation and promotion of Chinese art and thus provided input to its collection practices.

Just as he had done with his collection of Italian old masters, Sirén published books that contextualised and legitimised the value of Chinese artworks both from the perspective of connoisseurship and of art-historical discipline. From the scholarly point of view, Chinese art was positioned within the frame of a primitivist aesthetic discourse, which also included the Italian old masters, thus bridging the two. This frame affected the popularity, the perception, and the value of Chinese art. Nevertheless, he thought to optimise his returns by having the collection exhibited in a museum and appraised by specialist art dealers, and the works of art independently presented by experts in a well-illustrated catalogue.⁶³⁷ Indeed those who contributed to the catalogue, and Sirén's contact with some of the most renowned art collectors and art dealers – M. Charles Vignier (1863–1934), Ching Tsai Loo (1880–1957), and Sadajiro Yamanaka (1866–1936) – and art collectors, suggest that he had become a “well-known member of the Asian Art scene in Paris”.⁶³⁸ The catalogue was entitled *Documents d'Art chinois de la collection Osvald Sirén* (1925) and the exhibition took place at The Cernuschi Museum of the Asian Arts in Paris for an extended period and was well received internationally, attracting vibrant critical reviews.⁶³⁹ Sirén

636 Ibid., 81–96.

637 Ibid., 84.

638 Sirén, “A Reconstruction of a Great Collection of Chinese Sculpture,” 75; Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 105.

639 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans* 84–85. The catalogue featured contributions from important specialists on Oriental art, and the exhibition was extended for a longer period (initially it was planned for a few months but it continued until 1926). The exhibition received publicity through French and Swedish newspapers. Prefazione

eventually sold most of the artworks from his collections to the National Museum in Stockholm.⁶⁴⁰

3.5.4 From the Italian primitives to Chinese Art

Riccardo Gualino and Lionello Venturi's frequent visits to Paris in the 1920s, when Sirén was living in the city, indicate that Sirén was in a position to influence the entrepreneur's collecting choices and to facilitate his shift in interest from Italian old masters to Chinese artworks, which he began to purchase in 1923.⁶⁴¹ According to Sirén, Gualino started to collect Chinese art as a consequence of his sojourns in Paris, as he became aware of the similarities with the Italian religious art of the Early Renaissance, while he also appreciated the convenient prices.⁶⁴² However, similarities with the Italian old masters should have come as no surprise when one bears in mind that Lionello Venturi had already made reference to Oriental art in connection to the Italian primitives as early as 1915. Nevertheless, the recurring references to Sirén in relation to the Gualino Collection, suggest that he played a part in inspiring and cultivating Gualino's new interest, although it is difficult to establish the exact extent of his role.

Gualino made contact with Sirén through Lionello Venturi. The first remaining letter between the two art historians is dated 1925. However, other biographical information suggests that they had known each other since the beginning of the 20th century.⁶⁴³ (Figs. 1–4) At the time, Sirén had already been involved in the Italian art trade and scholarship and, therefore, there had been plenty of opportunities for the two to meet and network. In particular, in the early 1900s, Sirén had been in contact with Adolfo Venturi, who he most probably visited in Rome, and published

V–XIII: La collection de M. Sirén est exposée au Musée Cernuschi depuis 1924 dans deux salles spéciales p.V. (1925–Ars asiatica VII, Documents d'Art chinois de la collection Osvald Sirén, Paris and Bruxelles Van Oest).

640 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 84, 97–101.

641 Cesarina Gualino's diaries and temporary import documents, in particular no. 52, 27 December 1925 (duplicate of no. 47, 12 January 1923), in FRG; Catalogues of the collection (1926 and 1928).

642 Sirén, "A Reconstruction of a Great Collection of Chinese Sculpture," 75–76.

643 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Osvald Sirén, 21 December 1925, in SA. It gives the impression that they were already well acquainted. In Lionello Venturi's archive there is a copy of one of Sirén's books published in 1912, *Nyförfärfvade konstverk i Stockholms högskolas samling*, with a dedication by the author 'All' amico Lionello Venturi con saluti affettuosi dall'autore.' Later, in 1920, Venturi gifted a copy of his book on Leonardo to Sirén with a dedication by the author 'A Osvald Sirén un amichevole omaggio'. Moreover, Lionello Venturi, who worked for *L'Arte*, lived in Rome until 1912, when Sirén joined the CIHA conference in the Italian capital.

articles in his journal, *L'Arte*, from 1904 onwards.⁶⁴⁴ J. J. Tikkanen, Sirén's professor at the University of Helsinki, was the first link between them. Tikkanen had been in contact with the Italian art historian since the end of the 19th century, and had shared a commitment to establish art history as a specific academic discipline.⁶⁴⁵ Sirén and Lionello Venturi were thus both from the first generation of academically educated art historians, who were open to include aesthetic matters in art-historical scholarship.⁶⁴⁶ In 1912 they were both invited to the CIHA conference in Rome as recognised experts on the Italian old masters.⁶⁴⁷ They had also been acquainted with Berenson. For both of them, the American scholar had been an inspirational figure regarding

644 Letters from Osvald Sirén to Adolfo Venturi, in FAV. The first letter preserved is dated 26 March 1903 (VT S2 b061 01), in FAV. In at least two letters he mentioned the intention to visit Adolfo Venturi's home, on 31 January 1907 (VT S2 b061 03) ("Forse vediamo (sic!) in marzo in Roma (sic!), se posso vengo pure a studiare le pitture trecentesche a Napoli."), 15 June 1908, (VT S2 b061 04) ("Vengo a Roma nei primi giorni di giulio (sic!) e spero di trovare Lei ancora a casa."), 11 January 1914 (VT S2 b061 06) ("Spero che Lei si troverà meglio ed avrà recuperato la luce al nostro prossimo incontro; spero almeno nel estate (sic!).") and then in 21 June 1920 (VT S2 b061 07) ("mille grazie della Sua lettera piena di vecchia amicizia. Sarebbe veramente un grande piacere per me di salutarla personalmente. Io mi troverò un paio di giorni a Pisa e Lucca, ma sarò di ritorno a Firenze il sabato (sic!) e poi voglio partire al più presto per Bologna etc."). The articles that Osvald Sirén published in *L'Arte* are: Osvald Sirén, "Di alcuni pittori fiorentini che subirono l'influenza di Lorenzo Monaco," *L'Arte. Rivista di storia dell'arte medievale e moderna* 7 (1904): 337–355; Osvald Sirén, "Alcune opere sconosciute di Bernardo Daddi," *L'Arte. Rivista di storia dell'arte medievale e moderna* 8 (1905): 280–281; Osvald Sirén, "Notizie di alcuni minori fiorentini," *L'Arte. Rivista di storia dell'arte medievale e moderna* 8 (1905): 48–119; Osvald Sirén, "Studi di musei e gallerie. Notizie critiche sui quadri sconosciuti nel museo cristiano Vaticano," *L'Arte. Rivista di storia dell'arte medievale e moderna* 9 (1906): 321–335; Osvald Sirén, "Quattrocento. Gli affreschi del Paradiso degli Alberti (Lorenzo di Niccolò e Mariotto di Nardo)," *L'Arte. Rivista di storia dell'arte medievale e moderna* 11 (1908): 179–196; Osvald Sirén "Alcune note aggiuntive a quadri primitivi nella galleria Vaticana," *L'Arte. Rivista di storia dell'arte medievale e moderna* 24 (1921) 24–28, 97–102; Osvald Sirén, "Come vediamo l'arte cinese," *L'Arte. Rivista di storia dell'arte medievale e moderna* 34, no. 4 (1931): 295–311.

645 Vakkari, *Focus on Form*; letters from J. J. Tikkanen to Adolfo Venturi (1892–1937), in FAV. In particular letter 24 October 1892 (VT T1 b43 01). "Essendo ritornato all'Italia per completare i miei studi archeologici, mi ho recato alla Direzione della R. Galleria per ottenere l'ingresso libero alle collezioni. Mi hanno però risposto, che vuole un permesso ministeriale. Perciò mi trovo costretto di disturbarla, preghiatisimo Signore, con la domanda fi gentilmente voler mandarmi un tale permesso, se vi pare che io possa ottenerlo. Spero che Lei mi ricordi ancora. Venuto a Roma avrò l'onore di da nuovo fare la Sua conoscenza. La prego di scusare la maniera di cui maltratto (sic!) la lingua italiana e di credermi, anticipando i miei ringraziamenti."

646 Vakkari, "Alcuni contemporanei finlandesi di Lionello Venturi".

647 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 191–193; Iamurri, "Berenson e la pittura moderna e la nuova critica italiana," 78.

methods of connoisseurship, the formalist theoretical ground, and the interest in Italian primitivism in terms of formal synthesis, emotions and spirituality.⁶⁴⁸

The relationship between Venturi and Sirén entered a new phase at the beginning of the 1920s. Between 1920 and 1921, Sirén, who was already preparing for his second journey to Asia, spent a lot of time in Italy researching for his major book on the 13th century Tuscan painting.⁶⁴⁹ His new interest in Eastern art was blossoming out of his first tour of the Orient, but his main focus was still on the Italian primitives. While in Italy he also had the chance to reconnect with Adolfo Venturi and to resume his links with *L'Arte*.⁶⁵⁰ It is likely that in these circumstances he would renew his old ties with Lionello Venturi as well.⁶⁵¹ Because the Italian art historian was assisting Gualino at the time with purchasing Italian old master paintings – the main reason for Sirén's presence in the country – this might also have been when he first made contact with the collector. In this regard it is useful to recall here that in his book on Tuscan painting, Sirén included two artworks (pls. 7 and 110) that would later enter the Gualino Collection (pl. 1, 1926 and pl. 6, 1928; pl. 4, 1928).⁶⁵² (Figs. 22–23, 30–31)

In 1926 Sirén wrote about one of these paintings, the *Madonna with Child*, attributing it to Cimabue.⁶⁵³ (Figs. 30–31) Sirén had probably had the chance to see the

648 Sirén was in Florence and probably visited Berenson's house in 1912–1913, at more or less the same time as Venturi's first visit to the American scholar. Letters from Osvald Sirén to Bernard Berenson, 21 December 1912 and 29 August 1913, in BBL; letter from Lionello Venturi to Bernard Berenson, 22 January 1913, in BBL.

649 Osvald Sirén, *Toskanische Maler im XIII Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Cassirer, 1922). The original work was published in Swedish (*Toskanska målare på tolvhundratalet: Lucca, Pisa, Florens*, Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & Söner, 1922), but the book in Lionello Venturi's collection (now at the University of Perugia library) suggests that he read the German version.

650 Letter from Osvald Sirén to Adolfo Venturi, 21 June 1920 (VT S2 b061 07), in FAV. In this letter Sirén tells Adolfo Venturi about his tour through Italian cities and about his plan to pay him a visit. He also postponed his article for *L'Arte* to the following year. Osvald Sirén, "Alcune note aggiuntive a quadri primitivi nella Galleria Vaticana," in *L'Arte. Rivista di storia dell'arte medievale e moderna* 24 (1921): 24–38.

651 For instance, Lionello Venturi's dedication to Osvald Sirén handwritten on the book *La critica e l'arte di Leonardo da Vinci* (1919) that he gave as a gift to the Scandinavian colleague suggests that they met in Turin in the summer 1920. "A Osvaldo (sic!) Sirén amichevole omaggio di Lionello Venturi, Torino 12 VII. 1920". The book makes reference to Sirén's previous publication on the same artist (p.163–164).

652 Sirén, *Toskanische Maler im XIII Jahrhundert; Venturi, La collezione Gualino; Venturi, Alcune opere della collezione Gualino*.

653 Osvald Sirén, "Considerations sur l'oeuvre de Cimabue. A propos de la Madone de la collection Gualino, à Turin," *Revue de l'art ancien et moderne* 49 (1926): 73–88. Venturi made reference to Sirén's work in this regard in both catalogues, in 1926 (pl. 1: refers to the 1922 book) and 1928 (pl. 6: refers to the 1926 article). Letter from Lionello Venturi to Osvald Sirén, 21 December 1925, in SA. Venturi and Gualino agreed upon Sirén's publication of an article about the Cimabue Madonna (today attributed to Duccio di Buoninsegna, Galleria Sabauda, Turin). "Naturalmente l'avv.

artwork during his tours of Italian cities in 1925, when it had already entered the Gualino Collection.⁶⁵⁴ (Figs. 34–35) The second artwork mentioned in Sirén’s book on Tuscan painting was the *Madonna with Child*, then attributed to Berlinghiero. (Figs. 22–23) This painting entered the Gualino Collection in 1928, but it had already come to Italy in 1925 from a Swedish private collection through Sirén’s contact with the Italian antiquarian Giuseppe Sangiorgi (1850–1928).⁶⁵⁵ (Figs. 25–27) While the import document shows a generic reference to a Byzantine Madonna with Child, after undergoing a restoration at the suggestion of the Sangiorgi Gallery, it was recognised as a work by Berlinghiero and, as such, it was declared as of national importance by the Italian State in 1930.⁶⁵⁶ (Figs. 24, 28–29)

Gualino non ha alcuna obiezione contro il Suo articolo nella *Revue de l’Art ancien et moderne*. Anzi sarà lieto di leggerlo, come sarò lieto io.”

- 654 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 105; document of temporary import, no. 136, 25 May 1929, which refers to a previous document dated 2 February 1925 (“bolletta doganale vedi pregresso verbale”), in FRG. Moreover a document from the export office of the Royal Gallery of Venice stated that the artwork, at the time attributed to Duccio di Buoninsegna, had been previously imported on 22 April 1924 (“Dai documenti di questo Ufficio di esportazione risulta che la grande tavola di metri 1,85 x 1,11 trecentesca senese ‘Madonna con Bambino’ attribuita a Duccio è stata importata il 22 aprile 1924 proveniente da Vienna.”), in FRG. The artwork had been the subject of a controversial situation internationally, which was also discussed by Duveen and Berenson in America. Letters from Duveen to Berenson (see footnote 502). The artwork was in the Gualino art collection by 1925, when Sirén wrote to Gualino in order to receive his consent to the publication of his article on Cimabue’s Madonna (see footnote 656).
- 655 Giuseppe Sangiorgi was an antiquarian based in Rome but extending his business to an international network. He had a branch of his business in Turin. Pettenati, “Le raccolte antiquariali,” 21. Letter from Sangiorgi Gallery to Lionello Venturi, 21 March 1928, in FRG. “Secondo il tuo desiderio mi affretto a mandarti il certificato d’importazione per la Madonna del Berlinghieri venduta all’avv. Gualino”. The antiquarian also attached the original document of temporary import no. 28, 10 October 1925 from Monaco “una pittura su tavola”. Bank of Italy, *Art Collections in Palazzo Koch*, 167. The artwork is today attributed to Maestro della Madonna di Rovazzano and belongs to the Bank of Italy.
- 656 Document of notification 13 December 1930 (law 20 June 2019, no. 364 and 23 June 1912, no. 688), in FRG. Letters from the Sangiorgi Gallery to Osvald Sirén, 23 November 1925 (“Per quanto riguarda la Madonna del Berlinghieri, Le dirò con tutta schiettezza che il restauro da essa subite, presenta il dipinto stesso in modo dubbio; e le persone che io ho interessato, si asterranno dal prenderla in considerazione, appunto per tale ragione. Ella dovrebbe autorizzarmi a togliere l’enorme quantità di vernice sovrapposta a tale dipinto e riportarlo in pristino; e se di restauro ci sia bisogno, esso venga fatto assai più limitatamente, e con criterio scientifico, tenuto conto che trattasi di un dipinto di interesse e non di un quadro da salotto. Il renderlo un po’ diverso di apparenza da quello che è ora farà sì che esso non sarà, io spero, così facilmente riconosciuto dalla clientela, che secondo dichiarazioni avute, già lo vide in Germania, a Londra, e altrove.”) and 2 December 1925 (“Così pure ho preso nota dell’autorizzazione che Ella mi dà di togliere il sovrapposto al dipinto del Berlinghieri, per

Although the main reason for Sirén's trips to Italy and his contact with the Venturis in 1920 and 1921 concerned the Italian old masters, it seems likely that the Finnish–Swedish art historian would make mention of his new interest in Chinese art. He had been publishing articles on the subject since 1918 and he was ready to leave for his second journey to Asia (1921–1923).⁶⁵⁷ Moreover, Lionello Venturi had proved to be sensitive to the topic of Oriental art since his first encounter with Berenson in 1913. The reconnection between Lionello Venturi and Sirén at the beginning of the 1920s came at a time when the relationship between the Italian art historian and Bernard Berenson was about to cool down. At this stage, Sirén played an inspirational role both in relation to the theoretical ground and to the study and collecting of Chinese art. At this time a new direction indeed developed in Venturi's aesthetic discourse, which became characterised by a growing emphasis on the conceptual use of the primitive in relation to mystical aspects. Sirén's influence might also help to explain the evolution of the Gualino Collection into a collaborative and strategic practice after 1922, as well as the increasing interest in Chinese art.

Although Venturi's first mention of Chinese art was referred to as part of a general aesthetic discourse, for example, in his inaugural address of 1915, it was not until the beginning of the 1920s that he began to familiarise himself with it in a more substantial way. In his personal library there were books by the major authorities in the field, such as Laurence Binyon (1869–1943), Arthur David Waley (1889–1966), and Leigh Ashton (1897–1983).⁶⁵⁸ In 1926, probably in preparation of the first catalogue of the Gualino Collection, he sent letters from Paris to his father, Adolfo Venturi, in which he mentioned his efforts to study Chinese art under the mentorship of Sirén, whom he considered the greatest expert in the field.⁶⁵⁹ Lionello Venturi explained

cercare di riportarlo in pristino. Non appena possibile farò fare tale lavoro ad un mio restauratore assai pratico ed esperto.”), in SA; Venturi refers to Sirén's publications when compiling the text for the catalogues to the Gualino Collection. In particular, in regard to the Madonna by Berlinghiero, he invited readers to observe the different appearance of the painting before and after removing old varnishes by comparing the illustration in Sirén's book (1925) and the one in the Gualino catalogue (1928).

657 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 57.

658 Marconi, *Relazione sulla catalogazione del fondo Lionello Venturi*. Books by Sirén and other sinologists can be found at the Fondo Lionello Venturi in Turin, Fondo Lionello Venturi in Perugia, and at the Lionello Venturi Archive in Rome. In the library of the University of Helsinki there is a copy of *Il gusto dei primitivi* (1926) by Venturi that the author sent to Osvald Sirén, as the personal card still in the volume states: ‘Omaggio di Lionello Venturi. Professore di Storia dell'arte. R. Università di Torino’.

659 Letter from Lionello to Adolfo Venturi, 28 May 1926 (VT V1 b45 19), in FAV. “Sto studiando quanto posso arte cinese. Ho veduto Sirén di ritorno dall'America, pieno di fotografie di pitture cinesi molto belle, come in Europa non si vedono. E ce ne sono alcune veramente insorpassabili”. Letter from Lionello to Adolfo Venturi, 1 June 1926 (VT V1 b45 20), in FAV. “Qui si studia bene l'arte orientale, e comincio

that Sirén brought to his attention a range of material of superior quality that was otherwise inaccessible.⁶⁶⁰

However, despite Venturi's best efforts to study Chinese art first-hand, his expertise remained very limited: he did not produce any scholarly publication in this regard and indeed his interest declined during the following decade. Therefore, he had no tools for directly sourcing, authenticating or evaluating the originality and value of Chinese artworks and it does not seem likely that he would have been able to gather a collection of Chinese art equalling the quality of that owned by Gualino. It is significant that, although the international art market was quite competitive, the Gualino Collection, in a relatively short time, secured a coherent group of Chinese artworks of the first order in terms of their aesthetic importance, revealing a strategic approach to the representation of different epochs and styles.⁶⁶¹

Berenson as well, although providing the initial inspiration, would be of little help when it came to advising on actual purchases, authentications, and appraisals. While he might have been influential regarding the bringing together of Chinese art and the Italian primitives theoretically and materially within the frame of his discourse and his collection, Berenson never developed a depth of connoisseurship on Oriental art. He had collected Chinese art between 1911 and 1917, but his professional expertise was very limited.⁶⁶² Chinese art converged and was appropriated, along with the Italian primitives, within the frame of his collection that reflected his aesthetic discourse based on a formalist conception of the primitive. Similarly, his discourse had been a useful tool in order to justify – thus projecting meaning and value – the unusual mix of artworks in the Stewart Gardner Collection. His concern with the American collection of Chinese artworks had been limited to this function and he had not been involved in their acquisition.

Instead Sirén could provide access to good quality artworks and, with his authority, guarantee their authenticity, while his aesthetic discourse provided validation of their importance. Therefore, Sirén should be considered as the primary connection and impulse behind Gualino's increasing interest in Oriental art. It is likely that Sirén and Lionello Venturi reconnected in Paris in 1923, when the Finnish-Swedish art

a capirci qualche cosa". Letter from Lionello Venturi to Osvald Sirén, 21 December 1925, in SA. "Buon lavoro in America. Mi avverta del suo ritorno perché possa venire a Parigi a sentire le novità dei due mondi". Letter from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, s.d.-before September 1926 (VT V1 b44 86). "...farei il mio solito viaggio 15 giugno–15 luglio a Parigi e Londra".

660 Letter from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, 28 May 1926, 1 June 1926, in FAV.

661 Caffarelli, "Chinese Art"; Suriano, "Chinese Sculpture from the Gualino Collection," 37–47; Sirén, "A Reconstruction of a Great Collection of Chinese Sculpture," 75.

662 Letters and invoices from Charles Vignier to Bernard Berenson, in BBL; Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 26.

historian had settled in the city on returning from his trip to China.⁶⁶³ At this point it was mainly the interest in Chinese art that brought them together. The fact that all of the Chinese artworks acquired for the Gualino Collection between 1923 and 1928 came from Paris seems to confirm that Sirén might have had a direct role in their acquisition.⁶⁶⁴ (Fig. 33) Sirén's influence was key, not only in terms of an aesthetic discourse focused on the importance of spiritual intuition in making art, but also as a practical connection for sourcing artworks and as an authoritative reference for appraisals.

Many of the artworks acquired by Gualino between 1923 and 1929 show some link to Sirén. Some of the sculptures were purchased from antiquarians close to the Finnish-Swedish art historian, such as Charles Vignier, La Compagnie de Chine et des Indes, and C. T. Loo.⁶⁶⁵ In particular, two of the first four artworks he purchased, the wooden *Sitting Bodhisattva T'ang* and *Head of Bosatsu*,⁶⁶⁶ had been exhibited at The Cernuschi Museum of the Asian Arts in 1924, the same year that Sirén's artworks were on show there.⁶⁶⁷ (Figs. 16, 16 b) This event would suggest that those artworks might have come directly from his collection. Sirén, although he sold most of his artworks in a block to the National Museum in Stockholm, informed the institution that he had negotiated the sale of the Buddhist sculptures with another collector.⁶⁶⁸

Another sign of the direct connection with Sirén in those years is the attempt by the art historian to have his books on Chinese art published in Italy. In this concern he asked Lionello Venturi to promote his cause with the publisher Tumminelli, who would later publish the first catalogue of the Gualino Collection. Although Venturi

663 In 1923, Lionello Venturi and Riccardo Gualino visited Paris, among other reasons, to see the collector's wife, Cesarina, who was for a time attending dance classes in the French capital. Marconi, "Cesarina Gualino musa mecenate pittrice," 141.

664 Documents of temporary import, no. 52, 27 December 1925 (duplicate no. 47, 12 January 1923); no. 6, 8 July 1927; no. 25, 29 September 1928; no. 20, 19 March 1928; no. 36, 2 December 1928, no. 37, 10 December 1928, in FRG. In 1929, Gualino purchased Chinese artworks during his journey with Lionello Venturi in America. Document of temporary import (from New York), no. 50, 25 April 1929 (from custom declaration 2215, 14 February 1929).

665 As for example Vignier provided the Wei Stele (Venturi 1926 pl. 69), la Galerie de la Compagnie de Chine et des Indes provided the Stele dated 544 (Venturi 1928: pl. 86), and Loo the Stele dated 527 (Sirén 1925: pl. 152–153); Suriano, "Chinese Sculpture from the Gualino Collection".

666 Venturi, *La collezione Gualino*, pls. 71 and 72.

667 The exact circumstances of the purchase of these artworks remains unclear because the document of temporary import 52, 27 December 1925 (in FRG) is in fact registered as a duplicate of the original document issued on the 12 January 1923. This might be a consequence of the exhibition at The Cernuschi Museum subsequent to the purchase. However, the issue of a duplicate also involved the other Chinese artworks despite not being exhibited at The Cernuschi Museum in 1924.

668 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 84, 97–101.

indeed contacted Tumminelli, the attempt had a negative result.⁶⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the art historian wrote a critical review about Sirén's book on Chinese sculpture, along with other articles designed to publicise Chinese art among a wider audience, in the newspaper *Il Secolo*. Probably with the same popularizing spirit, he edited the publication of another article written by Sirén on *L'Arte* in 1931, which intended to promote the appreciation of Asian art.⁶⁷⁰ (Fig. 43)

Meanwhile Sirén had left Paris to return to Stockholm at the end of 1926. Nevertheless, he continued to follow the development of the Gualino Collection with interest. In 1927, for instance, he sent an appraisal, the only one still in existence, about a Chinese sculpture, which was written on the back of a photograph in the same way that he had done with the Italian old masters.⁶⁷¹ (Figs. 41–42) Moreover, in 1928, the second catalogue of the Gualino Collection also contained extensive references to Sirén's texts similarly to the previous publication in 1926.⁶⁷² Sirén indeed had published many of the artworks owned by Gualino, in some cases before his

669 Letter from publishing house Tumminelli to Osvald Sirén 28 December 1925, in SA; letter from Lionello Venturi to Osvald Sirén, 21 December 1925, in SA. See footnote 636.

670 Venturi, "La scultura cinese"; Venturi, "Novità sull'arte cinese"; Venturi, "I mercati artistici"; Osvald Sirén, "Come vediamo l'arte cinese," *L'Arte. Rivista di storia dell'arte medievale e moderna* 34, no. 4 (1931): 295–311; letter from Lionello Venturi to Osvald Sirén, 23 March 1931, in SA. "La ringrazio molto delle fotografie e naturalmente sarò lieto di pubblicare tutte le sculture che Lei mi ha mandato, soltanto, poiché Lei parla in genere del gusto cinese e non soltanto delle opere d'arte del museo di Stoccolma, Le chiedo se Ella approva la mia idea di illustrare il Suo articolo anche con altre riproduzioni. Per esempio, Lei parla degli animali cinesi: non sarebbe il caso si riproducesse il Leone della collezione Gualino che Lei ha pubblicato nel Burlington Magazine?"

671 Appraisal, 29 April 1927, in FRG. Bronze Bodhisattva identified by Sirén as an example typical of the Sui period and thus very rare and of a particularly high quality. The photograph bears the stamp of Edgar Worch, a German dealer of Chinese art. However, there are no signs that Gualino would have bought this sculpture.

672 In chronological order according to Gualino's purchases, the collection's artworks illustrated by Sirén in the 1920s are: (document of temporary import 1923/27 December 1925), *Stele Wei* 6th century (Venturi 1926: pl. 69; Venturi 1928: pl. 85; Sirén 1925: pl. 138), *Head of Bodhisattva Chou* (Venturi 1926: pl. 70; Venturi 1928: pl. 87; Sirén 1925: pl. 304b), *Sitting Bodhisattva T'ang* (Venturi 1926: pl. 71, Venturi 1928: pl. 94; Sirén is quoted but a specific reference is not indicated), *Head of Bosatsu* (Venturi 1926: pl. 72; Venturi 1928: pl. 104; Sirén is quoted but a specific reference is not indicated); (certificate of temporary import 8 July 1927) *Sitting Lion* (Venturi 1928, pl. 84; Venturi makes a generic reference to Sirén without quoting a specific source); (document of temporary import 19 March 1928) *Stele Wei* 544 d.c. (Venturi 1928: pl. 86; Sirén 1925: pl. 182); *Standing Bodhisattva Sui* (Venturi 1928: pl. 88; Sirén 1923: pl. 230); *Head Yuan* (Venturi 1928: pl. 95; Sirén 1925: pl. 611 and Sirén 1930: pl. 118).

purchase and in some cases remaining the only one illustrating them.⁶⁷³ (Fig. 21) Sirén's catalogues were indicated as a source in both the Gualino Collection's catalogues and, in some cases, his text was quoted almost word for word by Venturi. This was the case with the *Wei Stele* from the 6th century, which Sirén published in 1925 indicating it as Gualino's property.⁶⁷⁴ (Figs. 17–18, 33) Just as Venturi had looked for validation of the collection's old masters through the highest authorities in the field, in a similar way Sirén offered the best option in relation to Oriental art. In the catalogues the reference to Sirén and to his renowned publications contributed to the legitimisation of the Chinese artworks in the Gualino Collection.

Sirén is also often reported as the owner of the photographs of the artworks or as the holder of their copyright. This was the case with the photograph of the *Bodhisattva's Head*, that was illustrated in plate 304 B in Sirén's book. Despite the sculpture being Gualino's property, Sirén is mentioned as the holder of the photographic rights, which would suggest that Sirén was the author of the photo.⁶⁷⁵ This is an important aspect because Sirén's jealousy and great consideration for his photographic archive would later prove to be very useful. Some of the Gualino Collection's artworks were heavily damaged in a traffic accident in the 1940s, when, following on from their earlier confiscation, they were transported from Turin to Rome.⁶⁷⁶ (Figs. 47–48)

673 This is the case for instance with the artworks – from document of temporary import 2 and 10 December 1928 – such as the *Walking Lion* (Sirén 1925, frontispiece and Sirén 1930, vol 3, pl. 7), the *Stele Wei* dated 527 (Sirén 1925, pl. 152–153) and the *Standing Buddha T'ang*, not published in the catalogues to the Gualino Collection and identified as the *Eleven-headed Bodhisattva early T'ang period* (Sirén 1925, pl. 379, 391 a-b and 392 a-b). These artworks had not been included in any of the Gualino catalogues because they had been purchased after the exhibition took place and the catalogue was published in 1928. Sirén thus published them in 1925, before they entered the Gualino Collection in 1928. See Appendix 3.

674 Sirén, *Chinese Sculptures from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century*, pl. 138; Venturi, *La collezione Gualino*, pl. 69; Venturi, *Alcune opere della collezione*, pl. 85. Document of temporary import from France no. 52, 27 December 1925 (duplicate of document no. 47, 12 January 1923), in FRG. The artwork now belongs to the Galleria Sabauda, Turin.

675 Venturi, *La collezione Gualino*, pl. 70 and Venturi, *Alcune opere della collezione Gualino*, pl. 87. Document of temporary import from France no. 52, 27 December 1925 (duplicate of document no. 47, 12 January 1923), in FRG. The artwork now belongs to the Galleria Sabauda, Turin.

676 Fini, "Per una biografia di Riccardo Gualino come capitano di industria, 253–256; Mortari Vergara Caffarelli, "Chinese Art," 73–77; Suriano, "Chinese Sculpture from the Gualino Collection". Following Gualino's financial breakdown, his collection was confiscated in 1931 by the Bank of Italy in order to repay creditors (more about this in the following chapter). The Chinese artworks were first transferred to the branch of the Bank of Italy in Turin. Later, in 1939, the Bank became the sole owner of those artworks, which it had moved to their headquarters in Rome in 1946. Because of an accident occurring while the artworks were in transit, some of them were destroyed and others seriously damaged. Consequently, they were sent to the ICR-Istituto

Later on, in 1960, when Sirén wrote an article about the collection, he suggested

Centrale di Restauro to undergo a long and complex restoration. Most of them were recovered, although some had been seriously compromised. Documents and letters regarding these events are kept at the ASBI in Rome. For the Bank's acquisition of the artworks, see: letter signed by Marcucci (ft.o/Marcucci), 6 April 1939, Segretariato, pratt. 1455, fasc. 1 (“...la Banca si è resa acquirente – con la sola esclusione del noto quadro attribuito a Piero della Francesca – della quota di spettanza dell’I.R.I. dei mobili ed oggetti d’arte provenienti dalla Liquidazione Gualino...”); memorandum, s.d., Segretariato, pratt. 1455, fasc. 2, sfasc. 1 (“Dopo non brevi trattative, l’Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale ha dato la propria accettazione alla proposta...per l’acquisto, da parte della Banca, della metà dei mobili ed oggetti d’arte a tutt’oggi residuati dalla Liquidazione Gualino...Il rimanente, che rappresenta il blocco quantitativamente e qualitativamente più importante, trovasi tutt’ora custodito presso la n/sede di Torino ed è formato...da opere di rilevante interesse artistico dell’Oriente asiatico...da oggetti d’arte Medioevale, del Rinascimento e Barocca...nonché da molti elementi artistici dell’800 e contemporanei”; appunto per il Dr. Colavolpe, 26 May 1978, Segretariato, pratt. 1455, fasc. 2, sfasc. 1, in ASBI. For the decision to move the oriental artworks to Rome and the organisation of the transport, see: letter from the governor of the Bank of Italy Luigi Einaudi to the director of the branch office in Turin, Domenico Caldana, 13 August 1946, Segretariato, pratt. 1455, fasc. 5, sfasc. 2 (“sono a pregarLa di voler provvedere al trasporto a Roma degli oggetti già della collezione Gualino...”); letter from Domenico Caldana to the governor of the Bank of Italy, 9 and 17 October 1946, Segretariato, pratt. 1455, fasc. 8 (“per informare che ... domani a mezzo camion e rimorchio della ditta Vinelli & Scotto di Torino, provvederò a spedire alla volta di codesti Centrali Uffici le opere d’arte di cui all’accluso elenco, corrispondente a quello inviatomi...”). For the accident, the fire, and the work of investigation and recovery of fragments, see: phonogram from the director of the branch, 23 October 1946, 11.10 p.m., Segretariato, pratt. 1455, fasc. 8 (“fonogramma urgentissimo. Informare che detto autocarro partito da Torino diretto Roma con valori artistici si è incendiato presso Grosseto al Km. 195 distruggendo grandissima parte dei valori.”); conservator Michelangelo Cagiano, report about the work carried out to collect and recover the sculptures’ fragments at the site of the accident, 16 February 1948, Segretariato, pratt. 1455, fasc. 2, sfasc. 2; correspondence between Domenico Caldana and Admeto Pettinari (General secretary of the Bank of Italy), 2 February–2 May 1948, Segretariato, pratt. 1455, fasc. 2, sfasc. 2, in ASBI. For the conservation process, see: letter from Cesare Brandi (director of the ICR) to Luigi Einaudi, 18 September 1947, Segretariato, pratt. 1455, fasc. 2, sfasc. 2 (“Mi è doveroso informare V.E. che gli oggetti della collezione Gualino, danneggiati nel noto incidente, sono qui giunti all’Istituto e che in questi giorni se ne è iniziato il restauro. Assicuro che l’esecuzione tecnica dei lavori sarà curata secondo i canoni scientifici...”); letter from Cesari Brandi to Pettinari (Bank of Italy), 30 November 1951, Segretariato, pratt. 1455, fasc. 2, sfasc. 2 (“...elenco delle statue di proprietà della Banca d’Italia...che sono state restaurate da questo Istituto,” among which are identifiable the *Sitting Lion* (Sirén 1960, p. 79), the *Stele Wei 544* (Sirén 1960, p. 85), *Eleven-headed Bodhisattva* (Sirén 1960, p. 89), the *Sitting Buddha T’ang* (Sirén 1960, p. 91), the *Walking Lion* (Sirén 1960, p. 77), the *Standing Buddha T’ang* (Sirén 1960, p. 91) not yet restored); note from the inspection to the ICR about the restoration method from Luigi Suttina (Bank of Italy) to Luigi Einaudi, 25 January 1948, Segretariato, pratt. 1455, fasc. 2, sfasc. 2 (“Gli oggetti restaurati...che erano ridotti in frantumi, rivivono nell’aspetto primitivo, sembra quasi ad opera di un miracolo, nonostante qualche lacuna che,

to the editor that he uses the photographs of the artworks he had taken prior the accident.⁶⁷⁷ Besides the images of the sculptures he had presented in his catalogues, Sirén also provided the photograph of the *Standing Buddha T'ang* that Gualino had imported in 1928, which had never been published prior the accident.⁶⁷⁸ This artwork had not been included in Gualino's catalogues and there was no other image of it showing its integral condition. While Sirén wanted to include in his article new photographs along the old ones only in relation to the animal sculptures, one can get a full-scale picture of the disaster when comparing his old pictures with those illustrating Suriano's article and showing the artworks in their state after the accident.⁶⁷⁹ (Figs. 19–21)

Sirén, Venturi, and Gualino's paths diverged during the 1930s. However, although the contact with Venturi remained sporadic, the archival documentation reveals a

abilmente mascherata con un metodo particolare, è difficile rilevare. Anche la primitiva patina è stata ricostituita con procedimenti appositamente studiati... Il prof. Brandi e i suoi valenti collaboratori nutrono buone e fondate speranze per il restauro di molti altri oggetti, compresi i due leoni, e ciò malgrado la mancanza di alcuni frammenti riscontrata nel lavoro di riordino dei rottami, tanto che, per non rinunciare a tutto quanto è umanamente possibile fare, si propongono di eseguire qualche ulteriore ricerca sul posto del sinistro..."); letter from Brandi to the Governor of the Bank of Italy, 7 September 1950, Segretariato, pratt. 1455, fasc. 2, sfasc. 2, in ASBI ("mi è grato comunicarLe che la ricomposizione della preziosa statua cinese raffigurante il Leone ruggente – s.c. *Walking Lion* – è ormai un fatto compiuto. Più di 4000 frammenti saldati ad uno ad uno ed inchiodati di bronzo. Il Leone inoltre è montato su un apposito cavalletto a sfere che ne permette il facile spostamento.").

- 677 Copy of the letter from Osvald Sirén to Lionello Lanciotti, 15 March 1960, in SA ("Many of the Gualino sculptures exists also in splendid large photographs made before the war, I believe, and I am including some from which you may judge the great difference in quality. It is also essential that some of the repaired sculptures and the two lions in particular, should be reproduced not only in their present state, but also in the state in which they were photographed before the war. I include early photographs...but I am very anxious to have it returned as quickly as possible because it is unique...these materials are more valuable to me than to anybody else.") and letter from Lionello Lanciotti to Osvald Sirén, 24 March 1960, in SA. Sirén, "A Reconstruction of a Great Collection of Chinese Sculpture". For a correspondence between the artworks illustrated in the article and those of the Gualino Collection not included in the catalogues to the collection see, Appendix 3.
- 678 I identified this sculpture with the *Bodhisattva Northern Qi Dynasty*. Sirén, "A Reconstruction of a Great Collection of Chinese Sculpture," 89. See footnote 662 and Appendix 3.
- 679 Sirén, "A Reconstruction of a Great Collection of Chinese Sculpture" and Suriano, "Chinese Sculpture from the Gualino Collection". The comparison is particularly striking in the following cases: *Stele Wei* 544 d.c. (Sirén p.85 and Suriano fig. 5), the *Standing Buddha T'ang* (Sirén p. 91 and Suriano fig. 14/14a), the *North Wei Stele* 527 d.c. (Sirén p. 86–87; Suriano fig. 4), the *Eleven-headed Bodhisattva early T'ang period* (Sirén p. 89 and Suriano fig. 10). See Appendix 3.

lifelong relationship based on respect and esteem.⁶⁸⁰ Sirén also continued to look at Gualino's career as a collector with interest. In 1959, while he was in Rome to take part in the award ceremony of the honorary degree from the University of Rome La Sapienza and, at the same time, to deliver a lecture at ISMEO, Sirén met Gualino once again.⁶⁸¹ Riccardo and Cesarina Gualino indeed attended Sirén's conference and invited him to their home on three occasions during his stay.⁶⁸² These were also opportunities to see the family's latest acquisitions of Chinese artworks.⁶⁸³

680 Correspondence between Lionello Venturi and Osvald Sirén, 1925–1961, in AS.

681 Perna, "A Satisfaction to the Heart and to the Intellect". The article deals with Sirén's relationship with ISMEO and with his appointment for his honorary degree from the University of Rome. Letter from Angelo Monteverde (Head of the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy at the University of Rome La Sapienza) to Osvald Sirén, 20 March 1959 ("Su richiesta dei colleghi Tucci e Venturi...in riconoscimento degli alti meriti da Lei acquisiti nel campo degli studi storico-artistici, ha deciso di conferirLe la laurea in Lettere Honoris causa") and 6 November 1959, in SA ("Il Magnifico Rettore di questa università ha fissato la data del sabato 19 dicembre p.v. per la cerimonia della laurea honoris causa"). The official communication of March 1959 from the University had been anticipated by Lionello Venturi, who was at the time holding the chair of Art History in the Faculty issuing the honorary degree, draft of the letter from Sirén to Venturi, 26 February 1959, in SA ("La sua gentilissima lettera per la quale m'informa che la Facoltà di Lettere dell'Università di Roma mi ha onorato con il titolo di Doctor (sic!) honoris causa mi è giunta ieri sera...per esprimere a Lei come vecchio amico e pure come portavoce della Facoltà i miei più vivi ringraziamenti... Mi sento legato con tanti fili di studi intellettuali e devozione artistica alla cultura italiana, antica e moderna, e perciò particolarmente toccato dal fatto che I miei lavori nel campo dell'arte orientale e italiano sono trovati degni di distinzione"). The ISMEO, in agreement with Sirén and the University of Rome, covered the scholar's travelling expenses from Sweden and organised a lecture in anticipation of the actual ceremony. Sirén first planned to deliver a lecture about "the beginnings of animal sculpture in China" (letter from Sirén to Giuseppe Tucci, president of ISMEO, 10 June 1959, in SA), then he thought about expressionism in Chinese painting (draft of the letter from Sirén to Mario Bussagli, 12 November 1959, in SA), and finally opted for a lecture about early Buddhist sculpture, which was delivered on 15 or 16 December 1959 (letter from Alberto Giuganino to Sirén, 19 November 1959, in SA).

682 There is mention of the encounters with Sirén and his wife in Cesarina Gualino's diaries, in FRG. I thank Beatrice Marconi for kindly bringing this information to my attention.

683 Letter from Riccardo Gualino to Osvald Sirén, 9 March 1960 ("Gli oggetti d'arte che ho attualmente a Roma e che Lei vide, furono da me acquistati dopo il mio ritorno dal confine") and draft of the letter from Osvald Sirén to Riccardo Gualino, 15 March 1960 ("Your kind promise to send me photographs of two or three of the Chinese stone sculptures which I saw in your home has filled me with expectations I hope you will find an occasion to carry out this promise very soon. Thanking you once more in advance for your kind co-operation and the delightful reception that you gave us in Rome...," in SA.

Gualino, recovered from his financial and legal problems, had begun to collect Chinese art again after the war.⁶⁸⁴ Sirén found the new artworks of interest and asked the collector to send him photographs, which were duly sent to him.⁶⁸⁵ (Figs. 39–40) Moreover, this encounter probably inspired Sirén's 1960 article on the Gualino Collection published in the ISMEO journal, *East and West*.⁶⁸⁶ This article remains one of the most extensive and thorough sources regarding Gualino's Chinese artworks.⁶⁸⁷ Sirén showed himself once again to be familiar with the artworks and to relate the events that involved them in a compelling way, including beautiful photographs from his beloved archive. The article was also a meaningful sign of the friendly relationship between Gualino and Sirén that lasted throughout their lives. Sirén took the opportunity to praise the collection for the high quality of its section on Oriental art, despite its compactness.⁶⁸⁸ Moreover, before eventually submitting the article to the journal, Sirén contacted Gualino in order to ask for clarification of the events and for his blessing for the publication.⁶⁸⁹ (Fig. 44)

Sirén's involvement in the Gualino' collecting project certainly made up for Venturi's lack of an expertise on Chinese art. The Finnish-Swedish art historian's support

684 Suriano, "La collezione di sculture cinesi," 34–35; Beatrice Marconi, "Riccardo e Cesarina Gualino a Roma. La seconda collezione," in *Le capitali d'Italia. Torino–Roma, 1911–1946. Arti, produzione, spettacolo*, eds. Marisa Vescovo and Netta Vespignani (Milano: Electa, 1997), 65–72.

685 Letter from Riccardo Gualino to Osvald Sirén, 9 March 1960 ("Come mia moglie scrisse alla gentile Sua Signora, prossimamente provvederò a fare le fotografie degli oggetti cinesi da Lei visti da casa mia a Roma e ne manderò a Lei, con gran piacere, una copia"), in SA; draft of letter from Osvald Sirén to Riccardo Gualino, 15 March 1960, in SA. Gualino kept his promise and Sirén thanked him for the photographs. Postcard from Osvald Sirén to Riccardo Gualino, 16 June 1960 ("Con i migliori ringraziamenti per le fotografie delle sculture cinesi e saluti affettuosi dal suo amico"), in FRG.

686 Sirén, "A Reconstruction of a Great Collection of Chinese Sculpture," 75–93.

687 Suriano, "Chinese sculpture from the Gualino Collection," 35.

688 Sirén, "A Reconstruction of a Great Collection of Chinese Sculpture," 76.

689 Letter from Sirén to Lionello Venturi, 21 February 1960, in ALV where Sirén introduced his idea about writing an article on the Chinese sculpture of the Gualino Collection. Letter from Osvald Sirén 4 March 1960, in FRG, directed to one 'caro amico', who presumably was Lionello Venturi, who then, in turn, handed it to Gualino (letter from Lionello Venturi to Riccardo Gualino, 7 March 1960, in FRG). Letter from Riccardo Gualino to Osvald Sirén, 9 March 1960, in SA, where Gualino stated that he received the manuscript of Sirén's article and gives some clarifications. Draft of letter from Osvald Sirén to Riccardo Gualino, 15 March 1960 ("...I did not want to send my article...before I had obtained your approval on its contents. I wanted in the first place to be agreeable to you in what I had to say regarding the pieces that belonged to you and to characterize your activities as a great art collector") and draft of letter from Osvald Sirén to Lionello Lanciotti 15 March 1960 ("The main cause for delay of the article was connected with my desire to submit it to Signor Gualino before I submitted it for publication"), in SA.

might have facilitated the growth of the Chinese section of the collection and might have been crucial in providing a strategic and systematic approach to the foundation of a collection of good quality that was representative of a broad spectrum of the developments in Chinese art in its homogeneity and coherence.⁶⁹⁰ However, one should nevertheless remember that his influence was also important in providing a theoretical background based on primitivism, spiritualism, and Formalism that was capable of embracing Chinese art. Venturi used theoretical tools to legitimise and to accommodate these artworks into the overall project in an organic way through his primitive frame. He indeed maintained a similar approach to that which Berenson had showed in connection to his collection and the one possessed by Isabella Stewart Gardner: he absorbed Asian art, in the same manner that he did with the Italian old masters, within a discourse founded on the concept of the primitive that served to emphasise an interpretation based on a Western perspective and modern aesthetics. The collection, oriented according to Venturi's notion of primitivism, became a frame for projecting a new meaning and value upon single artworks. The impact of Sirén's theory over Venturi's aesthetic ideas can be seen especially in the foregrounding of the mystical aspect associated with formalist primitivism.

3.5.5 The Influence of Theosophy

The emergence of a more profound spiritualism in Venturi's ideas during the 1920s can also be related to Theosophy, a religious and philosophical current with which Sirén had also been involved. One of Venturi's arguments in *The Taste of the Primitives*, which also resonated in the introduction to the catalogue of the Gualino Collection (1926), was the tension between primitive spiritualism and materialist naturalism. In this respect he also made a distinction between organised churches, – which he considered as promoting devotion and thus the illustrative reproduction of physical aspects – and individual spiritualism, which he saw in terms of expression of a metaphysical intuition. This kind of religiosity had been emphasised and promoted by the Theosophical movement since the previous century.

Theosophy was essentially a philosophical movement that emerged in the second half of the 19th century in the context of a dominant positivism and materialism.⁶⁹¹ Indeed at the time occultist discourse, which included Theosophy, emerged with the belief that science could contribute to proving the existence of the “spiritual

690 Sirén, “A Reconstruction of a Great Collection of Chinese Sculpture,” 75–93.

691 Founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky in 1875 in New York. James A. Santucci, “Theosophical Society,” in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, 2 vols, eds. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Antoine Faivre, Roelof van den Broek and Jean-Pierre Brach (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1114–1123.

realm”.⁶⁹² Occultism offered the option of spirituality beyond faith, introducing Eastern philosophies as alternatives to Western traditional creeds.⁶⁹³ This kind of alternative spirituality was embraced by modernist circles and became a source of artistic inspiration. Occultism, mysticism and esoteric spirituality became popular among intellectuals and artists in Europe at the turn of the 20th century, contributing to the shaping of modernist discourses.⁶⁹⁴ The spiritual aspect of modernism should be indeed looked at from the perspective of an unorthodox religiosity and beyond the inclusion of religious material aspects, such as iconography, rituals, beliefs and symbols, in modernist artworks.⁶⁹⁵

The spirituality and irrationality involved with occultism was not in contrast to the positivism of the age of the Enlightenment, but complementary.⁶⁹⁶ One should bear in mind that the fast progression of science and technology, which often resulted in the unexplainable and surreal, had a strong impact in shaping the new century’s ideas about reality. Occultism helped to “reframe” scientific discoveries at the turn of the 20th century.⁶⁹⁷ Consequently, the occultist’s appropriation of scientific discoveries, which had put in crisis traditional norms of representing material reality, contributed to inspiring avant-garde artists and to defining modernist discourses, such as Futurist research. The discovery of the X-ray and other entities that were invisible to the naked eye (electricity, radio waves, infrared, ultraviolet, and radioactivity) gave new insight into visual phenomena. The discoveries of the time, while redefining the conception of the material and physical world, contributed to reinforcing the occultist claim that a spiritual and metaphysical dimension exists beyond material appearances.⁶⁹⁸

Sirén’s interest in Theosophy can be considered as one of the factors influencing his spiritual emphasis in terms of inner life and revelation, which characterised his interest in primitivism and his aesthetic theory based on Formalism.⁶⁹⁹ Sirén had been an active member of the Theosophic community as far back as 1900, when he began writing for the journal of the Swedish branch of the association.⁷⁰⁰ Lionello Venturi’s contact with Theosophy, which might have been at the root of his increasing interest in spiritualism in the 1920s, has not yet been studied in detail, but it seems

692 Santucci, “Theosophical Society,” 1114–1123.

693 Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 12.

694 Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 4–5.

695 Nina Kokkinen, “Occulture as an Analytical Tool in the Study of Art,” *Aries* 13 (2007): 7–36.

696 Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 13.

697 Bauduin, “Science, Occultism, and the Art of the Avant-Garde in the Early Twentieth Century, 23–85”.

698 Ibid.

699 Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 10–14.

700 Ibid., 10.

that his involvement took place in the context of Gualino's intellectual circle, which hosted guests linked to Theosophy on several occasions.⁷⁰¹ The Theosophical movement had been particularly popular in Italy since the end of the 19th century and maintained a great influence on Italian culture until the first postwar period.⁷⁰² It especially attracted the attention of that part of society that wished to reform culture and social structures according to new values. It was popular among intellectuals and the bourgeoisie alike. In Italy it also attracted secular-minded thinkers, who were against the influence of the Catholic Church and who also supported feminism.

Since at the time it was common, indeed fashionable, among intellectual circles across Europe to be members of the Theosophical Society, this was probably also the case of Gualino's entourage.⁷⁰³ In the 1920s the Gualino household became an international network of avant-garde artists and intellectuals. In those years the Gualino circle included artists, dancers, and actors from Russia, such as Bella Hutter and Raja Markmann, Alexander and Clotilde Sakharoff and Georges and Ludmilla Pitoëff, as well as Mary Wigman, who had been a student of Rudolph Laban, who himself had been in direct contact with Theosophy.⁷⁰⁴ The pianist and composer from Ukraine, Marcelle de Manziarly (1899–1988), and the British dancer Cinthya Maugham (1907–1965), who had a direct link with Theosophy, also attended Gualino's circle regularly and both were close friends of Cesarina (1890–1992), Riccardo Gualino's wife.⁷⁰⁵ Theosophy certainly became one of her personal interests, studying it and introducing it often as a topic of conversation within her circle, as early as 1923.⁷⁰⁶

In 1919, while Gualino was still getting acquainted with Lionello Venturi, he helped his Russian business partner Samuel Gourevitch and his daughters to resettle in Turin as a consequence of the outbreak of the Bolshevik revolution, which also caused considerable financial damage to Gualino himself.⁷⁰⁷ The following year,

701 Intervista a Riccardo Gualino, 20 May 2010; Marconi, "Jessi Boswell e Cesarina Gualino," 73–75.

702 Marco Pasi, "Teosofia e antroposofia nell'Italia del primo Novecento," in *Storia d'Italia. Annali 25. Esoterismo*, ed. Gian Mario Cazzaniga (Torino: Einaudi, 2010), 569–598.

703 Bauduin, "Science, Occultism, and the Art of the Avant-Garde in the Early Twentieth Century," 23–55.

704 Gualino, *Frammenti di vita*, 100–103, 121–123; Ponzetti, *Il caso Gualino*, 9–24 (Program of the Theatre of Turin 1925–1929).

705 Marconi, "Jessi Boswell e Cesarina Gualino," 73–75.

706 Ponzetti, *Il caso Gualino*, 72–154. Entries in Cesarina Gualino's diary, 24 September 1923, 25 September 1923, in FAV. Moreover, in 22 October 1923, Cesarina took part in a conference held by Curuppumullage Jinarajadasa (1875–1953), a theosophical writer and president of the Theosophical Society. On the 16 December 1923, Cesarina expressed her interest in reading a book by the British Theosophist Charles Webster Leadbeater (1854–1934).

707 In particular Gualino lost his investment in the real estate project of building a new residential neighborhood in Saint Petersburg. Bermond, *Riccardo Gualino finanziere*

Gouretvitch also recommended his niece Bella to the care of the Gualinos. Bella Hutter came from a family of artists and intellectuals called the Markmanns. Cesarina Gualino became very close to these Russian women, thus becoming familiar with the modernist culture and network – exceptional in Italy at the time – that they brought with them. Bella, who had acquired some experience as a dancer in Russia, convinced Cesarina Gualino in pursuing an education as a modern dancer with her in France, introducing her into some of the most progressive circles of intellectuals and artists in Paris.⁷⁰⁸

After a period of education in France, Cesarina Gualino persuaded her fellow dancer friends to participate in a project in Italy, aiming at developing and spreading modernist culture grounded in a spiritual sensibility.⁷⁰⁹ In 1924, Cinthya Maugham also became involved in the woman's project. The foundation of the Theatre of Turin, originally Scribe Theatre, in 1925 was a result of Cesarina Gualino's vision. Her husband had first established a small theatre adjacent to his home. Later, when he bought the Theatre of Turin, he had the old building restored according to modern standards of architecture and design. Contemporary artists were in charge of decorations and scenography. The theatre premises also housed a school of avant-garde dance, Cesarina Gualino's primary interest. It was dedicated to a programme of original international performances of drama, dance, and music.⁷¹⁰ It was one of the few places in Italy where avant-garde performances, including those organised by Futurist artists, could be seen.⁷¹¹

The exposure of the Gualinos to a modernist entourage, in part involved with Theosophy, both during their trips to Paris and at home in the 1920s, coincided with their progressive departure from an antiquarian approach to art collecting. This was the time when Gualino began to be interested in and to buy both Oriental and modern art during his frequent visits to Paris. Lionello Venturi's presence at the Gualino residence became more and more frequent after their first encounter in 1918

ed imprenditore; Anderi and Bocchietto, *Sulle tracce di Riccardo Gualino*; Ponzetti, *Il caso Gualino*, 2–7; Adele Marini, ed., *Lo straordinario mondo di Riccardo e Cesarina Gualino*, accessed February 4, 2019, <https://www.libreriamarini.it/mostre/i-gualino-e-le-arti>.

- 708 In 1921 and 1922 Cesarina Gualino attended Georges Hébert, La Palestra, a gymnastic college in Deauville in Normandy, and in 1923, she spent one month in Paris attending Jeanne Ronsay's (1886–1953) dance school, where she also became acquainted with Isadora Duncan and Clotilde and Alexandre Sakharoff. Marconi, "Cesarina Gualino musa mecenate pittrice," 141; Marini, ed., *Lo straordinario mondo di Riccardo e Cesarina Gualino*.
- 709 Ponzetti, *Il caso Gualino*.
- 710 Ponzetti, *Il caso Gualino*, 8–24; d'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 221–232.
- 711 Ponzetti, *Il caso Gualino*, 8–24. The idea of a theatre is presented already in 1923. Bernardi, "Riccardo Gualino e la cultura torinese," 174–182.

until he was there on an almost daily basis, as it also emerges from several entries in Cesarina Gualino's diary and from the family photo album.⁷¹² He became an active force within the circle and in 1924 he assumed an important role in the theatre project as well. In these circumstances it seems natural to believe that Venturi was also exposed to Theosophically inspired conversations. This also certainly constituted a shared interest with Sirén at the time of his first meeting with the Italian collector in the mid-1920s. Therefore, the change in Gualino's collecting practice at the beginning of the 1920s might have been influenced by the new cultural tendencies he came into contact with. This contradicts the narrative of Gualino's memoir, in which he claimed that the shift in collecting was merely a consequence of his encounter with Venturi.⁷¹³ While Venturi procured the artworks and the aesthetic frame for their interpretation and valuation, Gualino's circle provided a stimulating ground for the development of Venturi's aesthetic ideas and for the definition of his discursive practice based on primitivism.

Moreover, through Gualino's cultural circle, Venturi became more interested in modern art and had access to the contemporary cultural debate, with the opportunity to interact with it and influence it. I will come back to this later, in the next chapter, but according to Venturi's claims in the 1926 catalogue, he came to share with Gualino a common interest in steering contemporary Italian culture in the direction of Venturi's primitivist discourse.⁷¹⁴ The theatre project is an example of their co-operation in this sense, as the avant-garde programme of performances was paired with the exhibition of some of the most provocative artworks in the collection, such the Chinese artworks or the Modigliani paintings. The meaningfulness of the artworks in this context was underlined by the precisely organised placement of the artworks and the lighting system.⁷¹⁵ In order to understand better the assertive function of the events organised at the theatre, one should remember that the shows were run on an invitation-only basis, which besides the local elite, usually included key figures in the cultural debate of the time, such as art critics Margherita Sarfatti (1880–1961) and Ugo Ojetti.⁷¹⁶

For Gualino the collection was a means to present himself to the local elite and to express his cultural sensibility. Gualino was thus able to pursue an image

712 Ponzetti, *Il caso Gualino*, 72–154; Cesarina Gualino's diary. Venturi appears as a familiar and almost daily presence in the Gualino household; Marconi, "Jessi Boswell e Cesarina Gualino," 74–78.

713 Gualino, *Frammenti di vita*, 85–89.

714 Venturi, *Il catalogo della collezione Gualino*; Lamberti, "Riccardo Gualino," 8.

715 Lamberti, "Riccardo Gualino," 8, 10; Lamberti, "La raccolta Gualino d'arte moderna e contemporanea," 30.

716 Ponzetti, *Il caso Gualino*, 8–24; Cesarina Gualino's diaries, in FRG; Bernardi, "Riccardo Gualino e la cultura torinese," 174–175.

of a cultivated, modern, liberal, and philanthropic entrepreneur: “a leader of new things”.⁷¹⁷ His collection was a visible sign of his financial success and of his cultural progressiveness. For Venturi the relationship with Gualino meant gaining access to a cultural circle influenced by modernist discourses. Moreover, the collection constituted an important visual counterpart to his aesthetic discourse, but it also became a means to extend his influence and authority beyond the limits of academic scholarship and traditional appraisals.

It offered him access to the contemporary cultural debate and a tool to promote his discourse within a cultural context that would prove unfavourable to his ideas. The scheme that was designed to mould Gualino’s identity with the support of Venturi’s aesthetic discourse, indeed did not receive a positive response in the cultural and historical context of 1920s Italy. At the time the cultural and political situation in Italy was in the throes of a dramatic evolution. Gualino and his enterprises were associated with “scandalous avant-gardism” and “snobbish intellectualism”.⁷¹⁸ Venturi’s aesthetic position concerning primitivism came to clash with the dominant cultural trend. This constitutes an interesting perspective for further consideration of the meaning of *The Taste of the Primitives*, which in many ways was related to the Gualino Collection, in its historical context.

717 Gualino, *Frammenti di vita*, 29.

718 Lamberti, “Riccardo Gualino,” 11; Bernardi, “Riccardo Gualino e la cultura torinese,” 184–193.

4. Primitivism in the Context of the Contemporary Cultural Debate in the 1920s: A Tool of Cultural Dissent

4.1 Venturi's Primitivism and the Historical and Cultural Context

The definition of Venturi's primitivism as a frame for condensing and branding his aesthetic ideas gains a particular meaning when looked at from a historical context. After the First World War Modern Classicism became the dominant discourse, an orientation that was in contrast with Venturi's aesthetic theory and collecting choices. I think that primitivism worked as a powerful tool to express and promote his ideas within a context that was unfavourable. I also think that the need to respond to the dominant discourse contributed to defining his version of primitivism. Therefore, an analysis of Venturi's definition and use of primitivism helps to position his work in the cultural debate of the time. In this regard I find it significant that the connection between his aesthetic theory and his conception of the primitive became explicit from the mid-1920s onwards, while already in the 1910s he had expressed his idea of art as something universal, mystical, and abstract. Moreover, Venturi's conceptual use of the term primitive emerged only once he became more explicit about his condemnation of classicism, around 1919.⁷¹⁹ Later, in the 1930s, the reference to primitivism disappeared, while the essence of his aesthetic thinking remained substantially consistent in the years before and after the 1920s.

What changed, compared to the 1920s, was the cultural context and Venturi's position within it. Therefore, I want to stress the importance of considering the cultural and historical context when analysing Venturi's conception of primitivism in relation to his work and thinking in the 1920s. Modern classicism was the main

719 Venturi, "La posizione dell'Italia nelle arti figurative"; Lionello Venturi, *La critica e l'arte di Leonardo da Vinci* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1919); Venturi, "Il valore attuale dei primitivi"; Venturi, "Del purismo nelle arti," 394–397; Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia*, 220–221.

aesthetic trend at the time.⁷²⁰ Moreover, those years coincided with a time when Fascism was having its impact on Italian art and culture. During the 1920s, the cultural debate was very lively and reflected the dramatic changes that involved both art production and the role of art in society.⁷²¹ There was an underlying tension between artists and the protagonists of the cultural debate, intellectuals and art critics. This tension, the gap between aesthetic thinking and interpretation, became an integral part of the dominant discourse of the time.

4.2 Venturi's Perspective on Modern Classicism

In 1915, Venturi enlisted to serve in the war as a volunteer, spending about two years at the front and a further two years in convalescence, recovering from war injuries. After this period of isolation, in 1918 he returned to his appointment as Professor of Art History in Turin. Soon after this, in 1919, he was named a full professor, a post he held until 1931.⁷²² In 1914, given the option, he had chosen the University of Turin. The location, in spite of being at the time a culturally provincial and backward city, offered the opportunity of close geographical proximity to France.⁷²³ Venturi thought that it was a good platform to pursue an international perspective, as expressed in his inaugural speech, which made it clear he wished to promote the study of art beyond national borders and the classical tradition.⁷²⁴ However, once he returned to his post after the war, Venturi found a cultural and artistic field dominated by nationalism and, from a formal point of view, by the rediscovery of classical principles.

In 1916, the Paris-based Italian artist Gino Severini (1883–1966) painted *Motherhood*, which marked his return to naturalism after a period of Futurist experimentation.⁷²⁵ On a similar path, taken by avant-garde artists who were exploring classical aesthetics, in 1917 Carlo Carrà (1881–1966) and Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978) began channelling their first experiments as part of the organised movement *Metaphysics*, in which hyper-realistic pictures were associated with aspects related to

720 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*; Gottfried Boehm, "An Alternative Modern: On the Concept and Basis of the Exhibition," in *Canto d'Amore: Classicism in Modern Art and Music, 1914–1935*, ed. Gottfried Boehm et al. (London: Merrell Holberton, 1996), 15–38.

721 Paola Barocchi, "Dal Novecento a Scipione," in *Storia moderna dell'arte in Italia. Manifesti, polemiche, documenti. Dal Novecento ai dibattiti sulla figura monumentale. 1925–1945*, vol. 3, ed. Paola Barocchi (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1990), 5–8.

722 D'Orsi, "Lo strano caso del professor Venturi," 10.

723 Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio," 39; d'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 199–203.

724 Venturi, "La posizione dell'Italia nelle arti figurative".

725 Gino Severini, *Motherhood*, 1916, Museo dell'Accademia Etrusca, Cortona.

subconsciousness.⁷²⁶ (Figs. 58 and 63) Nevertheless, Venturi continued to look at the new aesthetic practices from his own theoretical perspective that had been shaped during the previous decade. Venturi still insisted on the importance of the experience of universality, mysticism, and abstraction in art as he had stated in his inaugural speech in 1915, a few months before his departure from the University.⁷²⁷

As a result of his aesthetic perspective, in the postwar years, he began to voice strongly his opposition towards classicism, especially in relation to contemporary art. In 1920, for instance, he expressed his dissatisfaction with the importance accorded to the celebration of the anniversary of Raphael's death and the publication of a series of monographs on artists from the 14th and 15th centuries that were promoted in the art journal *Valori plastici* (1918–1922).⁷²⁸ Venturi thought that the celebration of the past affected the work of contemporary artists because, in his opinion, it meant fostering an intellectual approach, thus distracting them from the emotional nature of creative expression.⁷²⁹ Venturi considered modern classicism a celebration of the past that lacked originality and failed to address the creative essence of art. He claimed that taking artworks and norms from the past as reference models in contemporary artistic practice constituted an academic approach. He stressed that the interest in material and contingent reality was detrimental to the spiritual – universal and eternal – value of art.⁷³⁰

4.3 Modern Classicism in the 1920s

The art debate in Europe in the years following the First World War involved a consideration of artistic tradition and classical aesthetics in connection to widespread nationalism. However, this debate was not clear-cut or homogeneous. After the war, artists began to look with new interest at classical aesthetic values. During the 1920s, they took the art of the past as inspiration and became interested in representing figures and other material aspects of reality, but they did so in the spirit of a personal re-elaboration of those models. They pursued an independent process of appropriation and actualisation of classical aesthetic principles. Artists, after experimenting with modernist artistic approaches, explored this new aesthetic turn in terms of a

726 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 42; Cioli, *Il Fascismo e la 'sua' arte*, 29–39; Giovanni Anzani e Carlo Pirovano, “La pittura in Lombardia nel primo Novecento,” in *La pittura in Italia. 1, Il Novecento, 1900–1945*, ed. Carlo Pirovano (Milano: Electa, 1992), 85–245.

727 Venturi, “La posizione dell’Italia nelle arti figurative”.

728 Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell’arte in Italia*, 220–221.

729 Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, 4–5; Venturi, “Il valore attuale dei primitivi”; Lionello Venturi, “Contro corrente,” in *Pretesti di critica* (Milano: Hoepli, 1929), xi–xvi.

730 Lionello Venturi, “Un problema della mostra del Novecento,” in *Pretesti di critica* (Milano: Hoepli, 1929), 191–196.

continuation and evolution, rather than rejection, of the earlier experimentation.⁷³¹

Modern Classicism, Purism, Magic Realism, Return to Order – all expressions that have been used by critics to describe the artistic landscape of the interwar period – maintained a connection with modernism. They shared an international and cosmopolitan network.⁷³² Although classical elements and principles became a common language within Modern Classicism in its different interpretations, the formal results did not consist in an explicit reference to ancient models or stylistic formulae.⁷³³ More specifically, the human figure in the context of Modern Classicism can be explained in terms of modern humanism.⁷³⁴ It considered the position of modern man within the present material reality. The artworks resulting from this aesthetic approach were far from being just academic products. Modern Classicism cannot be simply considered an involution nor a reactionary tendency, nor as part of a national political policy.⁷³⁵

In 1917, Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918) defined the *Rappel à l'Ordre*, Return to Order, in terms of an interest in the rediscovery of a “constructive” approach in art.⁷³⁶ In the same year Amédée Ozenfant (1886–1966) and Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (1887–1965) published the manifesto *Après le Cubisme* (1917), which, short of making a direct reference to classical art, praised principles such as order, purity, and discipline, in association with the Mediterranean tradition.⁷³⁷ In this context of a prevailing “constructive” approach, what was stressed was the importance of abstraction of archetypal and eternal elements over the contingency of naturalism, realism or classical academism. Purism was conceived as a means to translate everyday life situations into eternal moments.⁷³⁸ The Return to Order was indeed iconic and not narrative. The reference to classical art was in its emphasis primarily ideal, rather than aesthetic and formal. Classicism represented a relation of continuity with the past and offered principles that came to be considered as tools to convey eternity.⁷³⁹ Many artists and theorists, including Margherita Sarfatti, one of the leading theorists

731 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 24–29.

732 Ibid.

733 Boehm, “An Alternative Modern,” 19–26.

734 Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 231; Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 58–59.

735 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 90.

736 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 45–51; Pierre Daix, “Classicism Revisited in Modern Art,” in *Canto d’Amore: Classicism in Modern Art and Music. 1914–1935*, ed. Gottfried Boehm et al. (London: Merrell Holberton, 1996), 74–84.

737 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 40–42.

738 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 70–71; Carlo Carrà, “Difesa della mia generazione,” *L’Ambrosiano* 9, no. 180 (31 July 1930): 3; Carlo Carrà, *Giotto* (Roma: Valori plastici, 1924).

739 Elena Pontiggia et al., eds., *L’idea del classico: 1916–1932. Temi classici nell’arte italiana degli anni Venti*, catalogue to the exhibition (Milano: Fabbri, 1992), 18; Boehm, “An Alternative Modern”.

of Modern Classicism and a protagonist in the cultural debate in the 1920s, interpreted modern classical aesthetics in terms of a spiritual sense of universality.⁷⁴⁰

4.3.1 Modern Classicism in Italy: Nationalism and Tradition

In Italy, many artists from different aesthetic and ideological backgrounds contributed to the trend of the Modern Classicism during the 1920s. Most of the artists came from a modernist background and maintained an open dialogue with the French-oriented international artistic milieu. However, nationalism was an important part of the aesthetic inclination that came to dominate after the First World War. Nationalism, nonetheless, was not a univocal phenomenon and not exclusively associated with classicism at the time. Different conceptions of nationalism coexisted in the aftermath of the war.⁷⁴¹ Since the end of the 19th century nationalism had been a widely shared idea in relation to the Risorgimento movement and the country's unification. At the beginning of the century, nationalism among progressive and liberal intellectual circles came to refer to the aspiration for a cultural and humanistic reality inclusive of ethnic, religious and ideological differences and in dialogue with the international community.⁷⁴² Futurism had given to the concept a meaning of superiority and military prevarication.⁷⁴³ The nationalist ideal had also been at the root of the interventionist campaign before the First World War, which, in the end, was radicalised as a result of the disappointing outcomes of the peace treaties. War had been presented as an opportunity for the newly enfranchised Italian state to become a respected member of the international community of nations, but instead it resulted in the loss of territories.⁷⁴⁴

After the First World War, the process of unification was still continuing and there was a lack of a shared national identity. The country was riven with social tensions – among workers and industrialists, peasants and landlords – mistrust in the government, which was considered weak, antiquated, and corrupted, and unresolved infrastructural problems that revealed a great gap between the North and the South. Even the Italian language differed greatly from region to region. Meanwhile, the

740 Margherita Sarfatti, *Storia della pittura moderna* (Roma: Cremonese, 1930), 96–147; Elena Pontiggia, “Novecento milanese, Novecento italiano,” in *Il Novecento milanese. Da Sironi ad Arturo Martini*, ed. Elena Pontiggia et al. (Milano: Mazzotta, 2003), 9–30.

741 D’Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 190–195; Paloposki, *Taidenäyttelyt Suomen ja Italian julkisissa kuvataidesuhteissa*, 22–31; Emilio Gentile, ‘*La nostra sfida alle stelle*’. *Futuristi in politica* (Roma–Bari: Laterza, 2009), 10–19.

742 Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity*, 4–7; d’Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 85; Braun, “The Faces of Modigliani: Identity Politics under Fascism,” 191.

743 Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity*, 4–7.

744 Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity*, 1–2; Philip V. Cannistraro and Brian R. Sullivan, *Il Duce’s Other Woman* (New York: William Morrow and Co, 1993), 117–242.

growing influence of international socialism was alarming for many and an exciting prospect for others.⁷⁴⁵ At the time art, and culture more generally, constituted the most consistent base of national unity and identity.

The reference to the Italian cultural and artistic tradition was not only made from an aesthetic point of view but also as a source of national identification and pride. Thus, the classical tradition became for many artists the starting point for defining a modern national cultural identity in dialogue with the international intellectual landscape.⁷⁴⁶ For these reasons, although the Return to Order had been internationally an evolution of the avant-garde, in Italy the reflection upon classical aesthetic principles did not escape a connection to nationalism. After the war, many of the artists who had lived in Paris and experimented with avant-garde ideas also began to evoke an Italian aesthetic tradition with the aim of giving a new national reference to contemporary art. This was also the spirit that indeed inspired one of the most important and comprehensive events dedicated to contemporary art in Italy after the end of the war – the *Fiorentina primaverile* collective exhibition, held in Florence in the spring of 1921.⁷⁴⁷

Artists and critics alike considered aspects such as figurative painting and solid construction of composition as typical Italian elements or qualities.⁷⁴⁸ The evocation of tradition opened a dialogue with the past in terms of continuity and evolution into the present. In this sense the past was not presented in a nostalgic way as something to be restored in the present, in terms of a copy, but in a dynamic way, which did not clash with the idea of reformation and modernisation. Tradition, unlike the idea of a past that is concluded and passed, was thought of as something in a continuous evolution and open to development to gain originality and modernity.⁷⁴⁹ This view of tradition became popular within the dominant aesthetic perspective of the time. Italian Modern Classicism was not a phenomenon of reproduction or revival of old models. There was no direct relationship with models, which instead were always reinterpreted within the actual aesthetic research of individual artists.⁷⁵⁰ This approach consisted in an appropriation of those models in order to define a modern aesthetics reflecting the contemporary era. Moreover, tradition did not

745 D'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 34–38, 87–88; Chabod, *L'Italia contemporanea*; Venturi, “Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio,” 55. Lionello and Adolfo Venturi were also concerned with the political and social unrests.

746 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 24–26, 46; Waldemar George, “Italiani all'estero. Mario Tozzi,” *Le Arti plastiche* 6, no. 8 (16 aprile 1929): 3.

747 Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 182–185; *La Fiorentina primaverile. Prima esposizione nazionale dell'opera e del lavoro d'arte nel Palazzo delle esposizioni al Parco di S. Gallo* (Roma: Valori plastici, 1922), catalogue to the exhibition.

748 Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 203–236, 290–303.

749 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 2–5, 72–75.

750 *Ibid.*, 8–9.

exclusively refer to classical antiquity. On the contrary, the plurality of Italian artistic traditions was recognised. Under the label of Italian tradition a very broad spectrum of phenomena could coexist, without any apparent fracture or contradiction, ranging from Greco-Roman classical art to Byzantine art, Etruscan archaism, the Italian primitives, and Renaissance art.⁷⁵¹

4.3.2 Quattrocentismo

The most recurrent example in reference to tradition was the art of the 15th century. This I see as particularly significant in understanding the idea of classicism within the dominant aesthetic orientation of the time. *Quattrocentismo* – rather than classical antiquity or academicism – was an extremely widespread and shared reference.⁷⁵² The rediscovery of some of the artists of the 15th century was associated with the origin of Italian modern art. Contemporary artists especially appreciated their formal solution aiming at the simplification of figures and space. The naturalism of the Early Renaissance was characterised by formal synthesis and emotional expression.

Pre-Renaissance artists were a source of inspiration in representing reality, while including subjective and spiritual aspects. They represented a sort of incomplete perfection, with a degree of incongruity and deformation that suited the melancholic state of mind dominating the aftermath of war.⁷⁵³ In spite of the common reference to classical aesthetic principles such as figure, space, and plasticity, the artworks of the time indeed conveyed hermetic and fairy-like atmospheres associated with a sense of distrust. The classic formal elements were paired with an interest in a metaphysical dimension of material reality. Moreover, besides the constructive approach and geometrical simplification of their formal attire, modern classicist artworks were melancholic and disturbing, rather than harmonious.

This is why contemporary art critics, such as Franz Roh and Massimo Bontempelli referred to the art of the time as *Magic Realism* (1915–1925).⁷⁵⁴ This definition generally referred to the dominant orientation of the time rather than to an organised movement. It was an umbrella term that included artistic practices that appeared aesthetically and formally similar, although they were in fact the result of the artists' individual artistic explorations. In general, there was a shared aim of employing tra-

751 Ibid., 81, 106–107.

752 Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 174–180.

753 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 58–59, 64–66.

754 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 50, 175; Massimo Bontempelli, “Novecentisti e pittori del Quattrocento (1927),” in *Storia moderna dell'arte in Italia. Manifesti, polemiche, documenti*, vol. 3, *Dal Novecento ai dibattiti sulla figura monumentale. 1925–1945*, ed. Paola Barocchi (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1990), 32–34; Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco, ed., *Realismo magico. Pittura e scultura in Italia, 1919–1925* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1988).

ditional techniques and materials, which contributed in pursuing a magical atmosphere.⁷⁵⁵ From the formal point of view, the paintings often showed an extreme simplification that emphasised archetypal elements of composition. However, while in some cases, everything was depicted with extreme geometrical perfection, achieving an effect of hyper-realism, like in artworks by Giorgio de Chirico and Antonio Donghi (1897–1963), in other volumes and space were defined by a more intuitive and expressive approach, like in paintings by Mario Sironi and Carlo Carrà. (Figs. 58, 59, 63) Nonetheless, to all of them material landscapes stood as a reflection of metaphysical sensibilities.

Moreover, generally, the colour palette was limited to natural shades. In the paintings, figures usually appeared motionless and solitary, occupying an otherwise desolated environment. As a result, the paintings look as if suspended in time with depictions of everyday life conveying a hieratic and nostalgic atmosphere. This approach represented a starting point for a new kind of realism, which was not confident in the ability of mankind to dominate and control the material world. Reality in these paintings was contaminated by and filtered with metaphysical elements as emerging from the individuals' subconscious.

4.3.3 Artists and Movements within Modern Classicism

The phenomenon referred to as the Return to Order first became known in Italy through the cultural journal *Valori plastici*.⁷⁵⁶ The journal associated the idea of actualising classical constructive principles with the aim of promoting formal synthesis and purism.⁷⁵⁷ The journal had many connections with France and the local modernist milieu, but nevertheless introduced a nationalistic interpretation of this new trend. The artists and art critics Edita (1886–1977) and Mario Broglio (1891–1948), who were editors of the journal, had settled in Paris and, while promoting the revival of the Italian artistic tradition, supported the work of the Italian artists living in the French capital.

The journal became a reference and gathering point for artists such as Massimo Campigli (1895–1971), Filippo De Pisis (1896–1956), Mario Tozzi (1895–1979), Alberto Savinio (1891–1952), Ardengo Soffici (1879–1964), Gino Severini, Carlo Carrà, and Giorgio de Chirico, who, although working independently, shared a French-oriented modernist experience and at the same time a reflection upon the

755 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 99–104.

756 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 153–166; Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*; Simona Storchi, “Valori plastici. 1918–1922. Le inquietudini del nuovo classico,” Supplement to *The Italianist* 26 (2006).

757 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 98.

Italian tradition.⁷⁵⁸ (Figs. 55, 58, 63) They formed a community, yet their aesthetic approaches and artistic achievements were very different from one another. They worked in an individual way, but nevertheless expressed some common ideas and traits. Despite the representation of material reality in their paintings, the evocation of emotions remained an important part of their works. The representation of reality, objects, landscape, figures, was neither naturalistic nor aimed at a faithful representation of reality. In fact, their images were processed to reflect the subconscious and other metaphysical aspects.

Valori plastici was also involved in the organisation of the exhibition *Fiorentina primaverile* in 1921, an event of national importance. The exhibition was the first national showcase to bring together examples of different contemporary aesthetic trends. While some of the artworks showed signs of Modern Classicism and a direct association with Valori plastici's entourage, others still relied on 19th century iconographic and stylistic models. From a nationalist perspective, the show underlined the common Italian identity of the artists, suggesting an identification with classical tradition.⁷⁵⁹ In the catalogue it was indeed stressed that the exhibition showed the Italian creative genius in the total breadth of its pluralistic formal and stylistic language.

Another group of artists represented a Modern Classicist orientation. Leonardo Dudreville (1885–1976), Achille Funi (1890–1972), Luigi Russolo (1885–1947), and Mario Sironi (1885–1961) signed the manifesto significantly titled *Contro tutti i ritorni in pittura* – against revivals in painting – in 1920.⁷⁶⁰ (Fig. 59) Despite their common organisation and shared aesthetic inclination, there was a great variation in the backgrounds of these artists – varying from Post-Impressionism, and Futurism to Secessionism – as well as the actual formal outcomes of their work. The majority of the artists came from the Futurist experience (Dudreville, Russolo, and Sironi), which continued to be a source of aesthetic inspiration.⁷⁶¹ Futurism, founded in 1909, had been the main Italian avant-garde movement, which derived elements from both Cubism and Expressionism.⁷⁶² Moreover, Futurism never completely abandoned

758 Silvia Evangelisti, "Italiani a Parigi. 1900–1935," in *La pittura in Italia. I, Il Novecento, 1900–1945*, ed. Carlo Pirovano (Milano: Electa, 1992), 625–674; Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 237–252.

759 *La Fiorentina primaverile*; Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 182–185.

760 "Manifesto contro tutti i ritorni in pittura," in *Il Novecento Italiano*, ed. Elena Pontiggia (Milano, Abscondita 2003), 18–22; Cannistraro and Sullivan, *Il Duce's Other Woman*, 265–269.

761 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 87, 167–169.

762 Pontus Hultén, *Futurismo e futurismi* (Milano: Bompiani, 1986); Maurizio Calvesi, "Il Futurismo e le avanguardie," in *Arte italiana. Presenze. 1900–1945*, ed. Pontus Hultén and Germano Celant (Milano: Bompiani, 1989), 59–68. The Manifest of Futurism was published in 1909 in the pages of the French newspaper *Le Figaro*.

components such as figurative representation and structural composition. The main idea of the group was reproducing a material reality through a de-constructive synthesis. Their research on formal synthesis inspired the idea of depicting objects in movement. (Figs. 53–54)

The movement gathering around the new manifesto pursued the development of the constructive and purist aspects of the Futurist aesthetics, while cultivating some aspects of traditional figuration and rediscovering elements of the classical formal language. Deriving from Cubism and Futurism, constructive principles were not a new thing. The purist approach meant reducing material reality to essential and eternal archetypal forms. These artists introduced elements considered typical of the Italian classical tradition, such as volumes, chiaroscuro, illusory space, but they did so by remaining detached from a direct connection to actual models from the past. Tradition was not seen as a contradiction within their modernist aesthetic premises. It was in fact meant as a foundation for developing a modern national cultural identity.⁷⁶³ In this sense, through their art practice, these artists wished to contribute to a cultural regeneration after the war and to the definition of an Italian identity. They specified in the manifesto that, although they aimed at reintroducing figuration in their paintings and rediscovering space and volume, they were not interested in the revival of the past. Instead, the Italian artistic tradition served as inspiration for creating a modern formal language as a suitable means to express emotions in relation to the present.⁷⁶⁴

Some of the artists who came from the Futurist experience, and who had adhered to the manifesto *Contro tutti i ritorni in pittura*, later became part of the *Novecento* group, which was another expression of the dominant trend of Modern Classicism. The *Novecento* group, a major artistic movement of the 1920s, stemmed out of the aesthetic position introduced by *Valori plastici* and *Contro tutti i ritorni in pittura*. The group was founded in 1922 under the supervision and leadership of the art critic Margherita Sarfatti. She had presented her aesthetic project to the artists gathered around her Milanese intellectual circle. The group was originally named *Sette pittori del Novecento* and was formed by Anselmo Bucci (1887–1955), Pietro Marussig (1879–1937), Ubaldo Oppi (1889–1942), Mario Sironi, Leonardo Dudreville, Gian Emilio Malerba (1880–1926) and Achille Funi.⁷⁶⁵ (Figs. 56–57, 59)

763 “Manifesto contro tutti i ritorni in pittura,” 18–22.

764 Ibid.

765 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 166–175; Cannistraro and Sullivan, *Il Duce's Other Woman*, 268–285; Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 231, 237–242; Margherita Sarfatti, “Il gruppo del Novecento,” in *Storia moderna dell'arte in Italia. Manifesti, polemiche, documenti*, vol. 3, *Dal Novecento ai dibattiti sulla figura monumentale. 1925–1945*, ed. Paola Barocchi (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1990), 13–16.

The group's main idea, hence the name, was to revive the great Italian tradition and cultural supremacy the country had established during the past centuries (Quattrocento, Cinquecento etc). In this case as well, the members of the group meant to actualise the past tradition in a modern formal language that would contribute to the fostering of a modern national cultural identity.⁷⁶⁶ The resulting artworks presented classicism in terms of a re-interpretation of aesthetic principles such as figure, plasticity, naturalism, and harmony. Again, as in the case of Valori plastici and Contro tutti i ritorni in pittura, the artists of Novecento came from different artistic backgrounds and manifested different interpretations of their shared aesthetic ground. Although they all emerged from urban, elitist roots, the group lacked a common project and there was no cohesion among the artists other than the proposition of the group's inner regulation. Oppi, for instance, was expelled from the group because in 1924 he accepted an invitation to make a solo exhibition at the Venice Biennale, instead of sharing the space with the group, contravening its regulations.⁷⁶⁷

In 1926, the group was re-founded with the name *Novecento italiano* and came to include an even larger base of artistic outcomes.⁷⁶⁸ The artists' substantial participation in the group's exhibitions was to the further detriment of the common aesthetic ground. The group became a window on the Italian contemporary aesthetic landscape. The sole recognisable common character was the general reference to Italian artistic tradition. Looking at the exhibitions of Novecento Italiano it is surprising to see the great variety of independent aesthetic approaches co-existing side by side.⁷⁶⁹ They represent a sort of anthology of the artistic practices conducted in Italy at the time. There were artists coming from Valori plastici's entourage (Carrà, de Chirico), from Futurism (Depero, Prampolini, Sironi), from Paris (Campigli, De Pisis, Severini), and artists working in a more private dimension, such as Felice Casorati (1883–1963) and Giorgio Morandi (1890–1964).⁷⁷⁰ (Figs. 55, 58, 59, 63, 64) Anything that could be brought back to the ideas of Italian tradition and national

766 Antonio Maraini, *Del '900 milanese* (Firenze: Giuntina, 1928), catalogue to the exhibition, 3–5. "Il bene del '900 milanese consiste, per me, nel fatto appunto di essere novecentesco con qualità e difetti incomprensibilmente di oggi, con in sé stesso, cioè tutte le esperienze della pittura moderna passata attraverso impressionismo, postimpressionismo, cubismo e il resto."

767 Cannistraro and Sullivan, *Il Duce's Other Woman*, 282. The importance accorded to the exclusive right to exhibit as a group suggests that the members did not have much more in common to "express" their unity and shared intentions. Their unity was more intellectual than substantial.

768 *Mostra del Novecento italiano* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1983), catalogue to the exhibition; *Catalogo della Prima mostra del Novecento italiano. Febbraio–Marzo 1926* (Milano: Palazzo della Permanente, 1926), catalogue to the exhibition; Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 166, 172–173; Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*.

769 *Mostra del Novecento italiano; Catalogo della prima mostra del Novecento italiano*; Cioli, *Il Fascismo e la 'sua' arte*, 45–53.

770 *Mostra del Novecento italiano; Catalogo della prima mostra del Novecento italiano*.

identity, from the 19th century and to the 20th-century avant-garde, was accepted and absorbed within the frame of Novecento Italiano. Aesthetic coherence among the artworks existed only because Sarfatti included them in a discursive frame, which suggested their interpretation in the light of her own aesthetic perspective.⁷⁷¹

All in all, a rounded observation of the aesthetic landscape going under the umbrella term of Modern Classicism presents with a variety of practices. A common aspect for Italian artists at the time was the exploration of aesthetic and formal ideas that would charge their artworks with an original meditation on the dramatic change that had occurred as a result of the traumatic war experience. They aimed to instill their works with an emotive force. Moreover, the large range of formal outcomes proves the individualistic character that artistic practice had during the 1920s. Therefore, the Venturian idea of classicism, which he associated with contemporary art, did not fully grasp the complexity and the emotional, unconventional, and creative potential of Modern Classicism.

4.4 The process of Fascistization of Art and Culture during the 1920s: The Fascist interest towards Modern Classicism

Another aspect to be taken into account when considering Venturi's use of a notion of primitivism in relation to its context, is the influence of Fascism that took place in Italy. Fascism had an impact on the cultural debate of the time, especially in relation to aspects such as nationalism and the glorification of the Italian tradition. In this regard, during the 1920s, Fascism turned its attention towards Modern Classicism as a source of symbolic images that could be useful in representing the myths of Fascism. Consequently, Modern Classicism, as aesthetic orientation, came to be reinforced by Fascist rhetoric in terms of major visibility and authority within the cultural debate of the time.⁷⁷²

The Fascist movement made wide use of myths in order to shape, express, and reinforce their identity and ideology. However, it mostly relied on existing and shared myths, rather than producing new ones.⁷⁷³ Myths responded to a spiritual concep-

771 Cannistraro and Sullivan, *Il Duce's Other Woman*, 314–315.

772 Cioli, *Il Fascismo e la 'sua' arte*, 53–56, 217; Emily Braun, "Italia Barbara: Italian Primitives from Piero to Pasolini," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17, no. 3 (2012): 259–270; Andrée Hayum, "Lionello Venturi, Roberto Longhi and the Renaissance 'primitives'," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17, no. 3 (2012): 331–349. Both authors interpreted Curzio Malaparte's book *Italia Barbara* (1926) as an appropriation of Italian pre-Renaissance artists in terms of Fascist nationalism. Mariana Aguirre, "La Difesa della Razza (1938–1943): Primitivism and Classicism in Fascist Italy," in *Politics, Religion, and Ideology* 16, no. 4 (2015): 370–390.

773 Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity*, 1–2; Antliff, *Avant-garde Fascism*, 20–23, 29–35.

tion of politics that relied on faith and emotional fascination for political success.⁷⁷⁴ The regime was presented as a secular religion and the Dux as deserving devotional respect and unquestioning following. This process of spiritualisation of politics relied on the emotional meaning of myths. The *aestheticisation of politics*, realised by Fascism, corresponded to the idea that the emotional meaning of myths could be reinforced through the employment of symbolic images, which carried emotionally significant potential.⁷⁷⁵ Fascism recognised the power behind the symbolic meaning of images as tools to brand its myths, rhetoric, and values. Images were employed to visualize the myths, thus supporting their function of conveying a message with emotional intensity. They were employed to structure and to materialise Fascist myths thus contributing to their dissemination and acceptance.⁷⁷⁶

Before turning to Modern Classicism, Fascism had looked to Futurism as a source for its images. (Figs. 53–54) During its formative years, Fascism drew on many elements from Futurist myths, ideological principles, and images – vitalistic aspects such as anarchism, elitism, oligarchy, and violence.⁷⁷⁷ However, following the end of the First World War, Fascist identity had been evolving from a revolutionary role to one of political leadership and social pacification.⁷⁷⁸ Fascism aimed at establishing a firm and authoritarian leadership in order to accomplish social unification and a shared national identity, which previous governments had failed to achieve. It aspired to put an end to political, regional, and social fragmentation.⁷⁷⁹ The shift in identity affected the rhetoric and the myths in use, as well as the symbolic images required to visualise them. Once in a leading position, Fascism began to emphasise myths

774 Adamson, “Ardengo Soffici and the Religion of Art,” 46–72; Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Cannistraro and Sullivan, *Il Duce’s Other Woman*, 269.

775 Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity*, 43; Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 8–9.

776 Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff, “Art and Fascist Ideology in France and in Italy: An Introduction,” in *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy*, eds. Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 6–7; Stone, “The State as Patron,” 212–214.

777 Cioli, *Il Fascismo e la ‘sua’ arte*, 117–149, 169–175; Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 6; Gentile, ‘*La nostra sfida alle stelle*’. In 1919 the Futurist party was candidate to the national election in partnership with the Fascist movement, however, with an unsuccessful result. Marinetti was among the first supporters of Fascism.

778 Giovanni Sabbatucci, “La crisi dello stato liberale,” in *Storia d’Italia. 4, Guerre e fascismo, 1914–1943*, eds. Giovanni Sabbatucci and Vittorio Vidotto (Roma–Bari: Editori Laterza, 1998), 140–161; Adrian Lyttelton, “La dittatura fascista,” in *Storia d’Italia. 4. Guerre e fascismo, 1914–1943*, eds. Giovanni Sabbatucci and Vittorio Vidotto (Roma–Bari: editori Laterza, 1998), 220–237. In 1922, Benito Mussolini was named Prime Minister.

779 Chabod, *L’Italia contemporanea*; d’Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 66–68, 86–90; Lazzaro, “Forging a Visible Fascist Nation,” 13–31.

regarding governability, stability, security, and unity.⁷⁸⁰ Therefore, Fascism distanced itself from Futurism, which was still championing anti-traditionalism, anarchism, and an elitist and individualist conception of society, although still in 1919 they were in an explicit political partnership.⁷⁸¹ Modern Classicism instead began to be seen as a more suitable source of imagery to represent the new Fascist identity, becoming the main reference in this regard during the decade.⁷⁸²

4.4.1 Modern Classicism and Fascist Discourse

Consequently, during the 1920s Fascism pursued a connection with the dominant aesthetic orientation, this eventually becoming one of the most prominent foundations of the Fascist discourse at the time.⁷⁸³ What was particularly appealing for Fascism was the Modern Classicist convergence between concepts apparently in contrast, as tradition and modernity.⁷⁸⁴ Tradition had been taken as a ground for the development of a modern national cultural identity. Fascism aspired to identify the political movement with this aesthetic idea, while putting a particular emphasis on its interpretation in a nationalist sense. In so doing, Fascism could overcome some of the contradictions intrinsic to its ideology, such as the call for a modern society while honouring tradition. In order to fulfil the identification of Fascism with aesthetic claims, the latter had to be absorbed into the Fascist discourse and be interpreted in Fascist terms. In other words, the aesthetic stances of Modern Classicism gained an ideological interpretation within the Fascist discursive frame.⁷⁸⁵

The appropriation of aesthetic elements, artistic practices, and images into the Fascist discourse was one of the regime's main strategies for establishing control over art and culture through interpretation rather than explicit coercion.⁷⁸⁶ This appropriation was possible, thanks to the use of discursive frames suggesting and enhancing the interpretation of artistic phenomena in Fascist terms, which recalls Venturi's use of the concept of the primitive, but opposite intentions. Discursive frames displayed a mechanism that, through the work of intellectuals and critics, would absorb and re-elaborate artistic expressions in order to make Fascist myths

780 Braun, "Mario Sironi's Urban Landscapes," 126–127.

781 Braun, "Mario Sironi's Urban Landscapes," 111, 126–127; Gentile, *La nostra sfida alle stee*. 'Coalition at the 1919 national election.

782 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 102–103.

783 Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity*, 80–83.

784 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 69–84; Barocchi, "Dal Novecento a Scipione," 5–8; Lazzaro, "Forging a Visible Fascist Nation," 13–31; Claudio Fogu, "To Make History Present," in *Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, eds. Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 33–49.

785 Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity*, 56–59.

786 Sedita, *Gli intellettuali di Mussolini*, 181–185.

visible.⁷⁸⁷ They became the ground for giving meaning and value to artworks from diverse backgrounds. Artworks and images were absorbed – included and appropriated – regardless of their style or original meaning. Single aspects were enlightened, while others were dismissed. The artworks would be presented as an expression of the Fascist ideology.

Images and artworks of Modern Classicism, including their formal and technical dimensions such as outlines (drawing), volumes, and three-dimensional space, gained a new meaning within the Fascist frame. The reference to the classical tradition was presented as an inspiration for the regeneration of Italian culture in relation to nationalism and political authority.⁷⁸⁸ At the same time nostalgic and gloomy or mournful aspects typical of Modern Classicism, loaded with a sense of distrust towards the future, which did not accord well with the Fascist rhetoric, were neglected and left out from the process of appropriation. The return to figuration was made to coincide with the Fascist sense of trust in mankind and optimism, although in the paintings the human figure mostly appeared as isolated, lost, and melancholic.⁷⁸⁹ Despite the attempt to make the aesthetic solutions meet these ideological requirements, the artworks showed a profound distance from the ideas of harmony, solidity of form, and control that were promoted by the Regime. Instead the art was often disturbing, dramatic, and enigmatic.⁷⁹⁰

Nevertheless, although there was little direct influence over artistic production in terms of norms, censorship, and explicit coercion during the 1920s, Fascism did deeply affect the cultural debate of the time. It is therefore of great importance to understand Fascist arts policy and the way Fascism came to influence the art and cultural discourse of the time in order to comprehend the meaning of Venturi's usages of the concept of the primitive, and thus his thinking and his way of working in the 1920s. In this regard, I suggest that it is significant that Venturi's definition of primitivism became most explicit at the time of the establishment of the Fascist regime. I think that, although Venturi's primitivist discourse did not in itself have a political or ideological nature, its definition was counteractively affected by Fascist involvement in the contemporary cultural debate. In 1924, during a conference, later published, that was open to a wide audience extending beyond the academic environment and reaching out to high society, Venturi spoke of the primitives as an *antidote* to the

787 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 190; Antonello Negri, "Aspetti del mercato e del collezionismo," in *La pittura in Italia. I, Il Novecento, 1900–1945*, ed. Carlo Pirovano (Milano: Electa, 1992), 722–725.

788 Gentile, "The Myth of National Regeneration in Italy," 25–26; Barocchi, "Dal Novecento a Scipione," 5–8.

789 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 59–64.

790 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 68–89.

prevailing contemporary classicism.⁷⁹¹ This was the first time he clearly imbued the term primitive with a conceptual meaning.

Therefore, primitivist discourse should be considered as emerging from the need to respond with more efficient tools to the cultural debate of the time in order to brand his unconventional aesthetic perspective, which was denoted as anti-classicist. Because of it, Venturi came to present classicism, not only as lacking a creative drive, but also in terms of a practice that serves extra artistic purposes, such as the celebration and illustration of an ideology, compliant with political power. He indeed believed that political issues had an impact on aesthetic interests and the cultural debate of the 1920s, which contributed to the provincialism and poor results of contemporary art.⁷⁹² He associated the general restriction of individual liberties with the subjugation of art to politics, causing a loss of creative freedom.⁷⁹³ He thought that the reason for the underestimation of primitive art at the time was the consequence of classical prejudice promoted by political power.

However, the relationship between power and art in the 1920s was complex, as was Venturi's relationship to the Fascist regime. One should bear in mind that Modern Classicism developed independently from Fascism, and in fact before the establishment of the Fascist regime, although it shared some common modernist roots. The two phenomena were the results of a similar course of evolution from a position of dissent and regeneration based on destruction, to one based on tradition and (re-) construction after the war. They emerged from a common ground of nationalism that saw cultural tradition as the basis for the definition of a modern national identity.⁷⁹⁴ Nonetheless they remained two independent phenomena. Despite their similar back-

791 Venturi, "Il valore attuale dei primitivi". "Onde può essere oggi opportuno di riesaminare il gusto dei Primitivi, per determinarne i tratti essenziali e dedurne il valore attuale... È opportuno riconoscere il valore dei Primitivi e dei loro epigoni a noi vicini, oggi che per idolatrare l'arte classica si costituisce un'arte neo-classica, fatta assai più di volontà e di intelligenza, che di sensibilità. Contro il neo-classicismo, antico e moderno, dissanguatesi nella pura Accademia, serve come antidoto appunto lo studio dei Primitivi, i più spontanei, i più sensibili, i più umili fra gli artisti di tutti i tempi."

792 Venturi, "Un problema della mostra del Novecento"; Lionello Venturi, "L'esposizione d'arte Italiana a Londra," *L'Arte. Rivista di storia dell'arte medievale e moderna* 33, no. 3 (May 1930): 300–303; Lionello Venturi, *The Present Conditions of Art Criticism*, unpublished manuscript, in ALV. The manuscript was the base for the publication Lionello Venturi, *Art Criticism Now* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1941). The author placed art and culture in the 1920s in relation to the political situation.

793 Federico Vercellone, "Forma ed estetismo. La Torino di Gobetti e di Lionello Venturi," in *Morfologie del moderno* (Genova: Marietti, 2006), 177–191; Venturi, "L'esposizione d'arte Italiana a Londra".

794 Emilio Gentile, "The Myth of National Regeneration in Italy: From Modernist Avant-Garde to Fascism," in *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy*, eds. Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 25–26.

grounds, artists' work was for the most part not a direct expression or celebration of a political project, regardless of their personal involvement in politics.⁷⁹⁵ Those artists who were more politically committed in supporting Fascism generally thought that art could contribute spiritually and inspire political leaders, suggesting the superior role of art's independence from politics.⁷⁹⁶

Moreover, politically involved artists for the most part tended to keep their artistic work detached from direct or explicit references to political matters. Mario Sironi, for instance, claimed that artists should support the Fascist political project with the production of images that could manifest Fascist myths; and indeed his pictures became in many ways an embodiment of Fascism and its age.⁷⁹⁷ Nevertheless, although he was an enthusiastic member of the Fascist party and among the founders of the Novecento group, he thought that artists should still produce art through a personal and inner creative process and not in terms of celebration or propaganda.⁷⁹⁸ This was true also for anti-fascist artists, such as Carlo Levi (1902–1975), who avoided political references in his paintings in order to deceive possible suspects from the authorities.⁷⁹⁹

795 In 1926–1927, Bottai called for enquiry from the pages of the journal he directed, *Critica fascista*, about the art under the Fascism addressing artists and intellectuals. Sedita, *Gli intellettuali di Mussolini*, 25–27; Sileno Salvagnini, *Il sistema delle arti in Italia, 1919–1943* (Bologna: Minerva, 2000), 344–354. In 1929, the editor of the cultural journal *Le arti plastiche* raised a debate on the topic of historical themes in contemporary art. The discussion among intellectuals from different cultural factions that unfolded on several numbers of the journal, formally dealt with the significance of historical paintings in the 19th century. It in fact addressed the initiative of offering a prize for paintings called to represent characters or events related to the foundation of Fascism, organized in the occasion of the 17th Venice Biennale. “Referendum sul quadro storico”, in *Storia moderna dell'arte in Italia. Manifesti, polemiche, documenti, Dal Novecento ai dibattiti sulla figura monumentale. 1925–1945*, vol. 3, ed. Paola Barocchi (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1990), 89–97; Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 194–201.

796 Mark Antliff, *Avant-garde Fascism: The Mobilization of Myth, Art, and Culture in France 1909–1939* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 30–32; Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 60–67, 101; Walter L. Adamson, “Ardengo Soffici and the Religion of Art,” in *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy*, eds. Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 62–63.

797 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 8–9, 132–142; Emily Braun, “Mario Sironi's Urban Landscapes: The Futurist/Fascist Nexus,” in *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy*, eds. Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), 120–121.

798 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 188, 192–193.

799 Pia Vivarelli, “Introduzione,” in Carlo Levi, *Lo Specchio. Scritti di critica d'arte* (Roma: Donzelli, 2001), xii; Maria Mimita Lamberti, “La pittura del primo novecento in Piemonte,” in *La pittura in Italia. 1, Il Novecento, 1900–1945*, ed. Carlo Pirovano (Milano: Electa, 1992), 45–84.

Also, in both cases, although being part of the artistic trend of Modern Classicism, Sironi and Levi's paintings escaped the measured harmony of classicism or naturalistic realism and instead favoured Expressionist elements. (Figs. 59–61) For instance, although Sironi's artworks contained many elements typical of Modern Classicism – i.e. figuration, solid volumes, suggestion of space, reference to tradition –, he maintained a connection with the Expressionist imagination, as seen in the formal aspects of his works, such as the use of strong colour contrasts, distorted figures, and sharp definition of objects. Sironi had first-hand experience of the Futurist avant-garde and continued to develop his art towards a synthesis between originality and tradition on the one hand, and extreme simplification and purism on the other. His style was characterised by a constructive approach that aimed at expressing melancholic emotions.⁸⁰⁰ It is interesting that, at the beginning of the 1930s, of the two, it was Sironi who was the one to clash with the political authorities in relation to issues of aesthetic conformity.⁸⁰¹

4.4.2 Fascist Arts Policy

This attitude of selection, appropriation, and re-elaboration of symbolic images was characteristic of Fascist arts policy. Although the aesthetisation of politics was among the key strategies deployed by Fascism in order to promote its ideology, gain consensus, and achieve political leadership, the regime did not establish official aesthetic guidelines or iconographic norms, nor did it endorse any specific art movement.⁸⁰² The regime believed that it was not necessary to force artists to conform to a certain aesthetic or to impose an official state art in terms of realism, academism, propaganda, ideological illustration or direct celebration of the regime. It considered it was more useful to appropriate artists' production afterwards.⁸⁰³

Despite of the many factions and aesthetic alternatives that existed in defining the Fascist arts policy, at least in the 1920s, the moderate wing prevailed.⁸⁰⁴ Fascist intellectuals, such as art critic and cultural influencer Margherita Sarfatti and Giuseppe Bottai (1895–1959), journalist, key figure of the regime, and eventually Minister of National Education in 1936, believed that the fascination and emotional power of Fine Art was proportional to its aesthetic quality, which he put in relation with the artists' independence.⁸⁰⁵ Margherita Sarfatti had been associated with Mussolini

800 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 18–67, 91–112.

801 *Ibid.*, 11–14, 176–179, 193.

802 Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 1–15; Lazzaro, “Forging a Visible Fascist Nation,” 13–31.

803 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 191–192.

804 Stone, *The Patron State*, 43–44; Sedita, *Gli intellettuali di Mussolini*, 25–29.

805 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 11–14, 186, 191–192; Cioli, *Il Fascismo e la 'sua' arte*, 53–56; Stone, *The Patron State*, 44–46, 187–190; Giovanni Belardelli,

since the time when they had both worked at the socialist newspaper *Avanti*.⁸⁰⁶ She had supported her fellow journalist and had been an activist since the first stages of the Fascist movement. She became involved in the political project in the role of a cultural advisor.⁸⁰⁷ She influenced the cultural and arts policy of Fascism with a form of sophisticated modernism in her interpretation of nationalism. Later, Mussolini distanced himself from her and she – not least as a Jew – found herself at odds with the new identity of Fascism, especially during the 1930s.⁸⁰⁸ Although Sarfatti sought a connection between art and the political power, she thought it to be in the power of art to direct and inspire politics, especially in regard to spiritual and social reform.⁸⁰⁹ In her view artists had to engage in a role of spiritual leadership.⁸¹⁰

Many fascist intellectuals thought that abstraction, synthesis, and mysticism were better methods for conveying their ideology than an openly celebrative realist art.⁸¹¹ Especially because Fine Art was seen as a sophisticated means directed to an intellectual elite, while other media, such as cinema and radio, were considered more suitable for mass communication and explicit propaganda.⁸¹² A similar distinction was also significantly made between Fine Art and illustration, the latter being seen as a tool of mass communication. A clear example in this regard is Sironi's double standard revealed between his artworks and in his work as an illustrator for the Fascist party newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia*, explicitly propagandistic, aiming at shocking and impressing. The difference is not only evident at an iconographic level, but concerns aesthetic and formal aspects, too.⁸¹³

Because the Fascist regime did not establish or impose clear aesthetic norms affecting the formal language or the content of artworks, the artistic practices of the time remained substantially independent and were characterised by a pluralism

“Il fascismo e l'organizzazione della cultura,” in *Storia d'Italia. 4, Guerre e fascismo, 1914–1943*, eds. Giovanni Sabbatucci and Vittorio Vidotto (Roma–Bari: Editori Laterza, 1998), 478–495; Salvagnini, *Il sistema delle arti in Italia*, 448.

806 Cannistraro and Sullivan, *Il Duce's Other Woman*, 77–95; Rachele Ferrario, *Margherita Sarfatti. La regina dell'arte nell'Italia fascista* (Milano: Mondadori, 2015).

807 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 91–92.

808 *Ibid.*, 176 – 177.

809 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 91–92; Adamson, “Ardengo Soffici and the Religion of Art,” 46.

810 Claudia Lazzaro, “Forging a Visible Fascist Nation: Strategies for Fusing Past and Present,” in *Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy*, eds. Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), 13–31; Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 91–92; Cannistraro and Sullivan, *Il Duce's Other Woman*, 269. “Margherita understood the inspirational power of myth and the need of faith to achieve such goals.”

811 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 190.

812 Wanrooij, “Mobilizzazione, modernizzazione, tradizione,” 422–426

813 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 11–14, 114, 132–142, 193.

of formal outcomes. Fascism generally accepted different artistic expressions and styles.⁸¹⁴ This pluralism was not only respectful of the various outcomes that composed the aesthetic landscape of Modern Classicism, but it also included other aesthetic approaches, such as Futurism and Expressionist or Impressionist orientations. This was still true in the 1930s and 1940s, a more authoritarian stage of the regime. It is significant that throughout the whole Fascist era the contemporary artistic scene presented a plethora of formal and aesthetic choices, ranging from the modern urban cosmopolitanism of Novecento Italiano and Stracittà, the modernist elitism of Futurism, the provincialism and intimacy of Strapaese and other individual isolated figures – i.e. Felice Casorati and Giorgio Morandi – to the mystical atmosphere of metaphysical art and archaism and the Quattrocento style of Magic Realism. Fascism indeed welcomed, even encouraged, a variety of artistic idioms, in some cases contradicting each other, as the purchases for public and private collections suggest – also Mussolini's private collection – throughout the 20 years of the Fascist regime.⁸¹⁵

This aesthetic pluralism responded to the nature of Fascist power, which was in constant need of changing its repertoire of myths and symbols. Fascism consolidated its political prominence through a combination of the methods of intimidation, coercion, compromise, and adaptation. Especially at the beginning of its role as a governing leadership, Fascism tried opportunistically to attract the support of different social classes ranging from monarchists, industrialists, ecclesiastics, and landowners to peasants, workers, and intellectuals.⁸¹⁶ The variety of imagery and aesthetic styles that followed each other during the Fascist regime reflected its imperfect totalitarianism dependent on the need to please different partners and supporters in order to thrive.⁸¹⁷ The evolution of Fascist discourse was the outcome of a continuous pleading for consensus.

The mobility of its ideas, its inclination to transformation, was part of the Fascist strategy to win acceptance and to bypass opposition.⁸¹⁸ The alternation of symbolic

814 Stone, *The Patron State*, 23–94; Enrico Mascelloni, “Venturi polemist. Gli anni Venti e il caso Modigliani,” in *Da Cézanne all'arte astratta. Omaggio a Lionello Venturi*, ed. Giorgio Cortenova and Roberto Lambarelli (Milano: Mazzotta, 1992), 147–148; Lazzaro, “Forging a Visible Fascist Nation,” 13–31; Sedita, *Gli intellettuali di Mussolini*, 181–185.

815 Francesca Romana Morelli, “Roma–Torino. Artisti, collezionismo pubblico e privato alle Quadriennali Romane, 1931–1943,” in *Le capitali d'Italia. Torino–Roma, 1911–1946. Arti, produzione, spettacolo*, ed. Marisa Vescovo and Netta Vespignani (Milano: Electa, 1997), 55–62; Archivio biblioteca Quadriennale, accessed February 25, 2019, http://www.quadriennale-di-roma.org/arbiq_web/index.php?sezione=quadriennali.

816 Braun, *Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 120–121, 126–127; Stanley G. Payne, “Foreword,” in Emilio Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity: Nationalism, Futurism, and Fascism*, ix–xix (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2003), xi–xii.

817 Adamson, “Ardengo Soffici and the Religion of Art,” 50–51; Payne, “Foreword,” xv.

818 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 191–192; Stone, “The State as Patron,” 205–207.

images that could be withdrawn from a wide range of formal languages enhanced the Fascists' possibility to address different targets and situations. Characterised by political flexibility, continuously adapting and transforming, Fascism as a movement endorsed a pluralism that allowed for a wide visual repertoire responding to its evolving messages and myths. For each political stage a corresponding elaboration of myths and new images was required. The connection between art and power, the identification between Fascism and aesthetic ideas, was established on the base of a continuous negotiation between Fascist identity and aesthetic pursuits rather than being imposed from above.⁸¹⁹

4.4.3 Fascistization of Art and Culture

Despite the substantial independence of artistic practices, pluralism was allowed to exist only as long as it would respond to the specific strategy of appropriation. In this sense pluralism was ratified and homogenised within the Fascist frame, linking single artworks to Fascist discourse. This *hegemonic pluralism*, as it has been defined, therefore gave shape to a Fascist arts policy that, despite its lack of direct control over art production, resulted in a process of fascistization of art and culture.⁸²⁰ Art could officially exist only in terms of a Fascist interpretation. This was a subtle system of indirect control of the arts and exploitation for political interests, which Fascism displayed while presenting the regime as the promoter of the artistic and cultural regeneration of the country. Through this policy, Fascism could present itself as a disinterested patron of the arts, inclusive and supportive of every aesthetic stance, while in fact it enacted a delusive mechanism.

In this sense the inclusion and the acceptance of an aesthetic pluralism guaranteed that Fascism would not only have a source of myths and images suitable to its ever-changing identity. Such a pluralism also meant that artists would avoid expressing open criticism and that they would take part in the Fascist discourse and framing structures. The Fascist strategy was particularly alluring for artists because it allowed them the option of coexisting within the Fascist discursive frame in a passive way. Artists of all aesthetic backgrounds and ideological orientations indeed found room for their individual aesthetic choices within this loosely defined and ready-to-compromise Fascist arts policy.⁸²¹ However, the acceptance of this Fascist framing system was not just a matter of mere opportunism, such as gaining visibility and support in spite of a personal practice.

Artists and intellectuals generally preferred to have the chance of affecting the contemporary cultural and aesthetic debate from within a dominant Fascist discourse,

819 Stone, "The State as Patron," 210.

820 Ibid., 205–207.

821 Ibid., 210.

even when being aware of the process of homogenisation, and thus abstained from direct forms of criticism of the regime. They preferred to engage in a passive participation, maintaining their line of work in privacy, rather than being silenced or excluded altogether.⁸²² Conformity also meant covering up possible anti-Fascist political involvement or beliefs. There are several cases of artists who were anti-Fascist, such as Felice Casorati and Carlo Levi, but who were still integrated into the Fascist discursive frame. The regime, on the other hand, was not concerned about the sincere nature of the artists' participation, because it could nonetheless be presented as a form of legitimisation.⁸²³ Through this strategy Fascism secured a widespread formal consensus among intellectuals and artists without compromising the control of art.

This aspect also explains the weak impact of the *Manifesto of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals*, which did not gain much of a following.⁸²⁴ The manifesto, promoted by Benedetto Croce and signed by a number of anti-Fascist intellectuals in 1925, had been written as a protest against the identification and appropriation of national art and culture by the Fascist regime.⁸²⁵ It was grounded on liberal principles and claimed that art and culture should not be bound to an ideology, but should rather remain independent and oriented towards an international scope. The manifesto corresponded to the Crocean idea that artists and intellectuals should be detached from material aspects of life such as politics and to the conception of art as an eternal and universal phenomenon.⁸²⁶

The tolerance of pluralism, of an independent and diversified aesthetic realm of artistic practices, therefore responded to the strategy of inclusion, appropriation, and interpretation that contributed to the shaping of the Fascist discourse. Through the process of inclusion and appropriation of symbolic images, Fascism could exploit art by manipulating its meaning, without directly controlling it. The plurality of artistic approaches was absorbed through a frame that was realised and perpetuated, thanks to the work of art critics and a range of official events. In this perspective the importance of discursive frames emerges as the means to produce meaning, knowledge, and thus power in spreading Fascism across the country.

822 Stone, "The State as Patron," 210; Sedita, *Gli intellettuali di Mussolini*, 183–185. The Fascist regime tolerated antifascism.

823 Stone, "The State as Patron," 210.

824 Emilio Raffaele Papa, *Storia di due manifesti. Il Fascismo e la cultura italiana* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1958), 42–60; Boatti, *Preferirei di no*, 32–39; d'Orsi, "Lo strano caso del professor Venturi," 5–11.

825 Papa, *Storia di due manifesti*, 42–60. The Manifesto of the Anti-Fascist Intellectuals was published in *Il Mondo* on 1 May 1925. The list of the supporting intellectuals continued in a further two issues of the same journal, 10 May and 22 May 1925. The regime tolerated Croce's views because he was an internationally established scholar.

826 D'Orsi, "Lo strano caso del professor Venturi," 5–11.

4.4.4 Patronage and Cultural Institutions as Part of the Process of Centralization and Cultural Fascistization

The influence of Fascism on art went from simple patronage to the centralised control of cultural institutions, and above all educational institutions, such as universities and academies. Control over events and artistic institutions came to be seen as more important and relevant to the Fascist strategy than the direct control of art production.⁸²⁷ The process of centralisation of State institutions, which also meant an increase in social and cultural control, was instrumental to Fascism in order to pursue the radicalisation of its political power.

Although Fascism became a leading force in 1922, when Mussolini was appointed Prime Minister following the March on Rome, the radicalisation within the authoritarian regime took place from the mid-1920s onwards.⁸²⁸ Progressively, Fascism occupied the major institutions and later founded new ones. In this process of centralisation of authority, the Fascist state aimed at controlling every aspect of individual life from cradle to grave: maternity policy, schools, work, army, and leisure. A similar process involved cultural institutions.⁸²⁹ The control of cultural institutions and other forms of patronage were a key part of the strategy of hegemonic pluralism and of the process of fascistization of the country. Exhibitions in particular were used to provide a frame that ensured an interpretation that linked the artworks on show to Fascist discourse.⁸³⁰

In the 1920s, the Fascist regime progressively became the main patron of art and culture. Fascism, as a government and as a political party, actively engaged itself in a complex programme of exhibitions, competitions, purchases, and grants supporting contemporary art.⁸³¹ Patronage was an especially useful tool during the early stages of the Fascist government, for attracting artists to Fascist structures, thus enhancing the process of appropriation into the Fascist discursive frame. Fascist patronage, which reflected the policy of hegemonic pluralism, supported the arts without wishing to affect its formal or iconographic elements. Artists could benefit from such patronage without compromising their aesthetic integrity. Support was indeed distributed in respect of aesthetic independence.⁸³² The artists who responded, directly or indirectly, in providing visual images suitable to represent the regime's myths were

827 Salvagnini, *Il sistema delle arti in Italia*, 13–45, 88–126; Morelli, “Roma–Torino,” 55–62.

828 D’Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 67–68; Cannistraro and Sullivan, *Il Duce’s Other Woman*, 286–298; Chabod, *L’Italia contemporanea*, 74–84.

829 Alessandro del Puppo, “Da Soffici a Bottai. Un’introduzione alla politica fascista delle arti in Italia”, *Revista de Historia da Arte e Arqueologia*, no. 2 (1995/1996): 7, 11.

830 Paloposki, *Taidenäyttelyt Suomen ja Italian julkisissa kuvataidesuhteissa*, 94–113.

831 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 100–101; Stone, “The State as Patron,” 211–226; Salvagnini, *Il sistema delle arti in Italia*.

832 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 100–101.

praised, although never named as official artists. At the same time those who did not respond were seldom censored or marginalised. Fascism introduced an image of the regime as a promoter sponsoring the artistic and cultural regeneration of the country, aiming at returning Italy to its previous role of superiority, playing on nationalist feelings.⁸³³

At the opening of the Novecento group's exhibition in 1923, Mussolini, although taking part as a private individual, gave the first speech about arts policy in his role as the head of the government.⁸³⁴ While avoiding an official endorsement of the group, Mussolini presented Fascist leadership as a liberal patron of the arts. It is significant that Mussolini introduced the new Fascist government in the context of and in relation to a cultural event. He stated that the Fascist government considered it impossible to govern yet neglect art and artists, but he also specified that this did not mean that it would encourage any form of state art, as he believed that art belonged to the individual. However, he also added that it was the duty of the government to involve artists in contemporary events that encouraged the expression of nationalist feelings.

One can see that one of Fascism's first priorities, once it had power, was to reinforce the nationalist myth and to establish a public role for intellectuals and artists. This latter aspect clashed with the Crocean idea of the role of intellectuals and artists as detached from the material and contingent context that had until then prevailed.⁸³⁵ Fascism indeed stressed the artists' responsibility to contribute to the shaping of Italian national identity. Subsequently, the regime became progressively better organised and more efficient in its policy of hegemonic pluralism, of its inclusion and appropriation of artistic practices.⁸³⁶ The second half of the decade saw the increasing authoritarian turn of the regime take place. This aspect also affected Fascist arts policy, with an increasingly assertive role of the regime in orienting the cultural debate of the time. However, throughout the 1920s – and in part also until the end of the regime in the 1940s – art production remained substantially independent, especially in regard to artists' formal and stylistic choices. What became more widely applied was control over the context associated with the artists' life and work. Moreover, this also meant that Fascism came to expect a more explicit adherence to the regime from artists and intellectuals, even if this was merely a formal and superficial recognition.

833 Gentile, "The Myth of National Regeneration in Italy," 25–26.

834 Cannistraro and Sullivan, *Il Duce's Other Woman*, 277–280; Cioli, *Il Fascismo e la 'sua' arte*, 44–45; Del Puppo, "Da Soffici a Bottai," 3–4. Quoted from Mussolini's speech: "'Non si può governare ignorando l'arte e gli artisti', ma non ha intenzione di 'incoraggiare qualcosa che potesse assomigliare ad un'arte di stato' in quanto l'arte 'rientra nella sfera dell'individuo'".

835 Boatti, *Preferirei di no*, 33–35; d'Orsi, "Lo strano caso del professor Venturi," 5.

836 Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity*, 80–83.

In 1925 the *Fascist National Institute of Culture* (Istituto nazionale fascista di cultura) was set up, and was directed mainly at promoting the participation of artists in public events. Significantly, this institution was later renamed *National Institute of Fascist Culture* (Istituto nazionale di cultura fascista), thus stressing the Fascist appropriation of the cultural field and intellectuals' official involvement.⁸³⁷ The function of this office did not involve the emanation of aesthetic or stylistic principles or iconographic demands or control over the commitment of the artists. Its function was to lead and co-ordinate the process of appropriation of significant images in the process of fascistization of the cultural debate of the time. With the same spirit of co-ordination among intellectuals, the Manifesto of the Fascist Intellectuals was issued in 1925 at the end of the National Congress of Culture in Bologna, promoted by Mussolini and Giovanni Gentile and signed by many well-established personalities, including Lionello Venturi.⁸³⁸ More than defying norms, it stressed the responsibility of artists to participate in the process of the modernisation of Italian culture, along with the government.⁸³⁹ The reference to artists' commitment and responsibility to represent the connection between the modern society and Italian culture with Fascism was also then reinforced by Mussolini in his address to the students of the Academy of Fine Arts in Perugia, in 1926.⁸⁴⁰

The manifesto aimed to reinforce intellectuals' adherence to the Fascist discourse and to involve them in shaping Fascist culture and aesthetic principles.⁸⁴¹ However, the general definition of the figure of the Fascist intellectual did not imply an exact presentation of their intrinsic qualities. Similarly, the idea of Fascist art was not translated in terms of formal or stylistic rules. In this concern, in the attempt to highlight a connection between the Italian tradition and Fascism, nationalism was one of the most important aspects. This went hand in hand with the rejection of foreign influences. It is significant that, still in 1928, Ardengo Soffici, an artist close to Fascism, when defining the Fascist aesthetic presented a generic and vague picture, claiming

837 Gisella Longo, *L'Istituto Nazionale Fascista di Cultura. Da Giovanni Gentile a Camillo Pellizzi (1925–1943). Gli intellettuali tra partito e regime* (Roma: Pellicani, 2000).

838 Papa, *Storia di due manifesti*, 42–60.

839 Mascelloni, "Venturi polemist," 147–148; Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 100–101.

840 Barocchi, "Dal Novecento a Scipione," 5. "L'arte segna l'aurora di ogni civiltà; senza l'arte la civiltà non è. Noi non dobbiamo rimanere contemplativi, non dobbiamo sfruttare il patrimonio del passato. Noi dobbiamo creare un'arte nuova, un'arte dei nostri tempi, un'arte fascista."; Cioli, *Il Fascismo e la 'sua' arte*, 53–56.

841 Papa, *Storia di due manifesti*, 42–60; Boatti, *Preferirei di no*, 32–39; d'Orsi, "Lo strano caso del professor Venturi," 5–11; Del Puppo, *Da Soffici a Bottai*, 7, 11.

that Fascist art “*should reflect the national spirit and tradition, avoiding foreign forms, it should be committed to the present and avoid hiding in archaism and primitivisms...*”⁸⁴²

The manifesto raised a positive response. Many intellectuals, especially among the younger generation, signed the paper that was drafted at the end of the Congress of Bologna.⁸⁴³ Many signed because they were especially attracted by the role of the modern committed intellectual, an active agent in the definition of state arts policy and influencing the cultural debate that had been presented during the Congress. The document was one of the first measures during the Fascist regime through which intellectuals were gathered together in order to give input to a public recognition of Fascism. The *Manifesto of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals* was indeed a reaction to the Fascist manifesto, which had been perceived as intruding on the sphere of intellectuals and threatening artistic independence. However, we have already seen how the strategy of fascistization had been successful in hampering the organisation and development of an active anti-Fascism during the 1920s. Its policy succeeded in dividing intellectuals and artists and avoiding the organisation of a common form of dissent.⁸⁴⁴

In the second half of the 1920s, Italy's process of centralisation kept advancing. After 1926, it became compulsory for artists to register with the professional union, *Sindacato delle belle arti*.⁸⁴⁵ This organisation mainly addressed the professional life of individuals, and not their work. While unions were presented as a form of tutelage for the professional category of artists, it worked in fact as a tool of capillary control and filter, encouraging participation and commitment. For instance, in order to participate in exhibitions or other public cultural events, artists were required to go through the selection of the unions.⁸⁴⁶ Local juries indeed took care of the selection of artists to be invited to national events. Therefore, although being local institutions, they played a role that had an effect on a larger scale. At first, local committees worked on the basis of individual discretion; it was only later that the government gave centralised instructions and guidelines on selection procedures. However, the choice of artworks in later years, which still included a great variety of artistic practices, also shows that the selection criteria were never standardised or univocal and were mostly interpreted at the discretion of local officials.

842 Ardengo Soffici, “Arte Fascista,” in *Storia moderna dell'arte in Italia. Manifesti, polemiche, documenti*, vol. 3, *Dal Novecento ai dibattiti sulla figura monumentale. 1925–1945*, ed. Paola Barocchi (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1990), 26–31. “...La cultura fascista non deve essere nè tutta volta al passato nè tutta volta all'avvenire, ma attuale e cioè animata dal doppio spirito del passato e dell'avvenire... [l'arte fascista deve] essere un'arte di spiriti nazionali, con caratteristiche particolari italiane che la distinguano dall'arte di ogni altro paese.”

843 Papa, *Storia di due manifesti*, 42–60; Boatti, *Preferirei di no*, 33–34.

844 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 1–2.

845 Stone, “The State as Patron,” 211–212; Salvagnini, *Il Sistema delle arti in Italia*, 13–21; Cioli, *Il Fascismo e la 'sua' arte*, 213–218.

846 Stone, “The State as Patron,” 211–212.

Another attempt to centralise control over the professional life of intellectuals, promoting their adherence to a Fascist discursive frame, was the foundation of the *Royal Italian Academy*, in 1929. It was yet one more institution overseeing and co-ordinating the Italian intellectual milieu in line with prevailing nationalism and classicism with the purpose of preserving the national character of Italian culture and favouring the flourishing of the Italian creative genius.⁸⁴⁷ The Academy was directly controlled by the state and came to absorb all the other pre-existent smaller, and independent, academies. Members of the Academy, who received a generous salary and began to include visual artists, were nominated on the initiative of the government. Among the first to be appointed directly by Mussolini was Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the inspirational leader of Futurism and among the founders of Fascism (1919).

4.4.5 Exhibitions as Part of the Fascist Frame

Despite the growing demands for the commitment and the explicit adherence of artists and intellectuals to Fascism, which also worked as a form of legitimisation of authority, exhibitions and other cultural events remained mostly open to a pluralistic set of aesthetic approaches. The process of centralisation and fascistization of culture nevertheless also affected art exhibitions. Exhibitions had a more direct impact in the policy of hegemonic pluralism, of appropriation and interpretation, because they worked in quite concrete terms as a frame projecting meaning directly over the single artworks exhibited. The context of exhibitions favoured a perspective of receiving artworks, in the light of nationalism and classical tradition and in connection to Fascist imagery, independently from their original meaning. Therefore, it was not necessary to discriminate between artworks on the basis of the authors' political ideas and aesthetic or stylistic choices. This attitude is proven by the pluralism of artworks that were included even in the most official and exclusive public events and competitions that were accessed through invitation and based on the evaluation of a centrally appointed jury. For instance, this was the case with the Venice Biennale and the Rome Quadriennale in the 1930s, both events of great importance which were under the direct control of Fascist institutions. They responded to the Fascist strategy of appropriation and exclusion and censorship were rarely applied and concerned above all cases of open criticism.⁸⁴⁸ (Figs. 51–52)

847 Sedita, *Gli intellettuali di Mussolini*, 28–31; 1926 *Fondazione della Reale Accademia d'Italia*, accessed September 28, 2018, <http://www.lincci-celebrazioni.it/i1926i.html>; Del Puppo, "Da Soffici a Bottai," 11.

848 Stone, "The State as Patron," 207, 211–230; Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities*, 1–15; Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum, eds., *Donatello among the Blackshirts: History and Modernity in the Visual Culture of Fascist Italy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005). The book edited by Claudia Lazzaro and Roger J. Crum

Exhibitions, lavishing benefits and offering a platform that ensured visibility among public and private collectors alike without compromising aesthetic independence, were attractive opportunities for artists, even for those who were not convinced by the Fascist political project. Therefore, exhibitions favoured the integration of artists into the Fascist discursive frame. As a result, in spite of the aesthetic pluralism, exhibitions were organized so to present the artworks as reflecting Fascist values. In turn these values were highlighted as dominating among the artists and in the cultural debate of the time. Through an exhibitionary complex, as formulated by Tony Bennett in Foucauldian terms, Fascism could present Italian culture through a perspective that would reinforce Fascist myths and advertise it internationally, thus becoming a tool of propaganda and diplomacy.⁸⁴⁹

4.4.6 Novecento as a Discursive Frame

Art critics were the major agents in this process of turning exhibitions into a frame capable of attracting and controlling a pluralism of aesthetic approaches. They had an important role in translating the aesthetic meaning of artworks into the Fascist vocabulary. We have already seen how the work of journalist and art critic Margherita Sarfatti contributed to projecting aesthetic coherence onto the artistic production of the artists working under the name of the Novecento group. Sarfatti inspired and promoted the group. At the time of the foundation of Novecento, in 1922, no direct reference was made to Fascism as a political movement or ideology. It was nevertheless under Sarfatti's influence and interpretation that the artworks made within the group could be used to voice and to make visible the myths of Fascist discourse.

The involvement of Novecento with Fascism was indeed more a matter of mediation and appropriation, rather than one of aesthetic conformity and political adherence. It was through Sarfatti's theoretical and critical work that Novecento art found coherence within Fascist discourse, in spite of the variation in the artistic practices of its individual members or their personal views on Fascism.⁸⁵⁰ Through her personal and professional network, she secured a link to political power, but most of the artists within Novecento did not think of their work within the group as constituting a subordinated position of art.⁸⁵¹ Some of the founding members (Bucci, Dudreville, and Malerba), although adhering to the aesthetic foundation of the group, kept a distance from Sarfatti's intention to promote Fascist discourse through their artworks and to

offers many examples of strategies aiming at enabling the process of appropriation of history, culture, and art thus concurring in reinforcing the Fascist discourse.

849 Paloposki, *Taidenäyttelyt Suomen ja Italian julkisissa kuvataidesuhteissa*, 94–113; Bennett, "Exhibition, Truth, Power: Reconsidering 'The Exhibitionary Complex'".

850 Cannistraro and Sullivan, *Il Duce's Other Woman*, 277–285, 309–314; Salvagnini, *Il sistema delle arti in Italia*, 47–55.

851 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 91.

establish a connection with the regime.⁸⁵² Even the Fascist regime, although appreciating the group's aesthetic project and its framing into the Fascist discourse, did not mean to endorse it officially.

After an initial crisis that was brought about by artists' defection from Novecento, Sarfatti re-founded the group in 1926 and immediately organised an exhibition that had a great significance and came to affect the cultural debate of the time profoundly. In spite of the government's reserves about Novecento, Sarfatti's wide network and her influential position gave an extraordinary visibility to the movement. By 1926, only four of the original members remained, but many new ones joined in.⁸⁵³ Artists were attracted by the possibility of gaining preferential visibility without materially affecting their artistic practice. There were hardly any iconographic or stylistic restrictions and Fascism was not directly involved. This meant that the group came to incorporate an even broader pluralism of aesthetic approaches and formal languages than it had done at its outset. It seems that, at this point, Sarfatti was no longer aiming to outline a common and exemplary aesthetic ground, but rather to create a frame where different aesthetic approaches could be absorbed, appropriated and re-elaborated, into Fascist discourse.

What Novecento did not achieve as a group, it gained as an art event. It became a major event on a national scale and was also recognised as a diplomatic tool, gaining popularity at an international level.⁸⁵⁴ Sarfatti was among the first to understand the power of a frame projecting meaning on artworks that could reinforce Fascist discourse and myth. Despite the great number of artists and the broad scale of aesthetic expressions, she could present the exhibition as a coherent whole from a Fascist perspective. Novecento contributed to the making of Italian culture fascist, embracing and promoting Fascist myths. Nonetheless, Novecento's exhibitions remained a window on the most prominent artistic pursuits of the time and were highly successful among collectors both at home and abroad.

852 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 166–175; Cannistraro and Sullivan, *Il Duce's Other Woman*, 269–285. In particular Dudreville and Bucci disagreed on Sarfatti's idea to not only invite Mussolini to the opening of their first exhibition in 1923, but also on her promise to gift the Dux with a sketchbook of drawings made by each one of the group's artists. This disagreement reflected these artists' resistance to become too directly involved with the Fascism.

853 Cioli, *Il Fascismo e la 'sua' arte*, 45–47, 50; Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 172–173; Rossana Bossaglia, "Caratteri e sviluppo di Novecento," in *Mostra del Novecento italiano, 1923 – 1933* (Milano: Mazzotta, 1983), catalogue to the exhibition, 19–32; *Catalogo della prima mostra del Novecento italiano*.

854 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 166; Paloposki, *Taidenäyttelyt Suomen ja Italian julkisissa kuvataidesuhteissa*, 199–239. While Novecento lost influence at a national level after 1929, it remained important at an international level as a diplomatic tool. During the 1930s, many group exhibitions were organised in Europe and, in 1931, in Helsinki.

Towards the end of the 1920s, Novecento's fortunes waned. It suffered the same destiny that led to the rejection of Futurism at the beginning of the 1920s. Novecento was no longer considered as a source of useful images because it did not keep pace with the new imperialistic stage of Fascism, which emphasised references to classical antiquities in Fascist aesthetic discourse. The regime indeed tried to express identification with the Roman Empire.⁸⁵⁵ In this regard, for instance, Sironi's artworks came to be considered anti-classical and anti-figurative, because of the influence of Nordic Expressionism that characterised his work.⁸⁵⁶ Despite the loyalty Sironi had expressed towards Fascism, the art critic Ugo Ojetti, who was close to the regime, and the fascist political leader Roberto Farinacci (1892–1945), both attacked him, defining him as subversive and anti-Italian.⁸⁵⁷ In general, Novecento artists came to be criticised for aspects that had earlier been accepted and tolerated, such as making international connections, or employing qualities of formal simplification and expressiveness, and gloomy atmospheres. In particular, the elitist and urban nature of the Novecento group came to clash with the growing populism of the Fascist discourse.⁸⁵⁸ The group was also criticised because of the lack of aesthetic coherence among its members. This characteristic, a typical trait of the group since its foundation, was now presented as a sign of opportunism and financial exploitation of Fascist patronage.⁸⁵⁹

The Novecento group's problem towards the end of the 1920s, was not only the result of the evolution of the Fascist identity and myths, but it was also a consequence of the process of centralisation. This does not mean that pluralism was no longer permitted, but that the regime wished to have a direct grip over the management of its Fascist influence based on the strategy of discursive framing. Downsizing the importance of Novecento was a clear sign that the regime was no longer willing to derogate the management of a key mechanism in its strategy.⁸⁶⁰ The contemporary process of centralisation of institutions and direct management of cultural events corresponded

855 Stone, "The State as Patron," 209–210, 226–229; Cioli, *Il Fascismo e la 'sua' arte*, 46–53.

856 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 191–195.

857 *Ibid.*, 114.

858 Vittorio Fagone, "Attraverso gli anni Trenta. Le poetiche e il contesto," in *Attraverso gli anni Trenta. Dal Novecento a Corrente. 120 Opere della Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna di Roma*, ed. Vittorio Fagone (Bergamo: Lubrina, 1999), catalogue to the exhibition, 13–21; Cannistraro and Sullivan, *Il Duce's Other Woman*, 393–394.

859 Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 245–251.

860 Cioli, *Il Fascismo e la 'sua' arte*, 50–51; *Catalogo della prima mostra del Novecento italiano*, 11. Margherita Sarfatti already in 1926 felt it needed to introduce the exhibition and the group with a declaration of no competition with other manifestations. "Da tale intendimento è lontano qualsiasi pensiero di rivalità o di ostilità verso le maggiori sorelle, le biennali di Venezia e Roma, internazionali per programma ed eclettiche per natura".

to the desire to exercise a firm control over politico-cultural frames. Altogether the evolution of the Novecento group's fortunes shows up the gap that existed during the Fascist regime between a Fascist cultural frame, art criticism, artistic theorisation and practices, which was the result of the process of appropriation and re-elaboration.

4.4.7 From Novecento to the Rome Quadriennale

If during the 1920s Fascist intervention in art mostly consisted of public statements in support of cultural initiatives – as was the case with the vernissage of both the 1923 and 1926 exhibitions of the group Novecento and with the opening of the academic year in Perugia in 1926 – by the 1930s, however, the regime had come to control directly the major events involving contemporary art.⁸⁶¹ In 1930, the 17th International Art Exhibition of the City of Venice, better known as the Venice Biennale, passed into the direct control of the government (Autonomous Board).⁸⁶² (Figs. 51–52) At the same time, an iconographic aspect was added to the selection criteria for participating artists. Artists were required to produce sculptures that would exalt the psychic value of the race, and to submit paintings inspired by people or events in connection to the birth of the Fascist movement. Nevertheless, when one looks at the artworks exhibited, one can see that these thematic aspects did not play a big role in the actual selection of artworks. Moreover, there were no directions about formal or stylistic requirements. Artists who would take part in the event, in spite of their ideological and political beliefs, could alter the iconographic prescriptions simply by choosing a particular title for their works.⁸⁶³ Therefore, the major control of the shows did not necessarily imply a tighter selection or discrimination by the jury, or protests from the artists. Artists could simply participate in a passive way, carrying further their personal aesthetic projects, while being incorporated in the frame of the event.

The following year, in 1931, a new event was created directly by the regime, which was managed centrally. The Rome Quadriennale was founded as the national counterpart to the international Venice Biennale, in order to present the latest Italian artistic production. The Quadriennale effectively took over the role of Novecento in

861 Cannistraro and Sullivan, *Il Duce's Other Woman*, 314; Benito Mussolini, "Il Novecento (1926)," in *Storia moderna dell'arte in Italia. Manifesti, polemiche, documenti*, vol. 3, *Dal Novecento ai dibattiti sulla figura monumentale. 1925–1945*, ed. Paola Barocchi (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1990), 9–12; Barocchi, *Dal Novecento a Scipione*, 5; Stone, *The Patron State*, 23–60; Belardelli, "Il fascismo e l'organizzazione della cultura," 441–495; Sedita, *Gli intellettuali di Mussolini*.

862 Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte 17 (Venezia: C. Ferrari, 1930); Braun, "The Faces of Modigliani," 182–192; Salvagnini, *Il sistema delle arti in Italia*, 36–45; Cioli, *Il Fascismo e la 'sua' arte*, 227–255.

863 Stone, "The State as Patron," 211–223.

displaying the latest and most valuable results of Italian aesthetic pursuits. Novecento had reflected Fascist discourse and supported its influence, but it was not under the direct control of the Fascists. This aspect came to clash with a regime that became intent on pursuing a process of centralisation and control.⁸⁶⁴

A jury that selected the artworks through a ‘by-invitation’ system and awarded prizes enhanced the framing function of the event. Their judgements and criticism guaranteed and underlined an interpretation of the artworks in line with Fascist discourse. The artworks were presented in the light of those principles that dominated the cultural debate of the time – nationalism, classicism, and tradition. Nevertheless, all the editions of the Quadriennale, at least up to 1935, reflected a diversified landscape of aesthetic practices, not only in relation to art shown, but also to the prizes awarded and the purchases made by the state.⁸⁶⁵ On the occasion of the First Rome Quadriennale, the jury was composed of members clearly favourable to the regime, such as Margherita Sarfatti, the artist and art critic Cipriano Efisio Oppo (1891–1962), Roberto Longhi, and Carlo Carrà.⁸⁶⁶

The jury selected artists, such as Felice Casorati and Mario Sironi, Ardengo Soffici and the Futurists, *Les Italians de Paris* and ex-members of the group *The Six Painters of Turin*, some of whom instead openly responded to a different ideological and aesthetic background.⁸⁶⁷ (Figs. 54, 55, 59–62, 64) Moreover, the Italian Paris-based Impressionist sculptor Medardo Rosso was chosen for the retrospective exhibition, the high point of the event.⁸⁶⁸ The selection of artists for the show was well-received, which is a sign that it did not constitute an exception or a disturbing result.⁸⁶⁹ On the contrary, the event was reviewed in terms of a “*spiritual regeneration and valorisation*

864 Salvagnini, *Il sistema delle arti in Italia*, 25–36, 97; Morelli, “Roma–Torino,” 55–58; Cioli, *Il Fascismo e la ‘sua’ arte*, 50, 255–267.

865 Salvagnini, *Il sistema delle arti in Italia*, 29. The Rome Quadriennale was considered of a better quality compared to the Venice Biennale. Archivio biblioteca Quadriennale.

866 Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 266 – 268; Valentino Pace, “Politica e accademia. Lionello Venturi, Roberto Longhi e la successione a Pietro Toesca nell’ateneo romano,” in *L’officina dello sguardo. Scritti in onore di Maria Andaloro*, eds. Giulia Bordi et al. (Roma: Gangemi editore, 2014), 347–352; Francesca Morelli, ed., *Cipriano Efisio Oppo. Un legislatore per l’arte. Scritti di critica e di politica dell’arte* (Roma: De Luca, 2000). Oppo was a member of the Fascist party and especially active in the arts policy. He became deputy to the Parliament as a representative of the Fascist party. He designed and directed the *Rome Quadriennale*. He was also responsible for the *Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution* in Rome (1932–1934).

867 For instance, the Six Painters of Turin, besides following Expressionist and Impressionist orientations, had expressed their ideological position in the Referendum about historiographical themes in visual arts.

868 *Prima Quadriennale d’Arte Nazionale* (Roma: Paci, 1931); Archivio biblioteca Quadriennale.

869 Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 266–270.

of the nation under the sign of fascism".⁸⁷⁰ Moreover public purchases, including those for the Mussolini Collection, involved artworks by Enrico Paolucci and Nicola Galante (ex-Six Painters of Turin), Mario Mafai (member of the young contesting group Scuola Romana), and Felice Casorati.⁸⁷¹

In 1935, despite the increasing restrictions resulting from the advanced stages of fascistization, the Second Rome Quadriennale shows that there was still a margin for aesthetic pluralism. On that occasion Oppo, the organisation's general secretary, significantly defined Italian art as art made by Italian artists, regardless of style and formal influences in their plurality of formal languages.⁸⁷² Among the artists invited to exhibit at the event was Carlo Levi, who was then arrested for anti-Fascist activism while his artworks were on display in Rome. Even before the Quadriennale opened, he had been under the observation of the Ministry of the Interior for subversive activity.⁸⁷³ Although Levi was involved in political activism and followed Impressionist and Expressionistic aesthetic orientations with reference to French art, his work was nonetheless intimately personal and showed no overt signs of political references.⁸⁷⁴ Elements of social criticism and formal dissent would emerge only later, during his confinement. Therefore, his artworks could still be absorbed into a Fascist framing. The openness of exhibitions during the 1930s suggests that hegemonic pluralism continued to be the main focus of Fascist arts policy working through framing by appropriation and identification, although coming under more direct control of the regime and in spite of increasing inner pressures for a more authoritative approach.⁸⁷⁵

Progressively, the control over culture came to constitute the occupation of every cultural institution. This process left no room for a cultural or artistic life either outside of Fascist discourse, or beyond the regime's corporative organisation, as there was no political alternative, once political parties had been banned. Art could exist only within a Fascist context. The Fascist regime controlled the development of artists through the academy, organised their profession through unions, and supported

870 Antonio Maraini, "La Quadriennale di Roma," *Dedalo*, no. 12 (March 1931): 682. "Segno della rigenerazione e valorizzazione spirituale della Nazione, nel segno della romanità fascista".

871 Morelli, "Roma-Torino," 55–58; Archivio biblioteca Quadriennale.

872 Morelli, "Roma-Torino," 58–61; Cioli, *Il Fascismo e la 'sua' arte*, 267–273.

873 Morelli, "Roma-Torino," 58–61.

874 Vivarelli, "Introduzione," i–xix.

875 Some of the Fascist leaders claimed it was necessary to tighten up the Fascist arts policy as to direct artists to expressing 'italianità'. Moreover, they complained that the strategy of compromised pluralism did not achieve the desired outcomes. The contrast between Premio Bergamo, patronised by Giuseppe Bottai, and Premio Cremona, patronised by Roberto Farinacci, both recurring annually since 1939, was the result of a situation that had been polarising during the 1930s. Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 11–14, 186, 191–193; Stone, *The Patron State*, 180–190; Salvagnini, *Il sistema delle arti in Italia*, 113–126.

artists economically with purchases and prizes. However, despite such major control over institutions and the professional life of individuals, as a general rule Fascism required the adherence of intellectuals and artists in name only, and did not closely monitor them unless they had openly criticised or opposed the Regime.⁸⁷⁶ Although Fascism gradually began to demand a more explicit endorsement from artists and intellectuals, the actual control over aesthetic outcomes remained limited.

One of the major challenges in studying and defining the artistic landscape of Italian art in the 1920s, is the gap between manifestos and theory, the interpretation of the critics, and the practical existence of the artworks. There is a contradiction between the independence of artistic production at large and the control over the frame of appropriation and interpretation displayed by Fascist policy. Cultural frames constituted the ground on which artistic phenomena were interpreted and linked to Fascism. Through framing devices and the policy of hegemonic pluralism, Fascism affected and oriented the cultural debate of the time in terms of a classicism interpreted in a nationalist sense. Within the cultural debate that took place in the 1920s, Modern Classicism was favoured, promoted, and appropriated by Fascism because it was considered a good source of images with which to express Fascist identity and myths. However, there was a gap between Fascist appropriation of Modern Classicism and actual artistic practices, between the aesthetic meaning of art and the political interpretation, which was promoted more vigorously. As a result, the power of framing as a tool of propaganda can be noticed in the definition of Novecento as Fascist art, which endured long after the end of the regime.⁸⁷⁷

Although the direct impact on artistic production was weak, Fascism nonetheless gained a strong influence over the cultural debate of the time, leading to the predominance of the Fascist discourse that came to emphasise aspects such as nationalism, tradition, and classicism as the essence of Italian cultural identity. I therefore argue that the Fascist framing, in terms of a ground of interpretation and a tool to affect the cultural debate of the time and to empower an aesthetic perspective, is also the key for understanding Venturi's conception of primitivism.

4.5 Primitivism as a Response to the Fascistization of the Culture in the 1920s

In the mid-1920s, at the time of the growing influence of the process of fascistization of arts and culture, Venturi began to associate his aesthetic theory with the concept of the primitive. As the Fascist discursive frame, based on a nationalist interpretation of classical aesthetic tradition, projected meaning onto aesthetic trends and art, so as to respond to the Fascist rhetoric and ideology, Venturi's use of the concept of

876 Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity*, 80–83.

877 Braun, *Mario Sironi and Italian Modernism*, 91.

primitivism aimed at doing the same, but from an opposing aesthetic position. The primitivist discursive frame, as we already saw in the case of the Gualino Collection, projected meaning onto artworks and promoted Venturi's aesthetic perspective. Venturi's definition of a primitivist frame thus reflects the same strategy of appropriation and interpretation as that displayed by the Fascist frame. It seems that Venturi recognised the power of this assertive strategy in creating meaning and consequently gaining power. Therefore, it is arguable that he took inspiration in order to define a tool that could enhance his intention to compete with Fascism in influencing the cultural debate of the time, offering an alternative aesthetic perspective. Venturi's engagement with a discourse on primitivism was not only a means to explain and promote his aesthetic ideas and collecting choices, but through it he also aimed to produce knowledge and to state an alternative aesthetic truth.

While the artistic practice of the time was not so distant from Venturi's aesthetic perspective, as we saw in the analysis of *Quattrocentismo*, the creation of a primitivist frame became his way of opposing the dominant discourse, which had been undergoing a process of fascistization. Primitivism, which functioned within the very logic of the Fascist frame, determined the ground for interpretations that were concurrent to the Fascist one and supportive of Venturi's aesthetic perspective. To him, it became a critical tool of dissent, which was meant to contrast with aspects of the dominant voice prevailing in the cultural debate of the time. Through it, Venturi wished to maintain authority in his ideas and the collecting choices he made that were irreconcilable with that cultural context. Therefore, the main aspects expressed through primitivism, such as anti-classicism and anti-nationalism, can be better understood if considered in relation to the Fascist interpretation of a classical aesthetic tradition in nationalist terms. This perspective throws new light on the meaning of Venturi's definition of primitivism in relation to the Fascist frame.

Venturi's interpretations and evaluations that were made within the primitive frame did not directly concern artistic production, but rather addressed the Fascist appropriation of those phenomena. This was the case of Venturi's considerations about contemporary art that seem to be detached from the actual artistic practices prevalent at the time. He described them in terms of a copy of the past, rediscovery of academic norms, and political conformism. The priority of responding to the Fascist interpretation in order to promote an aesthetic perspective of his own within the cultural debate, conditioned Venturi's evaluation of art. In retrospect, he also admitted that his prejudices had prevented him from understanding modern and contemporary art during the 1920s. He recognised the fact that he had not been able to look at it in an objective way.

Venturi affirmed that all of his writing in the 1920s had been morally conditioned as a consequence of his confrontation with and distance from the dominant

discourse of the time.⁸⁷⁸ He explained the nature of his position as a commitment against Fascist interventions in art and culture, the support of the critics, and the compliance and complaisance of the artists.⁸⁷⁹ Still in the 1930s and 1940s, Venturi expressed in several occasions his opinion about the poor results of contemporary art as a consequence of the political influence.⁸⁸⁰ In particular, Venturi thought that the effects of the Fascist arts policy were more evident in the work of those artists that became active after the First World War. However, Venturi later reconsidered the value of the artists who had worked in line with Italian Modern Classicism. For instance, in 1955, on the occasion of the Rome Quadriennale, he praised the selection of artists that he considered representative of the best of the Italian artistic tradition. Among the artists were Carrà, Soffici, and Boccioni, who had also been shown in the First Rome Quadriennale (1931), which Venturi had strongly criticised.⁸⁸¹

While Venturi's notion of primitivism was grounded in his aesthetic ideas, which it summed up and promoted, it particularly stressed some aspects that addressed the Fascist discourse. These included the independence of artists from political involvement and from public commitment or submission to the government's demands; the spiritual and emotional character of the artistic creation as against intellectualism; the spontaneity and progressive character of art that avoids formal conformity to the art of the past. This elaboration on primitivism made it an efficient tool for opposing the cultural fascistization and promoting his authority based on a different aesthetic background. Primitivism was seen as an "antidote" to classicism, which he considered as an intellectual structure that lacked a spiritual inspiration and responded to academic norms, illustrative criteria, and political celebration.⁸⁸²

878 Lionello Venturi, "Prefazione," *Arte moderna* (Roma: Bocca, 1956), 4; Lionello Venturi, "Contro corrente," in *Pretesti di critica* (Milano: Hoepli, 1929), xi–xvi; Lionello Venturi, *The Present Conditions of Art Criticism*, unpublished manuscript, in ALV. The manuscript consists in the text for a cycle of six conferences that Lionello presented at the Johns Hopkins University in 1941. Especially the first conference focused on art and art criticism in the 1920s and 1930s resuming the main points of his criticism against the dominant discourse. Later published as Venturi, *Art Criticism Now*.

879 Venturi, "Prefazione," 4.

880 Lionello Venturi, "Divagazioni sulle mostre di Venezia e Monza con la risposta ad Ugo Ojetti," *L'Arte. Rivista di arte medievale e moderna* 33, no. 4 (July 1930): 396–405; Lionello Venturi, "La nuova Italia arriva in America," in *Arte moderna* (Roma: Bocca, 1956), 215–224; Lionello Venturi, "Miti del gusto attuale," *La nuova Europa*, no. 18 (10 June 1945): 5; Lionello Venturi, "Pittura italiana contemporanea in una mostra a Londra," *Emporium* 104, no. 620 (August 1946): 51–57; Lionello Venturi, "Linguaggio attuale della pittura," in *Arte moderna* (Roma: Bocca, 1956), 243–249.

881 Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 268–269; Venturi, "Per una critica dell'arte contemporanea," in *Saggi di critica* (Roma: Bocca, 1956), 149–157.

882 Venturi, "Pittura italiana contemporanea in una mostra a Londra"; Venturi, "Il valore attuale dei primitivi"; Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, 3–15, 185–221; Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 252.

Universalism – which primarily carried anti-nationalist connotations, another important aspect of Venturi's primitivism – was associated with the idea of the international character of art that stretched beyond geographic and cultural limits.⁸⁸³ Venturi indeed preferred a cosmopolitan nationalism, as opposed to the prevailing nationalist ideology based on the idea of Italian superiority. This kind of humanist nationalism had circulated within liberal circles since before the war. It was associated with a project of cultural and intellectual regeneration, which proposed an idea of national identity shaped in terms of a dialogue among cultures beyond ideological, religious, or ethnic aspects.⁸⁸⁴ Humanist nationalism was conceived as a confrontation between different national identities and as a humanistic brotherhood.⁸⁸⁵ This idea of nationalism differed profoundly from the nationalism associated with racial superiority and military prevarication that instead prevailed within the Fascist discourse.⁸⁸⁶

Venturi's considerations of contemporary art become clearer when one compares them with Fascist discourse and the resulting presentation of artistic phenomena. Nationalism and tradition were the main points emphasised within the Fascist frame in terms of classicism.⁸⁸⁷ Within this framing, a close connection between the Italian tradition and drawing was established, while colourist and tonal painting were associated with foreign influences. Similarly, figure painting was interpreted as superior and as a national characteristic, as opposed to landscape art.⁸⁸⁸ On the contrary, in Venturi's opinion, and in the context of a primitivist frame, both an emphasis on linearity and the prevalence of figure painting were academic measures that lacked a creative impulse and spiritual inspiration.⁸⁸⁹ As a result, from this perspective, it is possible to explain how Venturi came to place contemporary art in relation to political influence and to academicism.

- 883 Lionello Venturi, "Problemi d'arte," *Leonardo* (20 January 1927): 1–6; Lionello Venturi, "La mia prospettiva estetica," in *Saggi di critica* (Roma: Bocca, 1956); Lionello Venturi, "Polemica con Ugo Ojetti sul gusto francese," in *Arte moderna* (Roma: Bocca, 1956), 85–94; Lionello Venturi, "Polemica con Ugo Ojetti. Numero 3," in *Arte moderna* (Roma: Bocca, 1956), 99–102; Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, 3–15; Venturi, "La posizione dell'Italia nelle arti figurative"; Venturi, "Novità sull'arte cinese".
- 884 Gian Piero Bona, "La via sofferta degli intellettuali italiani. 1911–1946," in *Le capitali d'Italia: Torino–Roma, 1911–1946. Arti, produzione, spettacolo*, eds. Marisa Vescovo and Netta Vespignani (Milano: Electa, 1997), 103–104; d'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 84–86; Braun, "The Faces of Modigliani," 191–192.
- 885 Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity*, 2–7, 43–44.
- 886 Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity*, 2–7; Gentile, 'La nostra sfida alle stelle', 10–16.
- 887 Vercellone, "Forma ed estetismo," 35–40.
- 888 Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 203–211, 224–232.
- 889 Venturi, "Un problema della mostra del Novecento," 191–196; Venturi, "Polemica con Ugo Ojetti sul gusto francese"; Venturi, "Risposta a Ugo Ojetti," in *Arte moderna* (Roma: Bocca, 1956), 91.

He read the loose reference to tradition and to classicism, common among contemporary artists, as related to the Fascists' aims to promote the nationalist idea of Italian cultural superiority.⁸⁹⁰ He thought that figure painting became once again popular not because of its aesthetic considerations, but because it was being promoted by the Fascist regime for ideological reasons. He indeed read the rediscovery of classical norms in terms of academicism, encouraged by the regime because of its tendency to be celebrative and illustrative.⁸⁹¹ Consequently, he concluded that political constrictions of art production were the causes of what he considered to be the poor academic and provincial artistic results of the time.⁸⁹² In his opinion, contemporary art was dominated by artworks characterised by harmony, naturalism, and attention to the material aspects of reality, because of the influence of Fascism.⁸⁹³

In line with the alternative aesthetic ground presented through primitivism, Venturi proposed Impressionism as a base for regenerating contemporary art and as a source of inspiration in terms of modernity, universality, and emotional response.⁸⁹⁴ He thought that the progress made in art at the end of the 19th century in terms of the rebellion against academic norms and an appreciation of a spiritual approach to creation, which he associated with Impressionist artistic research, did not find a following.⁸⁹⁵ Therefore, he considered the artistic production after Impressionism of poor quality. However, this interpretation of Impressionism derived from the primitivist frame, which in the process of appropriation, selected and amplified those aspects that supported his aesthetic perspective and his position within the cultural debate of the time. Venturi indeed found in Impressionist art aspects such as synthesis, abstraction, personal and emotional expression, universal and eternal value, which in fact disregarded its materialist and positivist character. Venturi related those aspects also in terms of freedom, independence, spontaneity, and anti-intellectualism, hinting at a reference beyond the aesthetic sphere and related to a moral and cultural ground.⁸⁹⁶

890 Bona, "La via sofferta degli intellettuali italiani," 103–108.

891 Venturi, "Divagazioni sulle mostre di Venezia e Monza"; Venturi, "Pittura italiana contemporanea in una mostra a Londra". Venturi claimed that every dictatorship needs neo-classical art to support the influence of its rhetorics.

892 Vercellone, "Forma ed estetismo," 35–40; Venturi, "La nuova Italia arriva in America"; Venturi, "Miti del gusto attuale"; Venturi, "Pittura italiana contemporanea in una mostra a Londra".

893 Venturi, "Divagazioni sulle mostre di Venezia e Monza"; Venturi, "Problemi d'arte"; Lionello Venturi, "All'esposizione di Venezia. Il gusto italiano," in *Pretesti di critica* (Milano: Hoepli, 1929), 165–170.

894 Venturi, "Problemi d'arte"; Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, 237–247.

895 Lionello Venturi, "All'esposizione di Venezia. Artisti stranieri," in *Pretesti di critica* (Milano: Hoepli, 1929), 185–190; Lionello Venturi, "I Macchiaioli," in *Arte moderna* (Roma: Bocca, 1956), 159–175; Venturi, "Linguaggio attuale della pittura".

896 Lamberti, "Lionello Venturi sulla via dell'Impressionismo," 271–276; Iamurri, "Lionello Venturi e la storia dell'Impressionismo. 1932–1939," *Studiolo*, no. 5 (2007): 75.

In this regard Venturi claimed that the prevailing classicism promoted by the Fascists resulted in an inability to understand the value of the emotional and spiritual character of art creation and thus of Impressionism.⁸⁹⁷ Moreover, Venturi thought that Impressionism was not appreciated in Italy at the time because of the limits set by nationalist rhetoric and criticism that associated foreign art with the corruption of Italian artists.⁸⁹⁸ However, in the 1910s and 1920s, despite growing suspicions against foreign art, Impressionism had not been completely disregarded in Italy.⁸⁹⁹ Retrospective shows on Impressionism and modern French art were organised, such as the First Italian Exhibition of Impressionism, held in Florence in 1910 and the retrospective exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 1920, curated by Vittorio Pica.⁹⁰⁰ The following Biennale, in 1922 presented a retrospective on Amedeo Modigliani and an exhibition on “Negro sculpture”.⁹⁰¹ Then, in the 1920s the interest in Impressionism started to fade with few studies and exhibitions recorded.⁹⁰² Nevertheless the most common reason for the reservations about Impressionism, even among critics close to Fascism, questioned its meaningfulness in the context of the contemporary aesthetic and artistic landscape. Impressionism was generally considered a manifestation of materialist realism that had run its course.⁹⁰³

Venturi’s presentation of Impressionism according to a primitive aesthetic frame as a valid aesthetic alternative and model for contemporary artists poses indeed some contradictions. The prioritisation of opposing the dominant discourse came at the expense of his understanding of contemporary art and ongoing aesthetic developments. When one compares Venturi’s reference to France and to Impressionism with the aesthetic implications in the context of the 1920s, one can see that it mainly consisted in an escape from the nationalistic rhetoric and its appropriation of the tradition of classicism. Later, in the 1930s, Venturi’s perspective on Impressionism

897 Venturi, “Polemica con Ugo Ogetti sul gusto francese”; Lionello Venturi, “Polemica con Ogetti Numero 2,” in *Arte moderna* (Roma: Bocca, 1956), 95–97; Venturi, “Polemica con Ugo Ogetti. Numero 3”; Venturi, “Problemi d’arte”; Lionello Venturi, “Il Gusto e l’arte. I primitivi e i classici,” *L’Arte* 30, no. 2 (1927): 71.

898 Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 298–303; Iamurri, “L’azione culturale di Lionello Venturi,” 101–102.

899 Lamberti, “Lionello Venturi sulla via dell’Impressionismo,” 263–264.

900 Esposizione Internazionale d’Arte della Città di Venezia, 12 (Roma: Bestetti e Tumminelli, 1920). Besides a retrospective on Cézanne, it included artworks by Signac, Bonnard, Matisse, Van Gogh, and Seurat. The following edition showed artworks by Denis and Bonnard.

901 Mascelloni, “Venturi polemista,” 143–148; Esposizione Internazionale d’Arte della Città di Venezia, 13 (Venezia: Ferrari, 1922).

902 Iamurri, “Lionello Venturi e la storia dell’Impressionismo,” 73.

903 Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 298–303; Sarfatti, *Storia della pittura moderna*, 1930.

changed and acquired a historical and philological focus, which resulted in important contributions to the scholarly research on the subject.⁹⁰⁴

As in the case of his judgement about Impressionist art, Venturi's consideration of the French cultural background reflected his bias towards the Fascist-oriented dominant aesthetic discourse. He thought that France offered at the time a more positive ground for the production of modern art. In the motto *Roma madre, Parigi amica*, he had expressed the idea of a national artistic identity inspired by an international and modern culture.⁹⁰⁵ He indeed referred to Paris as an international melting pot and a progressive centre that did not interfere with artistic production, as opposed to the Italian cultural situation that he described as secluded in a dominating nationalist classicism.⁹⁰⁶ French cultural progressivism was, in his opinion, the premise that boosted artists' creativity. He also appreciated Paris as an international centre of independent art scholarship and of a wide art market that he had experienced first hand. It was in this spirit that he recommended artists to acquaint themselves with the French tradition and working environment.⁹⁰⁷

However, within his primitivist frame, he provided only a very limited glimpse of the 1920s French cultural milieu and artistic culture. His picture was partly ideological and utopian in its nature and responded to the aesthetic characteristics promoted within his discourse on primitivism. Indeed, he failed to understand that Modern Classicism derived from French influence.⁹⁰⁸ Moreover, he completely neglected the modernist experience from Post-Impressionism onwards. Only during the 1930s would he become interested in French art after Impressionism.⁹⁰⁹ The result was a contradiction through which Venturi invited contemporary artists to experience

904 Iamurri, "Lionello Venturi e la storia dell'Impressionismo".

905 Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, 4–5; Venturi, "Polemica con Ugo Ojetti"; Venturi, Polemica con Ojetti. Numero 2"; Venturi, "Polemica con Ugo Ojetti. Numero 3"; Venturi, "Problemi d'arte, 96–97". "Sebbene dopo la morte di Cézanne non sia sorto in Francia un grande artista perché oggi da tutte le parti del mondo si guarda ancora a Parigi? Perché quel che è vivo nel nostro gusto pittorico di noi novecentisti è ancora il gusto di Cézanne".

906 Venturi, "Polemica con Ugo Ojetti sul gusto francese," 92–94.

907 Venturi envisaged a school in France for Italian artists following the example of foreign academies in Rome that gave to artists from abroad the opportunity to study Roman antiquities. The project was to be financed by Gualino. Iamurri, "L'azione culturale di Lionello Venturi," 102; Venturi, "Polemica con Ugo Ojetti sul gusto francese"; Lamberti, "La pittura del primo novecento in Piemonte," 45–84.

908 Pontiggia, *Modernità e classicità*, 25–28, 53–54.

909 Lionello Venturi, "Gli studi di storia dell'arte medievale e moderna," in *Saggi di Critica* (Roma: Bocca, 1956), 304–306. In the 1930s Venturi published a series of articles about Post-Impressionist artists such as Picasso, Utrillo, and Renoir in 1933, on Gauguin in 1934, on Van Gogh in 1937, on Pissarro and Rouault in 1939. The interest in this new array of artists was anticipated in 1930. Venturi, "Risposta a Ugo Ojetti".

French culture in order to direct them towards a modern regeneration, but which was translated in terms of supporting an Impressionist revival.

Out of this spirit and through Venturi's mentorship, artists Jessi Boswell (1881–1956), Gigi Chessa (1898–1935), Nicola Galante (1883–1969), Carlo Levi, Francesco Menzio (1899–1979), and Enrico Paolucci (1901–1999), eventually formed the group *The Six Painters of Turin*, in 1928.⁹¹⁰ (Figs. 60–62) When Venturi introduced the group on the occasion of their first exhibition at the Sala d'arte Guglielmi, in Turin in 1929, he stressed their reference to French Impressionism. This reference was also echoed on the cover of their catalogue, which featured Manet's painting, *Olympia* (1863).⁹¹¹ The actual connection with Impressionism that Venturi suggested, consisted mainly in formal aspects, such as the use of delicate tonality, and in employing personal iconography, rather than a more profound aesthetic inspiration of universalism and spiritualism. This constituted a contradiction with Venturi's claims about artistic independence, originality, and creativity, and being averse to copying or repeating formal or stylistic formula.

Primitivism was associated with ideas such as modernity and internationality, but in truth it turned out to promote a backward-looking and reactionary aesthetic perspective, as even some of his followers realised.⁹¹² Venturi's aesthetic thinking, rooted in the previous decade, and the need to preserve his authority in the new context, also conditioned his evaluations of art in relation to Futurism. He defined this art movement, the only Italian avant-garde experiment, as an involution, in comparison to the aesthetic achievement of Impressionism and considered it as a form of classicism.⁹¹³ This definition of Futurism in terms of classicism corresponded to an interpretation made from within the primitivist frame. In this context Futurist art was considered to be based on material reality and lacking a spiritual and introspective dimension. Moreover, Venturi criticised Futurism for its commitment and involvement in extra-artistic stances that in his opinion resulted in an intellectual,

910 Dragone, "Lionello Venturi a Torino. Gualino e i Sei," 88–92; Lamberti, "La pittura del primo novecento in Piemonte," 45–84.

911 *6 Pittori di Torino* (Milano: Belvedere, 1929); d'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 212.

912 Vivarelli, ed., *Lo Specchio*, 99–104. "I termini più usati furono in quegli anni quelli di moderno e di europeo: arte moderna, arte europea. Parole che oggi non hanno più alcun senso, stravolte e consumate dall'uso...Ma che cosa queste parole significavano allora? Che forza avevano nei riguardi della cultura dominante? Che scoperta era il "moderno" quando anche il critico che ci era più vicino, e carissimo amico di alcuni di noi, Lionello Venturi, cominciava appena a rivolgere il suo interesse alla conoscenza dell'arte moderna, o andava a fatica avvicinandosi a una prima comprensione dell'Impressionismo?"

913 Stefano Valeri, "Lionello Venturi e Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. Documenti della nota polemica della stampa degli anni 1929–30," *Storia dell'arte* 30 (2011): 123–144; Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 323–330.

rather than spontaneous and emotional, approach to artistic production.⁹¹⁴ His evaluation brought Futurism back to the Fascist discourse, in as much as he saw it to be conditioning art by promoting the classical tradition in respect of nationalist myths.

Although Futurism had political links to Fascism and had inclined itself towards the nationalist rhetoric, it hardly met the standards of Fascist discourse.⁹¹⁵ Futurism aspired to a national spiritual leadership and proposed to destroy the objects and places defined as the prime examples of the Italian tradition in order to enhance a modern regeneration and creativity. Fascism indeed distanced itself from Futurism in the 1920s, although recognising the movement's contribution to the modernisation of Italian culture. In the polemical clash with Venturi, the Futurist mentor Marinetti addressed the contradiction of Venturi's claims about Futurism as compared with Impressionism. Marinetti accused Venturi of promoting a reactionary aesthetic perspective and of being unable to understand modern art.⁹¹⁶

In the 1950s, Venturi admitted that he had not been able to look at Futurism in an objective way. He claimed that his inability to understand the aesthetic value of Futurism was caused by the fact that he considered extra-artistic aspects like the political context and Futurist political statements in order to judge the aesthetic outcomes of the group. Venturi explained that he was not able to engage with Futurism, especially due to its provocative and aggressive attitude, which in the end he recognised was necessary to break with tradition and liberate the creative drive of the artists.⁹¹⁷ He especially came to recognise the importance of Futurism in reforming provincial Italian art at the beginning of the 20th century in light of the latest modernist trends spreading from France.⁹¹⁸

914 Valeri, "Lionello Venturi e Filippo Tommaso Marinetti," 123–144. In particular in the article "Futurismo e passatismo vengono alle mani alla Pinacoteca di Torino," *Il Mattino*, 29 November 1929 (newspaper cuttings in the Lionello Venturi Archive), Venturi reveals the willingness of Futurist artists to identify Futurism with Fascism, in spite of the regime's distance from the movement. They claimed that because Venturi appeared to be against Futurism, he must also have been an anti-Fascist.

915 Gentile, *The Struggle for Modernity*, 41–75; Gentile, 'La nostra sfida alle stele,' 53–68. In 1919 the Futurist party participated in the national election in partnership with the Fascist movement.

916 Valeri, "Lionello Venturi e Filippo Tommaso Marinetti," 123–144.

917 Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 330–332; Lionello Venturi, "Gli archivi del Futurismo," *Il Veltro* 2, no. 3 (Marzo 1958): 23–25. "Colpa della guerra... colpa della loro incostanza...colpa del fascismo, ma soprattutto colpa di di tutti noi che non sapemmo vedere, oltre le escandescenze di cattivo gusto, le ragioni vere della rivolta. Così che solo dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale è stata possibile discernere gli aspetti positivi del futurismo...A distanza di quasi cinquanta anni, sorvolando sull'inutile tono provocatorio, vien voglia di riconoscere il buon senso dei futuristi."

918 Lionello Venturi, "Gusto internazionale (1952)," in *Saggi di critica* (Roma: Bocca, 1956), 334–335.

This reconsideration of the value of Futurism confirms that, in the 1920s, Venturi's priority was responding to Fascist rhetoric in order to oppose and resist the fascistization of art and culture. This priority can furthermore be seen in the appropriation of Felice Casorati's work: another example of how aesthetic stances did not play a primary role in his considerations about contemporary art. Aesthetic matters were manipulated in order to promote Venturi's authority and to position himself within the cultural debate of the time. Within a primitivist framing, Venturi exalted Casorati's art in terms of its creativity, spirituality, independence, and synthesis.⁹¹⁹ He emphasised his synthetic formal language in terms of the expression of personal emotions. Through the primitivist frame, Venturi could thus isolate Casorati from the dominant discourse. Nevertheless, Casorati's work reflected the dominant aesthetic trend of Modern Classicism in many ways.

Casorati's artworks, his depiction of figures and space, were carried out in a classical manner regarding depth, volume, order, simplicity of composition, geometrical organisation, and measured expression of human emotions. He rediscovered an approach to painting through drawing. However, his use of colours, the casual appearance of flatness and his deformed figures, harked back to his formative Expressionist experiences. Moreover, the constructive purification and geometrical simplification of his compositions tended to abstraction, as in his painting *Eggs* (1914–1915). In his paintings it is possible to find a reference to the past artistic tradition that went back to examples of the Italian 14th and 15th century art, which had been a shared inspiration among the artists of the time.⁹²⁰ (Fig. 64)

The art of those centuries was appreciated for the rediscovery of the material reality and of classical aesthetic principles in an intuitive manner, rather than following a scientific formula. Casorati used the limited range of an earthy palette, while the representation of figures was still simplified and wary of using exact anatomy or precise rendering of human expressions. His portrait figures, solid in their physical appearance, stood melancholic and hieratic at the same time, absorbed in their thoughts. His work indeed did not aim at creating an effect of harmony and measured perfection. He often included disturbing elements that, while they might at first glance go unnoticed, were responsible for the distressing effect of a painting as a whole. There were always dark corners, doors opening to emptiness, deserted places, which the artist used to add a reference to a metaphysical reality, inscrutably an inseparable part of material reality.

Although Casorati escaped an association with the nationalistic rhetoric, his work was well received and was included in the Fascist discourse, which tended to highlight different aspects from those that Venturi appreciated, and neglected those

919 Lionello Venturi, "Il pittore Felice Casorati", *Dedalo*, no. 4 (September 1923).

920 Giorgina Bertolino and Francesco Poli, *Felice Casorati. Catalogo generale delle opere* (Torino: Allemandi, 2004).

that were more difficult to absorb. The painter exhibited his paintings regularly in official shows and he received honorary recognitions. His work was considered so much in line with the dominant discourse that he not only won first prizes but was also appointed to jury memberships and other official roles, such as professor at the Academy of Fine Art.⁹²¹ Nevertheless, Casorati was among those artists who accepted a passive role within the Fascist discourse, although maintaining an anti-Fascist position that he learned to avoid to publicly express.⁹²²

He avoided public exposure and worked in privacy, surrounded only by the closest friends, intellectuals and artists. He participated in the same liberal circles as Venturi, and contributed to the project of cultural reformation promoted by Venturi and supported by Riccardo Gualino. For instance, he was a mentor to the artists of the group Six Painters of Turin, although he did not share their neo-romantic and lyrical aesthetic ideas.⁹²³ When Venturi promoted Casorati's work, he did so in the spirit of recognising his contribution to the cultural project that could refer to primitivism. Although from a formal point of view, Casorati responded neither to the Fascist discourse nor to Venturi's aesthetic perspective, we see that both frames appropriated his works, conferring different meanings that reinforced the ideological position of the appropriator.

4.6 Competing Frames

During the 1920s, the primitivist and Fascist classicist frames were concurring with each other, supporting oppositional aesthetic perspectives within the cultural debate of the time by means of appropriation and interpretation. Both were inexact and non-objective in their focus, and artists in fact mainly worked independently from the process of appropriation. This clash of frames also involved the interpretation of the art of the past. While within the Fascist frame, art was interpreted in terms of nationalism, tradition, and aesthetic characteristics like harmony, solidity, and construction, Venturi's primitivist stance stressed instead spontaneity, independence, spiritual and emotional values, and universal aesthetic characteristics such as formal

921 Looking at the catalogues of the Venice Biennale, Casorati appears to have been invited to take part in the Venice Biennale in 1924, in 1928, 1930 and to the membership of the jury in 1926. From the Archives of the Quadriennale, Casorati appears among the winning artists in 1931. In 1935, he was listed among both the organisers and the exhibiting artists. In 1939 and 1943, he was listed among the artists presenting their works.; Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio," 69.

922 D'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 206. At least since 1929 he was nevertheless kept under the observation by the Fascist police, who searched his home and studio five times only in that year. Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio," 69. Casorati was arrested for a few days, together with Gobetti, in 1923.

923 D'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 204–206, 212–232; Lamberti, "La pittura del primo novecento in Piemonte," 65–75.

synthesis. Frames could serve in attributing different meanings to any artwork independently from their actual formal and stylistic appearance.

Quattrocentismo is a good example of how the evaluation of the same phenomenon could acquire a different meaning within different frames, although both resulted in a positive reception. The art of the 15th century was seen within the Fascist frame in terms of the roots of an Italian artistic tradition founded on classical principles, like outline and chiaroscuro, and a materialist and constructive approach. Venturi instead interpreted the art of the same time as the result of a genuine inspiration and praised it for its emotional force. He appreciated the artists of the 15th century for their spirituality and synthesis of expression. It is interesting to notice that, generally speaking, artists representing Modern Classicism looked mostly at the art of the 15th century in terms closer to Venturi's primitivism than to those of the Fascist frame.

The art of Macchiaioli, a group of Italian artists who were active at the end of the 19th century, was also evaluated in positive terms within both frames, but on the basis of different motivations. The Fascist frame, outlined with the contribution of art critics close to the regime, placed the Macchiaioli movement in relation to the Italian classical tradition. It was considered a contribution to the rediscovery of a classical tradition of solid and volumetric painting finalised to the illusionistic representation of space and figure.⁹²⁴ These artists were also appreciated for their commitment in voicing historical themes in relation to the Risorgimento, thus contributing to the raising of consciousness about a cultural national identity. Any connection with French art, or any other foreign influence, was neglected. Instead Venturi had positioned the movement in relation to French Impressionist landscape painting and stressed the international dimension of the artists' connections.⁹²⁵ (Fig. 64)

He thought that the group reflected the freedom and spirituality, the unintellectual approach and personal synthesis, that he had admired in Impressionist works.⁹²⁶ He found that in regard to material reality, they favoured abstraction over representation or illustration.⁹²⁷ Venturi also referred to all these aspects, as in the

924 Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 183–194; Iamurri, “L’azione culturale di Lionello Venturi,” 101.

925 Venturi, “Polemica con Ugo Ogetti sul gusto francese”; letter from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, 9 November 1926 (VT V1 b45 27), in FAV. In this letter to his father, Lionello speaks about the painter Armando Spadini, who he considered was influenced by Renoir. He thought that the criticism about this painter was divided between nationalist critics who appreciated his work but neglected the French influence, and those who, because they recognised this influence, undervalued the artist's work. He concluded by advising Adolfo Venturi not to share his positive opinion about Spadini, because it would be translated in terms of anti-nationalism (“lesa italianità”).

926 Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, 75–189; Venturi, “I Macchiaioli”; Lionello Venturi, “La mostra Signorini,” in *Arte moderna* (Roma: Bocca, 1956), 197–203; Lionello Venturi, “Giovanni Fattori edito,” in *Arte moderna* (Roma: Bocca, 1956), 177–184.

927 Venturi, “Problemi d’arte,” 106–107.

case of Impressionism, in relation to a social and political independence.⁹²⁸ He especially appreciated Giovanni Fattori, whom he compared to Cézanne, for distancing himself from academic art by being a self-taught artist and thus not corrupted by an intellectual approach in making art.⁹²⁹ In relation to Impressionism, Venturi highlighted a similar emotional significance and personal inspiration of forms. He also stressed the artists' connection with France in terms of the influence of an environment that he considered progressive, international, and open, and thus favouring independence and individuality.

Such divergence of interpretations depended in part on the reference to a different set of artworks, the finished ones and the drafts, that represented two different formal languages coexisting in the artistic practice of many Macchiaioli artists.⁹³⁰ The group belonged to the 19th century realist trend and aimed at portraying nature in a faithful and illusionistic way. They often depicted historical events or celebrated current events. Macchiaioli adopted the technique of plein-air painting introduced in France, but the results of such practice were mostly intended as drafts to be employed later in the studio in order to achieve a veristic effect in their paintings. These draft works, which were those showing a closest resemblance to the Impressionist style in Italy, were usually of a very small format and never appeared on official fora. Although the Macchiaioli artists distanced themselves from academic painting, they nevertheless were part of the positivist trend of realism and materialist representation.

4.7 Cultural Debate, Polemics, and Cultural Activism

The idea that primitivism functioned as a frame of appropriation that promoted an alternative aesthetic perspective with the aim of challenging the dominant discourse, is also confirmed by the polemical character of Venturi's interventions during those years. He adopted the role of an activist, of a committed intellectual, who explicitly meant to affect the contemporary cultural debate.⁹³¹ He succeeded in gaining visibility and arousing discussion, as we can see from the large number of book reviews he received and from the public confrontations he had at the time.⁹³² (Figs. 13–15) He

928 Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 33.

929 Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi*, 31–32. “Si divenne ignoranti e l’ignoranza permise di abbandonarsi a dio con una sensibilità infinita senza più alcun freno né di natura né di ragione”. Venturi, “Giovanni Fattori edito”.

930 Broude, “*The Macchiaioli*,” 1–12, 266, 281. Riccardo Gualino owned several small sized artworks by Macchiaioli artists.

931 Venturi, “Contro corrente”.

932 Venturi, “Il Gusto e l’arte. I primitivi e i classici”; Benedetto Croce, “*Il gusto dei primitivi di Lionello Venturi*,” in *Storia moderna dell’arte in Italia. Manifesti, polemiche, documenti*, vol. 3, *Dal Novecento ai dibattiti sulla figura monumentale. 1925–1945*, ed. Paola Barocchi (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1990), 49–51; Emilio Cecchi, “Un’estetica senza l’arte,” in *Storia moderna dell’arte in Italia. Manifesti*,

used provocative language, disregarding scholarly standards, with the idea of making an impression. For instance, in *The Taste of the Primitives*, he expressed feelings such as repugnance for Giulio Romano and annoyance for Raphael, while describing the art by Correggio as blasphemous.⁹³³

The book was a historiographical account that came to assume the tone of a pamphlet intended to be part of the cultural debate of the time. Judging from the number of critical reviews addressing his claims and noting his unusual language, it seems that Venturi achieved his goal. It was clear that he referred to contemporary cultural and artistic phenomena, and not only historical ones. Some fellow debaters perceived the book's function as a tool for confrontation, others wondered who or what was the target of Venturi's polemic. Many just observed the complexity of the book. Both Longhi and art critic Giacomo Debenedetti (1901–1967) accused Venturi of using his criticism to address moral questions that stretched beyond an aesthetic dimension.⁹³⁴ Nevertheless, it is important to observe that, despite the explicit polemical criticism of his statements, Venturi was never censored.

During the 1920s, Venturi's commitment to steering the cultural debate of the time led him into a confrontation that went beyond the theoretical ground of his academic work. Since the 1910s he had pursued an academic career with the idea of influencing art-historical scholarship and proposing a method that would integrate aesthetic and critical approaches. Starting from 1919, once back in the professorship after the war, he included modern and foreign art in the academic curriculum in line with his aesthetic concept of universalism. The lessons concerning the least orthodox topics, like modern art, came to have more impact than he had intended or even foreseen because he had to hold them at the local Pinacoteca, and was thus exposed to a wider public.⁹³⁵ Between 1920 and 1922 he was chairman of the *Società di cultura torinese* (Turin Society of Culture), a role that contributed to setting him up as a cultural promoter and influencer, beyond the limits of a professional audience and academic boundaries.⁹³⁶

Through the Society, he made contact with liberal intellectuals and artists, such as Piero Gobetti (1901–1926) and Felice Casorati, who in turn influenced his

polemiche, documenti, vol. 3, *Dal Novecento ai dibattiti sulla figura monumentale.*

1925–1945, ed. Paola Barocchi (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1990), 52–59;

Iamurri, “Un libro d’azione?”; Iamurri, “L’azione culturale di Lionello Venturi”;

Valeri, “Lionello Venturi e Filippo Tommaso Marinetti,” 123–144.

933 Mascelloni, “Venturi polemista,” 143–148.

934 Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 121–130, 304–305.

935 For example, this was for instance the case with Futurist artists' intervention over Venturi's pedagogical decision to include Futurism as a topic in the Art History exam. Valeri, “Lionello Venturi e Filippo Tommaso Marinetti,” 123–144.

936 Venturi, “Dal nazionalismo familiare all’esilio,” 60; d’Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 202–203.

cultural perspective.⁹³⁷ Open lectures in partnership with liberal circles gave him the chance to express his ideas and to influence a non-professional audience, directing the preferences of the wealthy elite to engage – and invest – according to his aesthetic perspective. When in 1924, he presented a series of four lectures in Milan, the news spread in the daily newspapers and drew much attention, resulting in a warm reception from the public.⁹³⁸ These lectures concerned the *present value of the primitives* and their success constituted a premise for the idea of writing *The Taste of the Primitives*, confirming the meaningfulness of the text in the context of the contemporary cultural debate. Out of the same activist spirit of affecting the cultural debate of the time on a large scale, Venturi wrote a column in the daily newspaper, *Il Secolo*. Venturi had already contributed to periodicals, such as *L'Arte*, the art journal founded by his father, which targeted a public of professionals. On the pages of *Il Secolo*, one of the most widespread daily newspapers in Italy at the time, he could instead address a wider audience and affect public opinion at large and promote his particular aesthetic and cultural perspective.⁹³⁹ He adapted his writing to the new target group with a captivating style directed to impress and provoke. The experience at the *Il Secolo* also sanctioned his visibility as a public figure at a national level.

As his father had been important in introducing Lionello Venturi into an international network of scholars and in fostering his academic career, Gualino instead had a primary role in favouring Venturi's pursuit of a role in contemporary cultural life. He was supportive of his connections with the wealthy cultural elite and cosmopolitan circles of liberal intellectuals, providing contact with an international and modernist entourage. The wealthy industrialist, interested in art, was indeed active within the local cultural milieu. Gualino's cultural patronage went beyond the art collection and touched different areas of cultural interest. His support, for instance, also had a big impact on the theatre world, with the realisation of the only centre in Italy at the time

937 Bona, "La via sofferta degli intellettuali italiano," 103–108; d'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 69–72, 199–202, 204–218; Lamberti, "La pittura del primo novecento in Piemonte," 60–61. Also artists Carlo Levi and Gigi Chessa belonged to Piero Gobetti's circle.

938 Venturi, "Il valore attuale dei primitivi". Newspaper cuttings about the event say: "Un folto pubblico di artisti, letterati e signore assistette... nelle sale dell'Istituto d'arte e d'alta cultura alla prima lezione tenuta da Lionello Venturi... molti applausi coronarono la bella lezione del Venturi". 'Lecture e conferenze,' *L'Ambrosiano*, 18 January 1924, in ALV. "Il dotto e originale conferenziere fu ripetutamente ed a lungo applaudito da un folto gruppo di artisti e di studiosi". *L'Ambrosiano*, January 1924, in ALV. Cesarina Gualino travelled to Milan to attend the conference. Cesarina Gualino's diaries, in FRG.

939 Laura Barile, "*Il Secolo*" 1865–1923. *Storia di due generazioni della democrazia lombarda* (Milano: Guanda, 1980), 390; Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 277.

to hold modernist performances. His theatre became well known in the city, although it was almost exclusively members of the intellectual elite who attended it.⁹⁴⁰

Venturi and Gualino established a partnership based on mutual support and friendship that went beyond the simple connection between art advisor and collector. Gualino's circle certainly played a role in putting Venturi in contact with contemporary liberal artists and intellectuals, offering a stimulating platform for his involvement in cultural debate during the 1920s. We have already seen in the previous chapter how Venturi often accompanied Gualino within the industrialist's domestic circle, or attending cultural events and travelling together. The introduction into local intellectual circles, that were elitist and sophisticated in nature, brought him a popularity and visibility that contributed to shaping his influential role.⁹⁴¹ Through Gualino's circle, Venturi received spiritual and moral, as well strategic and financial, support. While at home Venturi could make contact with progressive artists and intellectuals, the trips abroad were wonderful opportunities to visit museums and meet fellow scholars, antiquaries and art dealers. Therefore, these trips abroad, the privilege of an elite, were also important in widening and reinforcing his international network.⁹⁴²

Gualino supported – and probably contributed to financing – Venturi's theoretical pursuits and his attempt to affect the cultural debate, in return receiving advice and promotion for his own investments. The Gualino Collection corresponded to the primitivist frame as Fascist events and shows did to the Fascist classicist frame. There is an episode that, in my opinion, describes well the mutual nature of their partnership in support of the common cultural project. In 1925, Sarfatti invited Gualino to join the managing committee for the organisation of the first exhibition of the Novecento Italiano group. Gualino declined, making a diplomatic excuse.⁹⁴³ However, it seems clear that he intended to avoid giving support to a project that represented the other side of the cultural debate. The following year, in 1926, in spite of Venturi's cordial relationship with Sarfatti, he indeed wrote a negative review of this first Novecento Italiano exhibition.⁹⁴⁴ The event coincided with the publication of *The Taste of the Primitives* and the catalogue of the Gualino Collection, which presented a quite different aesthetic stand compared to that of the exhibition.

940 Alessandro Martini, "Teatri e teatri d'opera in Italia tra le due guerre mondiali. Modelli, protagonisti, progetti," in *Architettura dell'eclittismo*, eds. Loretta Mozzoni and Stefano Santini (Napoli: Liguori, 2010), 321–379. The Theatre suffered as a result of Gualino's financial troubles, and closed its doors in the 1930s.

941 D'Orsi, "Lo strano caso del professor Venturi," 11.

942 Boatti, *Preferirei di no*, 166.

943 Iamurri, "Un libro d'azione?" 121; d'orsi, "Lo strano caso del professor Venturi," 11–16. Venturi replied to Sarfatti that Gualino only entered into enterprises that he could control fully.

944 Venturi, "Un problema della mostra del Novecento".

Primitivism was the discursive frame that gave a common ground and coherence for all of Venturi's initiatives, both at a theoretical and practical level, directed at influencing the cultural debate to promote his aesthetic perspective. However, despite his efforts to stem the increasing influence of Fascism on the culture and the dominant discourse, I argue that he did not follow a political agenda. His priority was instead the wish to make space for his aesthetic ideas and to retain his authority within the dominant discourse. He defended his cultural project and its independence and possibility to exist within the national cultural discourse. His primitivism was an efficient tool used to promote his ideas and safeguard his authority at many levels, – academic and public.

4.8 Primitivism and Politics in the 1920s

Venturi's books and interventions from the 1920s have been described as ethically and morally motivated.⁹⁴⁵ He himself also declared in retrospect that they were a protest against the limitations to intellectual freedom during those years.⁹⁴⁶ Art historian Carlo Giulio Argan, who was among his last pupils and one of his first biographers, defined Venturi's work in the 1920s as an intervention against the political opportunism and influence that characterised the cultural debate at the time.⁹⁴⁷ However, especially up until 1928, there are no actual signs of Venturi's activity as an anti-Fascist, in spite of his commitment as an intellectual involved in liberal circles.⁹⁴⁸ Venturi was not fond of Fascism, and never became a member of the party. Nevertheless, he saw the regime as an improvement compared to the socialist government, which it had replaced, and maintained a relationship with intellectuals close to the regime, cooperating in some cases with national institutions.⁹⁴⁹

All through the 1920s, Venturi actively participated to the cultural debate of the time and he was by no means an outsider or a marginalised figure. His authority was recognised, and his voice never censored. For instance, the Gualino Collection, in spite of its unusual composition, was praised, although especially for bringing

945 Mascelloni, "Venturi polemista," 143–144.

946 Venturi, "Prefazione," 4. "Occorre risalire alla condizione della cultura nel periodo tra il 1920 e il 1930, quando la libertà intellettuale veniva a poco a poco soffocata, il "Novecento" trionfava e Ugo Ojetti rappresentava in qualche modo una legge. La polemica ch'ebbi con lui nel 1930 fu la mia rivolta, non solo a lui".

947 Giulio Carlo Argan, "Le Polemiche di Lionello Venturi," *Studi piemontesi* 1, no. 1 (Marzo 1972): 117–124.

948 D'Orsi, "Lo strano caso del professor Venturi," 11. The author defines both Venturi and Gualino as "afascisti"; not pro and not against, not interested in political matters.

949 Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio," 55, 62–67; d'orsi, "Lo strano caso del professor Venturi," 5–6, 11, 15–17.

some artworks back to Italy.⁹⁵⁰ (Figs. 9–12) In 1924, he cooperated with the Venice Biennale, curating a personal show of Casorati's artworks, and again in 1930, when the event came under the direct control of the regime. At the time Venturi organised a retrospective of Amedeo Modigliani, which, although presenting a controversial artist who had established his career under the influence of the French avant-gardes, received a generally positive reception.⁹⁵¹

Venturi was also asked to write some of the entries for the Italian Encyclopaedia, a project pursued by the Fascist government in line with the dominant nationalist discourse and took part in the committee working at the national planning for the school.⁹⁵² In 1929, he organised the exhibition of The Six Artists of Turin. (Figs. 60–62) This group, clearly in opposition to Fascist aesthetic discourse, was also shown at the Galleria di Roma directed by Pier Maria Bardi, and was financed by the corporative union of the artists, the arm of the Fascist arts policy.⁹⁵³ Being shown at this gallery was the equivalent of being given honorary official recognition and the support of the critics.⁹⁵⁴ Although the group was involved with liberal intellectual circles and developed a style that had an explicit link to anti-classical and foreign origins, it could still find a space to flourish. Therefore, Venturi's support for aesthetic expressions that challenged the dominant discourse were not a sign of provocation or reason for marginalisation but were accepted and included in the cultural debate of the time.

Venturi was close to several intellectuals who adhered to Fascism because he had shared with them an academic education or military experience, besides having a similar nationalist commitment. These acquaintances, and especially the Fascist intellectual and politician Vittorio Cian (1862–1951), who had been rising in the ranks

950 When released, the catalogue of the Collections received a large number of positive critical reviews. Moreover, it was also praised by intellectuals close to the regime. For example, Ugo Ojetto had asked some of the artworks from the Gualino Collection, which he defined as “magnificent”, in loan for a temporary exhibition. Letter from Ugo Ojetto to Lionello Venturi, 5 October 1921, in ALV.

951 Lionello Venturi, “Mostra individuale di Amedeo Modigliani,” in *Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte 17*, 116–118; Venturi, “Divagazioni sulle mostre di Venezia e Monza”; Venturi, “Polemica con Ugo Ojetto. Numero 2”; Lionello Venturi, “Sulla linea di Modigliani,” in *Arte moderna* (Roma: Bocca, 1956), 205–208; Lionello Venturi, “Amedeo Modigliani,” in *Arte moderna* (Roma: Bocca, 1956), 209–214; Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 316–322; Braun, “The Faces of Modigliani,” 183–195. The most discordant voice was the one of art critic Cipriano Efisio Oppo.

952 Boatti, *Preferirei di no*, 34, 167; Iamurri, “Un libro d'azione?,” 119.

953 Francesco Poli, “Le due generazioni. I Sei di Torino e la Scuola Romana,” in *Le capitali d'Italia: Torino-Roma, 1911–1946. Arti, produzione, spettacolo*, eds. Marisa Vescovo and Netta Vespignani (Milano: Electa, 1997), 51–52; d'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 207–218.

954 Poli, “Le due generazioni,” 51–52.

of the party and of the regime, became a key figure in Venturi's lobbying strategy, especially when it came to his academic career.⁹⁵⁵ A sign of the cordial relationship with representatives of the regime can be found in the involvement of Sarfatti and Ogetti in support of Adolfo Venturi's nomination as a Senator. The appointment was then achieved in 1924.⁹⁵⁶ This event is a good testament to Lionello Venturi's initial attitude towards the regime. As many missives show, the father and the son had a very pragmatic, sometimes opportunistic, view of politics.⁹⁵⁷ They cared more about their authority and influence, than they did about political or ideological issues.

This perspective is important when one considers certain contradictions, such as Venturi's endorsement of the *Manifesto of the Fascist Intellectuals*, in 1925, and his support for the new Fascist regulations introduced at the university in 1926.⁹⁵⁸ Besides his activism, he pursued a good relationship with political power, which he understood as inevitable in order to achieve his goals. The state of Venturi's good relationship with Fascism, even in 1929, is proved by the intercession with Giovanni Gentile in order to protect some of his friends and students from political arrest.⁹⁵⁹ Moreover, both Adolfo and Lionello Venturi welcomed the idea of founding the Italian Academy and discussed how to profit from it personally.⁹⁶⁰ In the same year Venturi was also appointed a member of the *Scientific Academy of Turin*.⁹⁶¹

The cultural opposition to the dominant discourse became more problematic as the process of centralisation pursued by the regime became a priority by the end of the 1920s. As Fascism became more explicitly identified with the national cultural identity, Venturi's connections with France and his poetics of universalism began to cast him in the light a national betrayer (*lesa italianità*) and he came to be perceived as anti-Fascist.⁹⁶² It is significant that the situation became more difficult for Venturi first in the academic environment, which was among the first targets of Fascist centralisation.⁹⁶³ In this context, the process of centralisation was particularly effective, considering the recognised importance of the control over education. This meant that the university suffered a major political intervention through the placement of figures of trust in key roles. As a result, Venturi's reference to France, in terms of the

955 Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio," 39–48, 70–89; Boatti, *Preferirei di no*, 155.

956 Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio," 72–77; Boatti, *Preferirei di no*, 164.

957 Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio," 72–77, 87–91; Boatti, *Preferirei di no*, 166.

958 D'Orsi, "Lo strano caso del professor Venturi," 11–17.

959 Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio," 91.

960 *Ibid.*, 87.

961 *Ibid.*, 91.

962 Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio," 70–94; letter from Lionello Venturi to Adolfo Venturi, 9 November 1926 (VT V1 b45 27), in FAV.

963 D'Orsi, "Lo strano caso del professor Venturi," 15–17; Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio," 86–92.

autonomy of the arts, and the will to promote his cultural perspective associated with the primitivist concept, clashed with the Fascist establishment. It was his intellectual, cultural and aesthetic, ideas, which he was not inclined to compromise, that led to controversy, and not his political activism or exposure.

As a result, his work and activities came to be perceived, and presented as, acts of political provocation. His lessons and his travelling and lecturing abroad began to be regarded with suspicion, and to be questioned. In 1928, the Education Minister made an official enquiry to the Dean, asking whether Venturi was performing his academic duties properly.⁹⁶⁴ His position became progressively less secure and more isolated, and he lost the support of his acquaintances within the regime. The new situation affected his authority and influence not only in the academic environment, but more generally in the cultural debate. A clear sign of this loss of authority and respect came in 1929, when a group of Futurist artists intervened to question him publicly about his pedagogical and professional choices.⁹⁶⁵ This confrontation turned into a long-lasting debate, even involving personal insults. The charismatic Marinetti also stepped into the fray, putting Venturi into a difficult position. However, Venturi did not back down and he refused to engage in a compromise with the Fascist regime and its aesthetic and cultural discourse.⁹⁶⁶

Nevertheless, after 1929, Venturi became increasingly exposed and his authority was more frequently challenged. In the same year Gualino also became more involved politically, especially over how the regime responded to the economic crisis.⁹⁶⁷ Before

964 D'Orsi, "Lo strano caso del professor Venturi," 15–17; Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio," 86–92.

965 Valeri, "Lionello Venturi e Filippo Tommaso Marinetti," 123–135; Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 323–330. The Futurists contested Venturi's decision not to let one of his students discuss an exam assignment about Futurist art. They claimed that Venturi showed not only a reactionary attitude towards art, but that his rejection of Futurism was equivalent to an act of anti-Fascism, given the sense of self-identification of the movement with Fascism still at that date. In reply Venturi defended himself, stating that he rejected Futurism as a topic for an art history exam because it did not yet belong to history. And as for the accusation of being reactionary, he claimed that as an art historian he had the duty to deal with the art of the past. The contestation was in fact aggressive, interrupting his lecture and Venturi's name came to be scorned in some of the major newspapers of the time. Marinetti addressed him, distorting his name in *Pecorello Sventura* so as to stress the fact that he was not worthy of his adventurous name (Lion and Venture).

966 Valeri, "Lionello Venturi e Filippo Tommaso Marinetti," 123–135; Cardelli, *La prospettiva estetica di Lionello Venturi*, 323–330.

967 Nicola de Ianni, *L'Archivio Riccardo Gualino*, accessed September 28, 2018, http://www.delpt.unina.it/stof/1_luglio_dicembre_1998/DeIanni1.pdf. In 1924 Gualino wrote a letter to Mussolini showing off. In 1926 Mussolini wrote to Gualino expressing pleasure at the entrepreneur's business success. In 1927 their relationship declined because of Gualino's criticism about the autarchic and nationalist economic policy of the regime. Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio," 67–68, 94–98.

he had kept his distance from any political involvement. His approach was one of snobbish detachment from populist Fascist policy, while emphasising his image as a successful entrepreneur.⁹⁶⁸ However, international financial crises directly affected Gualino's business and eventually led to his imprisonment and confinement in 1931 on the grounds of harming the Italian economy, which masked other motivations of a political nature too.⁹⁶⁹ Moreover, as a consequence Gualino's assets were appropriated by the Bank of Italy in order to settle debts with his creditors.⁹⁷⁰ (Fig. 47–48) For Venturi, Gualino's disgrace not only meant the loss of an important personal and financial supporter; it also meant incurring increasing suspicions about his own position towards the regime, especially as he continued to visit his close partner in spite of the isolation of the confinement.⁹⁷¹

In this atmosphere, in 1931, Venturi applied for a professorship at the University of Rome, a post previously held by his father, which had become vacant following his retirement. In this instance it was Adolfo Venturi who, with his usual pragmatism and opportunism, recommended that his son align with the regime in order to receive the nomination.⁹⁷² Nevertheless, Venturi's application was turned down. The official

968 D'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 227, 234; d'Orsi, "Lo strano caso del professor Venturi," 11; Fini, "Per una biografia di Riccardo Gualino come capitano d'industria," 253–256;

969 Fini, "Per una biografia di Riccardo Gualino," 253–256. Riccardo Gualino was arrested on Mussolini's direct order without any previous notification.

970 Several documents about the juridical appropriation of Gualino's assets and consequent documents regarding the attempt of alienating them, including artworks, exist in the Archives of the Bank of Italy. The artworks were listed, as were his other assets, in the general catalogue and their value assessed in 1931 by Guglielmo Pacchioni (Superintendent of the Galleries in Piedmont) in 1931. A few years later, in 1936, the Bank of Italy, in response to alienating Gualino's assets, commissioned Ottavio Marini (Director of the Turin City Museum) to compile a report about the value of the artworks, already cut off of the 40% from the earlier estimation, that had not yet been sold. Marini suggested lowering their price further and favouring the transition of the artworks to public museums. He motivated his suggestion in consideration of the changing situation in the art market, but above all – he stressed – because he thought that the value of most of the artworks – and the collection as a whole – had been previously overestimated. Moreover, Marini observed that the group of Chinese works, in spite of its extraordinary quality and value, would hardly find a buyer given the antiquarian market situation. For this reason, he recommended the Bank keep the artworks together, with express wishes that they would remain in Italy. *Situazione e dislocazione delle opera d'arte dell'oriente asiatico con il valore di stima attribuito dal prof. Pacchioni nel 1931 (s.d. post-1950)*, Segretariato, pratt. 1455, fasc. 2, sfasc. 1; *Elenchi diversi di mobili, oggetti d'arte, di provenienza Gualino (29 April 1936)*, Segretariato, pratt. 1455, fasc. 3 (cover letter and general considerations); *Elenco dei quadri di provenienza della liquidazione Gualino di proprietà della Banca d'Italia rimasti invenduti (2 April 1937)* Segretariato, pratt. 1455, fasc. 1, in ASBI, Archivio storico della Banca d'Italia.

971 Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio," 98.

972 Boatti, *Preferirei di no*, 166–167.

reason was that it was considered unnecessary to retain a second professorship in Art History at the University of Rome once the old professor retired.⁹⁷³ However, it seems more probable that the real reason was Venturi's insistence on maintaining a distance from the regime and promoting an alternative cultural perspective in the academic curriculum. The professorship, especially the one in Rome, was considered a prestigious and influential position. Venturi was not seen as worthy of holding such a position of trust, even though in 1930 the prefecture of Turin had informed the Ministry of Interns about Venturi's good political and moral conduct.⁹⁷⁴

In the same year (1931), the Fascist regime also imposed a compulsory oath of loyalty on every professor working in Italian universities. This was a measure that responded to the general process of centralisation and the demand for formal recognition from intellectuals and artists. The oath was not directly accompanied by plans for increased controls over teaching and curricula. Many professors who did not agree with the Fascist regime signed the document in order to retain their position, and trusted that it would not affect their academic activities.⁹⁷⁵ Signing the oath was comparable with the artists' passive acceptance of the process of fascistization and of the integration of their work in a Fascist frame. Only twelve professors refused to sign.⁹⁷⁶

Consequences were not meted out immediately, but all of them eventually lost their posts at the university. However, no other means of persecution were pursued by the Fascist regime. Venturi was one of the professors who refused to sign the oath. He gave both a personal and a professional reason. He claimed that he had never adhered to a political party and that he had proved his patriotism, by serving as a volunteer during the First World War, and thus he considered it unnecessary to prove his loyalty again. Moreover, he believed the idea of serving in order to form citizens faithful to the Fascist regime, as claimed in the text of the oath, was irreconcilable

973 Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio," 99–113.

974 Ibid., 91.

975 Boatti, *Preferirei di no*, 11; d'Orsi, *La cultura a Torino tra le due guerre*, 319; Lionello Venturi, "Italy after Fascism: Mussolini's Fall is only the First Step Towards Democracy," *Current History* 5 (September 1943): 56–60. In this article Venturi analysed the role and responsibilities of the monarchy during the regime. He also described the important role that intellectuals played in order to keep alive a critical spirit behind the rebellion of the younger generation against Fascism, in spite of their work under the supervision of the regime. From the article one gains the impression of a sense of respect, rather than resentment, towards those professors who had not stood against the Fascist request of a loyalty oath. "Italian intellectuals have sometimes bowed to Fascism in order to go on with their simple life, but they did not aid to Fascism... This is the reason why young people who at the age of six were forced to attend Fascist institutions, often rebelled against Fascism when they reached 20. University students were a headache for the Fascist authorities."

976 Boatti, *Preferirei di no*.

with his profession. He indeed affirmed that “*the ideal premises of my discipline do not allow me to champion a political regime within the school*”.⁹⁷⁷

Venturi’s rejection of the oath cannot be simply explained in terms of an act of anti-Fascism, as it in fact was the result of a more complex situation.⁹⁷⁸ Certainly, it was a brave and unusual decision, implying public dissent. The demand of a loyalty oath marked a moment when it became clear that only one official voice was possible under the regime, even though many intellectuals and artists could still coexist by embracing a passive profile and accepting homogenisation. I argue that Venturi’s refusal was only partly motivated by political and ideological resentment. It had become clear to him that his position in the cultural debate had already been cornered, his authority limited, and his professional autonomy questioned and restricted. Also, he had lost support within the regime, despite his father’s role as a Senator, which had in many ways contributed to protecting Venturi’s position in the earlier years. At the same time, Gualino’s support to their common cultural project faded as a consequence of his arrest and confinement. Lionello Venturi could have coexisted, as many intellectuals and artists chose to do, within the dominant discourse. However, he took pride in expecting a prominent role, and did not settle for a passive and marginalized one as a consequence of his uncompromising intellectual stance.

Therefore, instead of bowing to the regime, Venturi chose to exploit his international connections and to explore the possibilities of a career as an independent scholar. Already in 1928, at the time of his trip with Gualino to the art museums and collections of North America, he had the chance to expand his connections there. In 1932, after losing his academic post, he obtained an invitation to Harvard for a series of conferences and travelled around, studying and networking.⁹⁷⁹ He went to America again on at least two further occasions, in 1934 and 1939, before settling there with the family until 1945.⁹⁸⁰ However, in 1932, after his first trip to America,

977 Venturi, “Dal nazionalismo familiare all’esilio,” 104; d’Orsi, “Lo strano caso del professor Venturi,” 17–18.

978 Argan, “Le Polemiche di Lionello Venturi”; Varallo, *Dal Nazionalismo all’esilio. Gli anni torinesi di Lionello Venturi, 1914–1932*; Braun, “Italia Barbara”; Romy Golan, “The Critical Moment: Lionello Venturi in America,” in *Artists, Intellectuals, and World War II: The Pontigny Encounters at Mount Holyoke College, 1942–1944*, eds. Christopher Benfey and Karen Remmler (Amherst and Baltimore: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 122–135.

979 Laura Iamurri, “Gli appunti di viaggio di Lionello Venturi, 1932–1935,” *Storia dell’arte*, Nuova serie 1, no. 101 (2002): 93–97.

980 Iamurri, “Gli appunti di viaggio di Lionello Venturi, 1932–1935,” 93–94; Stefano Valeri, “Lionello Venturi antifascista ‘pericoloso’ durante l’esilio 1931–1945,” *Storia dell’arte*, Nuova serie, 1, 101, (2002): 16–21. In a letter to Riccardo Gualino, Lionello Venturi wrote about his plan to accept an invitation to deliver a series of twelve conferences in American cities between March and April 1936. He traveled with the hopes to establish a network fruitful for further developments. With this spirit, he also

Venturi settled in Paris with his family and did not return to Italy. There he continued his work as an independent scholar, travelling extensively throughout Europe and USA.⁹⁸¹

It is difficult to establish the exact reasons for such a sudden relocation to France and whether he already had it in mind not to return to Italy when he left. Nevertheless, I think that, when considering Venturi's move abroad, it is inaccurate to speak of him as an exile, even a voluntary one, because of the political implications of the term. He was not sent abroad, he did not escape, indeed the authorities issued a passport valid for expatriation for his trips, and he could freely move across international borders at least until 1938. While still in Italy, Venturi had come to the attention of the police, but, following an official inquiry, he was found not to be politically involved.⁹⁸² His decision to relocate to France probably gathered momentum as a result of the arrest of his son Franco for his involvement in anti-Fascist circles.⁹⁸³ Indeed, Venturi was not involved in any political activity in Italy and he came in direct contact with anti-Fascist organisations only in 1932, once in France.⁹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, immediately after his move to Paris, Venturi came under the surveillance of the Italian secret service.⁹⁸⁵ Moreover, at more or less the same time, Gualino had also moved to Paris, following the end of his confinement. He was also under the surveillance of the Italian secret service, who were especially interested in his financial enterprises.⁹⁸⁶ (Figs. 49–50)

expressed his wish to learn and master English language. Letter from Lionello Venturi to Riccardo Gualino, 24 May 1935, in FRG.

981 Iamurri, “Gli appunti di viaggio di Lionello Venturi, 1932–1935,” 93–94.

982 Venturi, “Dal nazionalismo familiare all’esilio,” 108–112; d’Orsi, “Lo strano caso del professor Venturi, 17–18.

983 Venturi, “Dal nazionalismo familiare all’esilio,” 108; Valeri, “Lionello Venturi antifascista ‘pericoloso’ durante l’esilio 1931–1945,” 16–20. Venturi became involved with anti-Fascist organisations already in France since 1932, in particular with the group *Giustizia e libertà*.

984 Boatti, *Preferirei di no*, 168–170.

985 Valeri, “Lionello Venturi antifascista ‘pericoloso’ durante l’esilio,” 15–24.

986 Once freed from his confinement, but still condemned to be prohibited from financial ventures, Gualino settled in Paris. There he was secretly placed under surveillance as a number of documents in ASBI shows. For instance, letter about Riccardo Gualino (s.d., s.n.) from Paris, *Rapporti con l’estero*, Pratt. 95, fasc. 3, in ASBI (“Malgrado i rovesci di fortuna subiti nel passato, il G. sembra disporre ancora di mezzi importanti e conduca una vita dispendiosa. Si dice che egli sia ancora amministratore di alcune società...”); confidential letters from Mario Pennacchio (delegate of the Bank of Italy) to Vincenzo Azzolini (Governor of the Bank of Italy), Paris, 25 October, 31 October 1933, 8 December 1933, and 28 December 1933, *Rapporti con l’estero*, Pratt. 95, fasc. 3, in ASBI (“...per accludere le informazioni che sono riuscito a raccogliere su alcune delle società che hanno qualche rapporto con l’attività del sig. Gualino”, “Secondo quanto mi viene riferito sarebbe stata segnalata a Londra, in questi ultimi mesi, la presenza dell’avv. Riccardo Gualino...le visite del Gualino sarebbero state motivate da ‘ragioni di affari’”); letter from Dr. Nathan, 13 January 1934 to Vincenzo Azzolini, *Rapporti con l’estero*, Pratt. 95, fasc. 3; memorandum about an

Therefore Venturi's friendship with the businessman certainly contributed to attracting suspicions about the nature of their activities in France.

Lionello Venturi's active participation in anti-Fascist circles and activities became more relevant and explicitly only at a later time. For instance, he took a more open stance against the racial law, issued in 1938, and against the Italian war declaration.⁹⁸⁷ After settling in America, Venturi also joined the *Mazzini Society*, an organisation of Italian anti-Fascist intellectuals. An aspect, which might have made him more outspoken in his anti-Fascist views might have been the pressure on him, as an Italian citizen, to maintain a clear distance from Fascism due to the tense diplomatic relationship between the two countries during the Second World War.⁹⁸⁸ Although some involvement in anti-Fascist activities on his part is reported by the Italian secret services from 1932 – also a sign of being under observation – he was listed as wanted by the regime only in 1938.⁹⁸⁹

Meanwhile, after moving abroad, primitivism disappeared from his intellectual agenda, proving once again its specific relationship with the context of the 1920s. It is significant that Venturi had planned to publish *The Taste of the Primitives* in America and had been working towards an English translation.⁹⁹⁰ However, it never saw the light of day. Instead in 1936, exactly ten years after the publication of his first book, his second book on the subject, *History of Art Criticism*, was published. This was a more mature and focused presentation of the alternative methodology he had initially proposed in the 1910s.⁹⁹¹ Primitivism, in its references to contemporary art and its attempt to influence the cultural debate of the 1920s, had vanished. Venturi also became more open towards the modern and contemporary artistic traditions but remained faithful to the aesthetic principles connected with abstraction and the intuitive expression of emotions, as his later articles show. Moreover, he even firmly refused to endorse the new dominant aesthetic discourse, rooted in realism and backed by the socialist government, when he returned to Italy at the end of the Second World War.

Anglo-Continental consortium based in France (s.d., s.n.), Rapporti con l'estero, pratt. 95, fasc. 3, in ASBI ("...a Roma è sorto il dubbio che dette società nascondano attività del Gualino...e nascondano anche attività di qualche anti-fascista").

987 Valeri, "Lionello Venturi antifascista 'pericoloso,'" 15–27; d'Orsi, "Lo strano caso del professor Venturi," 19–20.

988 Valeri, "Lionello Venturi antifascista 'pericoloso,'" 16. Valeri quoted Venturi claiming that the Italian intellectuals living in the USA, protested against the Italian declaration of war, which in his opinion was important in order to distinguish the Italians from the Fascists. "Si cominciò allora ad abituare gli Americani a distinguere gli italiani dai fascisti."

989 Boatti, *Preferirei di no*, 168–170; Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio," 113.

990 Lionello Venturi, *The Taste of the Primitives*, s.d. Unpublished document, in ALV.

991 Lionello Venturi, *The History of Art Criticism* (New York: Dutton, 1936).

* * *

Primitivism was Venturi's way to respond to, challenge, and compete with the Fascist discourse and its frame of appropriation, while influencing the cultural debate at the time. At the beginning of the 1920s, Venturi started the process with which he came to associate his aesthetic theory with the concept of the primitive. Consequently, his conception of primitivism worked as a frame that projected meaning and value over artworks from the present and from the past within a coherent context. Primitivism became the basis for supporting his interpretations and argumentations. However, it emerged from this study that the primitive frame not only responded to aesthetic motivations. In Venturi's attempt to take part in the cultural debate of the time, the main goal lay in preserving his authority and influential role, despite the evolved aesthetic panorama and irreconcilable dominant discourse. However, although he tried to affect the cultural debate with his alternative perspective, which eventually clashed with the establishment, his engagement with primitivism was not the result of political activism.

Towards a Conclusion

The initial scope of this research was intended to be a textual analysis of Lionello Venturi's major work of the 1920s, *The Taste of the Primitives* (1926). However, I fairly soon observed that a purely theoretical approach was insufficient to understand the book fully. I therefore changed my approach to include a larger focus on Venturi's professional and intellectual life, with the aim of positioning his work and thinking in the context of the time. This new approach consisted of a perspective for analysis centred on the concept of the primitive, which was essential to Venturi's work in the 1920s. Despite this term being of great relevance in *The Taste of the Primitives*, its meaning remains ambiguous and elusive. The first question in my study therefore concerned the definition of the term primitive in Venturi's work, the motivation behind its usage, and the way in which it had been employed.

Venturi used the term primitive, shifting its meaning from its historical connotations to its aesthetic qualities, such as creativity, abstraction, and spiritual inspiration. In other words, Venturi turned a set of historically determined aesthetic characteristics, typical of the Italian old masters, into a universal aesthetic category. The analysis of the meaning of the "primitive" as an aesthetic category contributed to highlighting Venturi's connection with the second generation of formalist theorists, a connection that had not previously been adequately considered. While the connection with Bernard Berenson had already been studied to a certain extent, the relationship with other scholars, in particular Clive Bell, Roger Fry, and Osvald Sirén, had scarcely been taken into consideration before this research.

Venturi's concept of the primitive reflects an aesthetic meaning that indeed reveals many points of contact with Formalism. These points primarily regard the conception of form as a synthetic and significant expression of spiritual and emotional intuition. In particular, it is possible to distinguish Sirén's influence on Venturi's theory for its profound consideration of mystical aspects implied in the creative process that was also inspired by his involvement in the Theosophical movement. Although it was not possible in this study to consider Venturi's involvement with Theosophy in an exhaustive way, it nevertheless emerged as an important component of Venturi's aesthetic ideas and definition of primitivism, in a similar way to those of Sirén. This area deserves further study.

The connection between Venturi and Sirén was not only at a theoretical level. The documentary research in this regard indeed proves that they were personally in contact as scholars and as art advisors. Their professional relationship had roots in the beginning of the 20th century, when they were part of a network of scholars interested in the Italian old masters. However, from the beginning of the 1920s, their connection deepened with regard to the Riccardo Gualino Collection and especially to Chinese art. The study of this link to Sirén helped to explain the circumstances behind Venturi's interest in Oriental art and its relation to primitivism in those years. Sirén inspired the inclusion of Oriental art in the collection, working as a link for purchasing artworks, and providing the authority not only to establish their originality and quality, but also for their interpretation and value.

By analysing the meaning of the term primitive, I also highlighted a discursive function that better supports the scrutiny of Venturi's work beyond its aesthetic and conceptual aspects. Theories of discourse that have been employed in other studies to analyse the role of primitivism in modernist contexts were also useful in considering primitivism in relation to Formalist theories and to Venturi's work. The discursive theory, as elaborated by Michel Foucault, allows an analysis that calls into consideration contextual elements, such as the influence of historical, cultural, sociological, and ideological conditions. Moreover, from this perspective, primitivism can be interpreted as a discursive practice that, by creating knowledge and truth, justifies the authority of the textual claims. The primitivist discourse, therefore, was used by theorists as a means to explain, promote, and provide legitimacy for a set of aesthetic ideas. It provided the extra-textual or intra-textual information, the frame, needed for the understanding and reinforcing of their claims.

In particular, in the case of Formalism, the primitivist discourse came to justify the inclusion of chronologically and culturally distant artworks within the same theoretical ground. This function gains a particular importance when one looks at it from the perspective of the scholars' involvement in the collecting practices supporting their choice of artworks. These discursive frames provided by formalist theorists constituted a context, which contributed highlighting and branding the value of the artworks presented. The aesthetic premises laid down by formalist theorists, for instance, constituted the ground for the inclusion of Chinese pieces along with Italian primitive artworks, making them popular among Western collectors in the 1910s. The appropriation and interpretation of Chinese art within the discursive frame contributed to establishing its aesthetic and economic value, turning it into a new semiophore. Because of the potential of discursive practices to influence the taste of collectors, scholars gained an important role in the art market. Art historians, in their role as art advisors, not only provided the guarantee of quality and originality, but they could shift the boundaries of what was considered as art, conditioning the taste of their contemporaries and setting trends in the cultural sphere. Thus, the

partnership between art historians and collectors became a widespread practice at the turn of the century.

Similarly, from the point of view of the discursive approach, I also consider Venturi's primitivism in terms of a discursive practice that promoted his ideas and claims. In this regard, the Gualino Collection can be considered as part of Venturi's primitivist discursive frame. The relationship between Riccardo Gualino and Lionello Venturi represented the same kind of partnership between collectors and entrepreneurs that had become a common practice at the time. The collecting choices, unusual in 1920s Italy, reflected Venturi's theories and followed his strategic advice. As part of the primitive discursive frame, the collection gained meaning, legitimacy, and value as a coherent whole. As suggested by Mieke Bal in relation to her explanation of exhibitions in terms of discursive practices, the context of the collection could contribute to producing knowledge and authority by projecting the curatorial agents' presentation and interpretation over the objects included.

The importance of primitivism's function as a discursive frame emerges especially when considered in the light of the historical and cultural context of the 1920s. In this regard it is meaningful that, although Venturi's aesthetic ideas were rooted in the 1910s, the definition of a primitivist discourse took shape in the 1920s. It was connected, inspired, and motivated by contextual dialectics and factors. In those years, Venturi became involved in the cultural debate of the time beyond the limits of the academic context and its theoretical interests. Besides functioning as an art theorist, art historian, and art advisor, he assumed many other roles. He acted as a committed intellectual and cultural influencer. Public lectures, columns in newspapers including public polemics, and curating contemporary exhibitions are examples of his cultural activism in those years. Also, the polemical nature of *The Taste of the Primitives*, despite its historiographical content, suggests its role as a critical intervention. All of these diverse cultural initiatives that he undertook, often sponsored by Riccardo Gualino, found explanation, support, and meaning in a common frame founded on the primitivist discourse, which had a cohesive function.

As discursive frames had proven to be useful in promoting unusual collecting trends, primitivism became the frame for justifying and promoting Venturi's ideas within the cultural debate of the time dominated by a profoundly different aesthetic orientation: Modern Classicism. Therefore, Venturi's involvement from a contesting position in the debate shows that his claims and work were not only determined by aesthetic motivation. They were also determined by the need to attest his authority and influential role within an adverse dominant discourse. This aspect emerged clearly in regard to the anti-classicism associated with his concept of the primitive.

In the 1920s, Modern Classicism came to dominate not simply as an aesthetic trend, but as part of a discursive practice that promoted the Fascists' myths and values. I found that the Fascist arts policy and Lionello Venturi followed a similar discursive strategy in deploying conceptual appropriation, interpretation, and re-elaboration in

order to gain control of the cultural debate of the time. Aesthetic references were influenced by political and cultural factors. There is indeed a gap between Modern Classicism as an aesthetic undertaking and as artistic practice, and the interpretation made within the Fascist discursive frame. In this frame Modern Classicism was mainly presented in terms of nationalism and tradition. The Fascist classicist and nationalist discursive frame favoured a process of fascistization of Italian culture and society, homogenising various artistic trends. Through the process of appropriation of symbolic images, Fascism could exploit art by manipulating its meaning, without directly controlling it. Through this strategy, Fascism steered the cultural debate of the time in a way that secured avoiding criticism and opposition from artists and intellectuals. The plurality of artistic approaches was absorbed through a frame that was realised and perpetuated, thanks to the work of art critics and a range of official events.

From the point of view of discursive analysis, Venturi's particular formulation of a primitivist discursive frame emerges in its historical context as a reaction to the fascistization of the dominant discourse. Venturi shaped his primitivism with the Fascist discourse in mind, although in a contesting relationship as a way to respond and to challenge it. The primitivist discursive frame therefore functioned as an empowering tool that protected and promoted his aesthetic theory and his authority as an art critic and cultural influencer. Venturi used his conception of primitivism not only to support and legitimise his claims in terms of a self-explanatory and self-justifying ground, but also to affect and mould the discursive structures to introduce an alternative perspective to the cultural debate of the time. The potential of discursive practices in producing meaning, knowledge, and thus power, is also evident, for example, in the neglect of the Novecento because of the enduring view about this group's connections with Fascism.

The interpretation of the primitive in terms of a discourse with cultural implications also helped in understanding the contradictions within Venturi's theory, his criticism of contemporary art, and the actual artistic practices of the time. Venturi's anti-classicism, as part of a discursive frame, addressed the appropriation of Modern Classicism that was carried out within the dominant discourse rather than actual artworks. Primitivism says more about Venturi as an agent in the cultural debate of the time, than it does about the artistic practices he evaluated and criticised. Venturi had relied on the primitivist discourse in order to present himself as a defender of modernity and progressive art, against a classicist tendency that he described in terms of reviving models from the past and resorting to conservatism as forms of pleasing those holding the political power. His discourse was indeed mainly directed at generally emphasising the need for a practice of art and culture independent of political influences.

The primitivist discourse responded to the need to address and resist the process of Fascist homogenisation and to argue for his right to have his voice heard as a

moral, critical, and aesthetic authority. Venturi's main concern indeed regarded the possibility of existing outside the Fascist discourse. He could have found space for his work within it, as did many other intellectuals and artists, and the professors who accepted the oath of loyalty to the Fascist regime. This would have meant coexisting in a passive way, being absorbed within the Fascist discourse, and thus seeing his influential role diminished. Behind the primitive discourse there was instead an urge to state his intellectual leadership. My perspective for analysis therefore contributes to an emphasis on the meaning of Venturi's activities in the 1920s as a consequence of a cultural climate that was limiting the space of his work, influence, and international networking. However, his attempt to affect the cultural debate with his alternative aesthetic perspective, while clashing with the establishment, was not the result of political activism, but rather motivated by more circumstantial reasons to do with an interest in maintaining the identity of an intellectual and following one's professional persuasions.

The focus on the concept of the primitive in this study constituted a perspective for analysis that, in the light of his multiple roles and his diverse initiatives in the 1920s, provided a more consistent and less fragmented intellectual profile of Lionello Venturi. It helped in understanding Venturi's professional and personal life, and in particular his book, *The Taste of the Primitives*, in a holistic perspective. The notion of primitivism emerges as a common thread, a shared ground, connecting the broad spectrum of his activities and ideas in those years. Analysing his understanding of primitivism means analysing the underlying frame of all of his texts and interventions, academic and non-academic. In particular, through the primitivist discourse we can have a better insight into Venturi's intentions, visions, projects. This approach, based on the consideration of the contextual meaning of the concept of the primitive, introduced a method that enhances an analysis capable of bringing together theoretical and historical aspects, the intellectual thinking and the social life of Lionello Venturi, which I hope can be further utilised in other research contexts.

The concept of the primitive as a perspective for analysis made it possible to move the focus of my research from a textual and theoretical analysis to a more complex transdisciplinary study – involving cultural history, art historiography, and the history of art collecting – on an international ground. Moreover, the inclusion of cultural and historical aspects in the focus of my research also implied a greater emphasis on archival research than I had initially estimated. For this reason, I visited several archives across different cities, providing a wide range of valuable primary sources and unedited documents, including letters, notes, and photographs. The shift in my research from theoretical analysis to a more historical and material ground highlighted the importance of some contextual aspects, such as the commercialisation of art (the art market and collecting) and the influence of social networks, which still are very topical in the art-historical scholarship of today. These are aspects that would be interesting to develop and elaborate on in future projects.

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Documents regarding the Gualino Collection
Letters about Gualino's activities abroad

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Appendix 1

Abstracts from the typescript of the English translation of *Il gusto dei primitivi* with the author's revision notes. Courtesy of the Venturi family and Archivio Lionello Venturi.

a. From the Introduction.

To be sure, the
 ^ The battle between the classicists and the romanticists was ~~some~~ ^{done} some time ago, but it is constantly being revived under different names. The banners of style are raised against realism, of beauty against truth, of intelligence against emotional expression, of form against color, of the finished composition against the impressionistic sketch, in short of Rome, the mother of the classical arts, against Paris, the refuge of the romantic arts.

Behind each of these ~~ideals~~ is some historical standard of taste. The classicists look back with a sigh to Greek sculpture and to the Florentine-Roman painting of the Cinquecento, and the Romanticists pin their faith on Venetian painting of the Cinquecento, Dutch and Spanish painting of the seventeenth century, French and Venetian painting of the eighteenth and the so-called international realism of the nineteenth century.

Nobody claims allegiance to the great "primitive" masters.

Of course everybody knows that all over the world, the museums and private collectors are clamoring for the works of primitive artists, that dilettantes swoon in the presence of Umbrian mysticism, and that books on primitive masters are multiplying daily, but the taste of the primitives themselves does not form a part of our artistic life. The love of the primitives is a luxury for drawing-rooms and leisure hours or for scholars who spend their lives in libraries. When a question of contemporary artistic interest comes up, when we must decide to welcome or reject a new form of art, the words classicism or impressionism come immediately to our ~~lips~~ ^{lips}, and the primitives no longer count.

3. 6

But they could free us from the wearisome contradictions between classic and romantic, they could open for us new horizons across the centuries and the continents, so that we might draw from every time and every place a universal consciousness of art.

If the numerous and impassioned studies of the erudite and the enthusiasm of dilettantes have been in vain, it is because of the prevalence of certain confusions and aesthetic prejudices which are all the more dangerous ~~and deep-seated~~ because they bear the stamp of a tradition which is centuries old. In spite of the analytic refinement of modern aesthetics, the prejudices are numberless, but two especially prevail under the names of "classicism" and "realism."

The space

7 The primitives will continue to be a dead letter to us as long as the prejudice of the imitation of nature reigns supreme. It is responsible for our belief that it is possible to learn in a few years of study at an academy a greater proficiency in anatomy than was possessed by the great primitive masters and that this proficiency is the basis of art. This prejudice induces us to link with our love of the primitives a self-satisfied and amused indulgence for the technical ineptitude of children. It is also responsible for the contrast between the "religious qualities" of the Trecento and the "art" of the Cinquecento. As long as in the very bosom of the Catholic church pagan expressions of art are cherished in the name of classicism almost as a check on the dangers of the free expression of the religious sentiment, classical taste will dry up the love which inspires the soul, and there will be no place for a public recognition of the primitives. They may as well remain mummified in the hands of those who will harbor them carefully and await a better generation.

A short time ago I read in a daily paper a discussion of neo-classicism

No space
 and neo-realism. It seems that after the war we took a mistaken pleasure in a sort of neo-classicism, but we have now come to our senses and a new day is dawning. The new epoch is called "neo-realism". This may seem only a matter of journalistic chatter, but the worst of it is that when we pass to the more serious matter of the history of art criticism the same kind of confusion of terms is everywhere evident. From the time that Vasari had the unhappy idea

of opposing the realism of the Venetians to the classicism of the Florentines, art and nature have been the two poles of all discussions. This was especially true in the nineteenth century. There were those who made an idol of the one, those who made an idol of the other, those who followed a happy middle course and took a ^{something} bit from both, and those who finally made the blessed discovery that the two poles are really one and the same thing.

One would almost like to beg one's friends not to mention the words classicism and realism for fifty years, but the wish would be futile and the prayer unheard. It will be better to bear with the discussion a little longer, and discover for ourselves the reasons behind the prejudices.

→ The word "classicism" has two distinct meanings, one philosophical and the other historical. Croce says of classical poetry "it is the particular fusion of the spontaneous and the cultivated, of inspiration and of convention which is present in the poetry of the great poets of all times or in the great parts of their works." (1); it conditions an eternal moment of the human spirit which renews itself each time that it creates art; it is found in all great artists even though they belong to periods not known under the name of "classicism." Thus, for example, Giotto and Rembrandt may both be considered as "classical" when the word is given its philosophical meaning.

If, on the other hand, we are using the word "classicism" to define the taste of the ancient Greeks and Romans in contrast to the taste of another historical period like the Byzantine, we do not give the word, and we ought not to give it, anything but a descriptive character. It is only an indication not an evaluation. We do

(1) La Critica, XXI (1923), p. 111

~~8~~ 9

not, or we ought not to, prefer Greek form to Byzantine color, Greek construction to Byzantine decoration, composition in three dimensions to composition in two dimensions, and so on, but we may prefer in Byzantine decoration or Greek construction, the element of taste which each historical epoch has developed in its approach to the condition of "classical art" in the philosophical sense.

The confusion between the two meanings has nevertheless been more frequent than one can guess. The impressiveness of ^{Greek art} ~~Greek~~, the fact that the Greeks and Romans were the first to make their art conformable to reason, the additional fact that the periods in which so much was written about art were thoroughly saturated with Greek and Roman culture, combined with the tremendous influence which the ancient world exercises over ^{all} our thought, ~~all~~ lead us to identify the universal value of "classical" with the art of the Greeks and Romans. Hence there is a presumption in favor of the construction of the Greeks and against Byzantine decoration, a tendency to designate form as the substantive in art, and color as only an adjective. Such identifications and affirmations produced as they are by a confusion, result in an absurdity. If we are to believe that the Greek and Roman artists achieved "the" perfection of art, and not "a" perfection, we deny all value to personality in art and encourage the artist to smother all self-expression and to borrow from the casts in the school-room and the marbles of museums, a ^{mask} ~~mask~~ of antiquity. The artist dies and at best only a small boy dressed up in Roman armor is born.

"realists," allowed the mystical process less importance than did, for example, the Italians of the Trecento. Thus the presence of God, of universality, of absolute spiritual reality were felt by the Trecentists in a way in which the "classicists" and the "realists" did not feel them. They did not feel them, not because they were any wiser, but because they ^{possessed} had less of the power and vitality of mysticism ~~in them.~~

Let us look at a mountain by Giotto and a mountain by Titian. (Pls. 1 and 2) There is no doubt that they each express the personality of the artist and hence that they are both works of art. But their difference is not only one of artistic personality. In fact Titian's mountain not only makes manifest the personality of Titian which is in it, but it also manifests the nature in it, we seem to have seen it many times before and we would immediately recognize it if we were to see it again. Giotto's mountain, on the other hand, certainly manifests Giotto's personality but it in no wise manifests nature; we have never seen that mountain in nature and we never shall. At the same time, Giotto's ^{mountain} ~~interest~~ is much simpler, its unity is more severe and absolute, its spiritual life is more immediate and penetrating, ~~even~~ though less complex. Unity, simplicity and immediacy are synonymous with the presence of God, which is direct in Giotto and indirect in Titian.

We may reach out to God through revelation and through induction. Induction is the way of science; revelation is the way of art. He who chooses from and refines upon nature in search of the beautiful Ideal and calls that beautiful Ideal God, is proceeding by induction, and he will only be an artist if that inductive process is blessed by an inspiration, a moment of revelation. One can be an artist in spite of the inductive process of the idealization of reality, but not because of that process. The primitives reached God directly through revelation and they cannot be understood without recognizing the ^{place} ~~sign~~ of revelation in art. The criteria

#4

22

we must understand this common taste of a given period before we can understand the work of any individual artist.

The preference for "revelation" and its numberless consequences in art brings together many artists who are neither classical (Greeks, and Romans, Italians of Cinquecento) nor romantic (strictly speaking, certain nineteenth century artists.) Thus to have discussed all the artists who have shared the taste of revelation would have led us into too distant fields and made our discussion wearisome.

I intend, therefore, to discuss the taste for revelation itself and to draw my examples chiefly from the work of two groups of artists. The one group includes the Italian painters of the period between the closing

years of the 13th cent and the end of the 15th cent.

We are quite familiar with the term "primitive" as applied to the art of this period, but we are less familiar with it as applied to the art of the second

group: the Impressionists of the nineteenth century. I have chosen these two groups because

I believe that the Italian primitives

represent one of the greatest heights

to which the human fancy guided

by a sense of ²³ divine communion
has attained, and because I believe
that our study of the Impressionists
will show that revelation is a
necessary and hence eternal element
in art + not dependant solely upon
certain historical conditions of re-
ligious life; and ^{that revelation} has a power which
need not be devitalized by the conditions
of modern life.

Art depends on revelation, but criticism does not. If criticism is
to understand the phenomenon of ~~revelation~~ it cannot abandon itself to a
mystical trance in the hope of obtaining a revelation of the truth, but must
use its own proper instrument of reason. Only reason can unveil the error
of a rationalistic intrusion into a non-rationalistic phenomenon. There
is no other way to unmask that error than to recount its history, to show
its consequences, to trace the assertions of independence from it, the at-
tempts at liberation from it and the many compromises.

The excessive rationalism of ancient criticism, the faith in revelation
in the Middle Ages, the compromises of the Renaissance between mediaeval faith
and classical reason, the neo-classical statutes which were in force from
the Cinquecento to the beginning of the nineteenth century, the romantic
reaction which never really fulfilled the task of criticism but which still
sheds its beneficent light even on the artistic poverty of today—these are
the principal historical aspects of that antithesis which in the criticism
of art assumes the names of reason and revelation, of man and of God.

b. From Corollaries.

-199-

Corollaries.

~~The sign~~
 Pure ~~Visibility~~ and Nature.

When lines, forms and colors have been realized in a work of art because they have been fused in the alembic of the artist's soul, they have been thereby transformed into something other than themselves. They have been individualized to the extent that they pertain to the particular work of art and to it alone, and at the same time they have been universalized to the extent that the whole of which they are the component parts belongs to the great absolute body of art. Thus the isolated individual human being who becomes an artist is caught up into the cosmos and united with it and finite man becomes God.

If this is the real explanation of art, it is the task of criticism to distinguish between the subject which an artist actually ^{has} succeeded in objectifying, and that which ^{has failed of assimilation} is ~~unassimilated~~ in the cosmos, and having no absolute value, is ~~merely~~ useless rubbish. Naturally there can be no material test because the phenomenon is purely spiritual. Thus a theory of forms or color, like ^a ~~the~~ theory of proportions which sets itself up as an infallible test which all art must satisfy before it can be regarded as a true objectification of the content of the artist's imagination, is false. Equally false is the academic test of truth to nature.

As he stands before a mountain a painter does not see its geographical significance nor its geological or botanical characteristics, but he sees in the mountain its component lines, forms and colors. Several painters in the presence of the same mountain would all see it in a different way.

Each would emphasize lines, forms and colors which the others either did not see at all or did not think significant. This choice among visual elements has a double origin, one lies in the personality and temperament of the artist and the other in the tradition of taste which the artist has learned in his school or in the milieu in which he has lived. He derives his preferences from the traditional taste, and in the mountain he finds the occasion for manifesting his preferences. From whatever source they spring, nature or taste, the lines and forms and colors are the true reality of the artist, they are his raw material; if he dominates or transforms them to identify them with himself, at the same time subjectifying and objectifying them, he achieves a perfect work of art. It is quite possible that the painter may be inspired by a number of things which are not actual visual elements in the mountain, its solitude, its silence, its rugged strength, or its pitiless ferocity. In that inspiration lies the mysterious process of the union of the individual with the universe. But all this has nothing to do with "nature" as the content of art, as it has been understood throughout the centuries. For "nature" has meant finding in the mountain and representing in the painting of the mountain its geographical, geological, ^{and} botanical characteristics. Likewise when an artist represents a horse raising its forward left leg it has been demanded that also the back right leg should be represented as lifted also; it has likewise been insisted upon that a house in the background of a painting should have a door large enough to enter. This sounds like common sense, but it is an error in criticism. Neither the geology of the mountain, the anatomy of

-201-

the horse, nor the practical necessities of house construction are the true interests of the painter. The impression which a painter draws from a mountain, a horse, or a house depend on their lines and forms and colors. To substitute, as was done for hundreds of years, the word "nature" for lines, forms, and colors was to invent a metaphor which would at least have been in bad taste even if it had not had such unfortunate consequences.

The theorists of pure ~~visibility~~ ^{design} have had recourse to a special ^aes-
 thetic for the graphic and plastic arts for the purpose of raising the ele-
 ments of form and color to the level of art. ~~But~~ ^{They contend} just as critics of poetry
 realize that in poetry words are not derived from empirical nature, so crit-
 ics of the graphic and plastic arts ought to drop all discussion of phys-
 ical nature and occupy themselves with lines and forms and colors them-
 selves which are the real matter of art. The theory was founded on a
 false premise and its results could only be false and erroneous. Fiedler,
 who attacked romantic sentimentalism, did not realize that the most vulner-
 able spot in romantic theory was its tenacious and illogical naturalism.
 Of course a naturalistic critic must have the courage of his convictions and
 systematize that nature which he assumes as a basis of art, and must define
 the elements of his nature, like house, mountain, river and so on. Lines,
 forms, and colors are also definitions of natural elements, but with this
 difference, that a knowledge ^{of houses and mountains is of use for practical and} ~~forms and colors are of value to art and to~~
~~art alone.~~ ^{scientific} purposes, while a knowledge of forms and colors are
 value to art and to art alone.

The theory of pure ~~visibility~~ ^{design} is a very inadequate explanation of the
 phenomenon of art. It is only a provisional systematization to facilitate
 an understanding of the problem. It took men of keener intuitions and
 deeper feelings than Fiedler, men like Wackemroder and Ruskin, to realize
 that art can be separated from a scientific study of external nature and

-202-

to feel the mystical relation between the personality of the artist and the means which he uses,--lines, forms and colors.

To say that an artist must idealize reality is nonsense when reality is understood as the lines, forms and colors of reality. He inevitably does idealize them by infusing them with his spirit, but he also realizes them by expressing his own spirit through them. Thus to speak of realism in the philosophical sense is to use a word which has no meaning.

The limits
of class-
ical taste

To say, still in a philosophical sense, that a work of art must be classical is at least dangerous, because the words suggest an irrepressible historical tradition in addition to the meaning which one wishes to attribute to them. Even when simple artistic perfection is implied by the use of the phrase "classical art," our minds in spite of ourselves jump back to the standards of perfection of Greek and Roman times. It would be well to say at the outset that classical taste died from the world the moment that Christianity became a vital force, and it was not reborn in the Renaissance and never will be. In the Napoleonic period, and in the other times nearer our own which we usually consider as period of revival of classical taste, there was no real revival, and the paintings and sculptures which masqueraded under the name were hardly even shadows of a world which had long since passed away. If it were to return again in all its perfection, Christianity would have to disappear and paganism would ^{have to} triumph once more. I realize that there are those who entertain this fascinating hope, but I leave it to others to speculate upon the possibility.

Until the Christian spirit is stamped out, classical taste cannot re-

c. About the Use of Prospective.

-251-

recession of plane, of delicate touch and hammering insistence make a unity of style which is complex, rich, full of surprise and of possibility.

Two such diverse tastes cannot be compared. In what respect is Michelangelo's taste superior to Antonello's? In anatomical science? But I wonder whether if there is any esthetic reason why a harmony between the external structure of a nude and its internal construction should be superior to a harmony between the external structure of a nude and an ideal figure of a cylinder. We have only to formulate the question to see that such standards of judgment are alien to esthetics and that the anatomical taste and the geometric taste are equally capable from the point of view of art of producing marvels and of producing monstrosities.

When we read in Cennino's "Libro dell' arte"

*take them of the size you want +
draw the lines of four working.*

and thereafter recall to mind the passion for perspective of the Florentines of the Quattrocento, and Alberti's exaltation of perspective as the origin of art, we may be drawn to the conclusion that in this, at least, the Trecento was inferior to the Quattrocento. There can be no doubt that Brunelleschi's discovery or rediscovery of perspective opened infinite new possibilities to the taste of the Renaissance. Perspective makes it possible to distinguish the theoretical vision of the painter from the empirical, and gives a unity to composition which is both superficial and

fundamental. It determines the space in which the figures move,

*Sense of volumes, architectural quality,
to an abony*

But if for Brunelleschi, for Masaccio, for Piero della Francesca and for many other Tuscan masters perspective was an artistic necessity, for other painters it became a scientific necessity which must be learned and demonstrated as a part of the artist's technical equipment. It was then no longer a force, but a weakness, not a stylistic principle but a mechanical performance. Because it is always possible to see the effects of perspective in nature, the men of the Renaissance thought it impossible to do without it, not realizing that when nature passes into art, necessities become optional and their use depends upon the personal style of each artist.

Indeed the absolute independence of perspective vision and creative fancy is proved by a strange phenomenon. Giotto had a profound sense of the third dimension, he shaped each figure with a view to its volume and the space it occupied, simplifying to the utmost each surface so that the eye of the observer should not be distracted by any pleasing modulation of surface but should find the true meaning of the figure in the totality of the relief. This all made perspective essential to Giotto but he was not acquainted with its scientific laws. In the buildings which rise behind the crowd in the Raising of Drusiana (Plate 42) the errors in perspective are innumerable. But in spite of his lack of any mathematical guide, he succeeded in realizing a sense of depths. What he did not know with his rational consciousness, he received from divine inspiration.

-253-

The monumentality of the scene, its heaviness, the heroic proportions of the figures against the distant background are all perfectly realized. The absurd has become real.

A charming poet of feminine grace like Perugino had no need for perspective in his art. But he had studied with Piero della Francesca and so he shows in his fresco of the Adoration in the Cambio that he knew how to draw a building correctly and how to dispose his figures following the lines of convergence. He knew all about perspective, but not feeling it as an artistic necessity, he made of it an ornament. The graciousness of the adoring throng was his theme. But he decorated the pilasters so profusely that they distract the eyes of the observer in a way which Giotto purposely avoided. In addition to his scheme of converging lines he placed the series of figures parallel to the plane of the background, and so totally lost that sense of unity which perspective can lend to a scene and which is the source of its grandeur and its monumentality.

Artistically speaking one may truthfully say that Giotto realized perspective without knowing it, and that Perugino disregarded it, knowing it, even when he was executing tour de force of perspective.

Piero della Francesca was a great theorist and at the same time a great poet of perspective. How much "adoration" he put into the treatment of the columns, the luminous entablature and the intervals of dark walls in the Flagellation at Urbino! (Plate 44) The same is a symbolical comparison between Oddantonio da Montefeltro between his counsellors and Christ among the hirelings of Pilate.

-254-

The realization of the symbol is visual and consists in the perspective. It gives the value of a distant memory to the scene of the Flagellation, it makes a luminous harmony between two dark masses. The discreet reference to the martyrdom of Oddantonio required the representation of the three portraits whose dark masses are brought out by the clear tones of the architecture. The unity of the scene is achieved by the interplay of dark on light, in the foreground and in the distance a chord of dark sings out against a background light. It is thus that perspective can become art.

Giulio Romano's use of perspective in a ceiling of the Palazzo del Te in Mantua (Plate 43) is of a very different order. The single purpose which the painter had in mind in painting the dome in the centre was to give the illusion of very great height, and the effect of height so obtained has no relation to the grouping of the gods. He had at his disposition an able hand and a really intelligence, but art is not produced by these alone. He varied and interrupted the effect of perspective with some judgment, but it remains an instrument which was not used for a genuinely artistic purpose. To infuse spiritual quality into an architectural perspective it is necessary for the artist to adore it with reverence, not insult it by using it as a mechanical instrument. For it is from such worship that the perspective of Pietro della Francesca derives its spiritual power.

When Leonardo realized that the linear perspective which he had learned from Florentine tradition was insufficient to satisfy his desire for universality, and that it was necessary to add to it aerial perspective, his style was enriched by so much and the diminution of color

-255-

values as an effect of distance became an essential element in his art. But what has already been said for linear perspective may be repeated for aerial perspective. Whatever is a stylistic necessity for one artist, in this case Leonardo, may become for others an impediment to the free flow of creative fancy.

For instance, it would be absurd to raise objections because Botticelli in his fresco of St. Augustine (Plate 46) did not make use of aerial perspective. By means of linear perspective he made a gigantic figure, morally and physically, and has given something heroic to his image of the great saint. That could never have been achieved without stark, incisive line. Any delicacy of surface modelling would have weakened the effect and rendered it empty and void instead of perfect.

Federico Barocci, on the other hand, imagined his St. Jerome through the medium of aerial perspective. The gradation of distances is continuous from the first to the last plane and is correct for the central figure and for every least object. One cannot then deny him coherence of style. But at the same time, Botticelli quietly dominates his style, he draws with full faith in his own creative powers, while Barocci is completely dominated by his style. The coherence is more the result of will-power than spontaneous impulse, it is studied rather than created. The work shows such respect for all the principles which he had learned, and such scrupulous care not to omit any, that his undeniable humility becomes a sort of fear. There results an excessive care for particular elements, a littleness of figures and things, a spiritual poverty which is painful after the heroic qualities of Botticelli.

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d. About Simone Martini and Titian.

-239-

On Plate 22, you will see how Simone Martini expressed the homage of adoration in the image of Robert of Anjou. Adoration cannot be felt in any other way than this, it absorbs the individual and fills the whole soul. The richness of the garments accentuates by contrast the purity of the line; the hands are disproportionately large, but that disproportion intensifies and purifies the expression. The fineness of the lines which describe the profile give it an ethereal quality and suggests the feeling that the whole figure consumes itself in adoration.

Compare with Simone's version of the effect of adoration upon the worshipper and Titian's representation of the Pesaro family in his masterpiece in the church of the Frari. (Plate 21) There can be no doubt that Titian felt the divine value of his masses, of his lights, of his transverse composition, of his movement, of his columns that soar out of the frame and lose themselves in the sky, and of his whole arrangement of the setting for the great ceremony. In the figure of St. Francis the painter has personified a conscious dedication of the soul, which is spontaneous, simple and sorrowing, like every great dedication, and complete because it is filled with the faith which renounces all. The portraits of the members of the Pesaro family are justly celebrated for their vivacity, their chromatic richness, and the varied and complex reality which they reveal. Nevertheless, I question whether they belong to the ensemble, if their spiritual absence from the ceremony which is taking place is not a disorganizing element. Two of them have folded hands, but it is perfectly evident that they are not adoring anything, they are only trying to make people think they are

-240-

adoring the Virgin and her Child. Such pretense may of course be the content of a work of art, but it is evident that such a content smacks a little of calculating intellectualism and is not consonant with the marvelously sincere figure of St. Francis, ~~but the interest in physical nature,~~ nor is such externality coherent with Titian's style. The interest in physical nature which he so admirably restrained in the figure of St. Francis, lacked a spiritual ^{check} ~~rein~~ from the point of view of religious significance when he was painting portraits.

For this reason we feel in the etherealized image of Robert of Anjou an expression of perfect, miraculous and absolute adoration which we search for in vain in the portraits of the Pesaro family.

e. The Primitives and the Art of the Nineteenth Century.

-262-

Chapter II

The Primitives and the Art of the Nineteenth
Century

The consciousness of the autonomy of "primitive" taste, of its technical perfection, and of its moral superiority cannot be limited to the interpretation of the works of ~~ixix~~ a particular period like the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance in Italy. Since the taste of the primitives is an essential and hence eternal aspect of art, in greater or less degree every authentic work of art always presents that aspect. Its traces may be found in the best artistic works of Greece of the Renaissance and of the so-called Baroque period.

But the painting of the nineteenth century merits especial attention. At the same time that the critics were "discovering" the primitives, many painters, without critical intent, were studying primitive art as a model, adopting it as a program, and exalting it as divine.

Many painters studied it for the sake of using it as a basis for their own art. But just because of the independence of primitive taste from the requirements of reason which has been emphasized in these pages, it eludes all study on the part of artists. It was natural that classical taste should have been and still is the school of the artist. A school is impossible without reason and classical taste is founded on reason. But the primitive artists founded their taste on a non-rational inspiration which can neither be taught nor learned. A critic may legitimately study a non-rational inspiration and discover its meaning and its reality. But an artist who studies such an inspiration with the intent of assimilating it and using it in his own art, invests it with rational elements, dis-

-263-

turbs its purity and ends by destroying it altogether. Reason can admit the existence of something other than itself but it cannot make use of it without destroying it, the non-rational cannot be translated into the irrational nor can the activity of the fancy be converted into a logical error without annulling the peculiar value of the non-rational manifestations of the creative fancy. And so Angelico's forms studied by a nineteenth century painter and assimilated by him are drained of their original inspiration and all the art and all the life which made them so beautiful under Angelico's own touch leaves them. Certainly class forms when imitated, are also lifeless and dead, but since they are justifiable by reason they may at least have some practical value for orators and politicians. The impossibility of any rational justification for primitive forms makes them utterly unserviceable for such purposes. And so the painters of the nineteenth century who assimilated primitive forms not only made them useless as art, but also useless for any other purpose. These misguided painters of course thought them useful for religious propaganda, not realizing that propaganda like teaching is based on reason that both ruin the value of all non-logical activity. Religion propaganda like artist propaganda is a contradiction in terms. In art and in religious revelation is the only effective reality, and propaganda has no part in the essential tasks of feeling and creating.

The rational elements which the primitivizing painters introduced into their painting by their pretended adoption of primitive taste, made it impossible that their pictures should betray even the faintest flavor of primitive taste. It was inevitable that their conscious purpose should defeat itself and make them misunderstand their models as well as the essence of art itself. Thus we may lay down the general rule, that it

is enough for a painter to study a primitive work for him to cease to be a primitive.

But can we not detect a genuine primitive flavor in the works of those artists of the nineteenth century who did not know the primitives? the same question may be asked in another form. Is there any painting in the nineteenth century worthy of the name of art? A knowledge of primitive taste will help us to answer these questions.

It is well-known that the civilization of the nineteenth century was characterized by a predominant interest in science and social organization and that art also had its eyes in scientific and political ends. Certain arts less adapted to and less resistant to scientific and practical influences like architecture disappeared from the scene.

Under such adverse conditions art could not withdraw itself from contact with the general culture of the time. It is often lamented that art has lost its relation to the people, but few have realized that when the people themselves lose interest, the art which runs after the people is committing voluntary suicide.

We have already observed the success enjoyed by the pseudo-primitives of the nineteenth century. It was a success which was no whit diminished by the opposition which they aroused. They created a scandal and the people were delighted with the scandal.

Overbeck, Minardi, Rossetti and Puvis de Chavannes are not to be pitied as men, for if they had to fight for their principles and had to contend with profound aversion on the part of some critics, they also had their eulogists whose encomiums often seem to us in the colder light of succeeding age to be excessive.

-265-

But there were others who were destined to live and die in poverty or in isolation because they could not agree with the dominating ideas of their century. Their work was misunderstood because the prejudices of neo-classicism had not been uprooted from the popular consciousness by romanticism. These men were Fattori and Lega, Manet and Cezanne and their companions. It may not be too much to suppose that because these artists themselves participated to some extent in the taste of the primitives that the century which through its pride of progress seems to us furthest from the humility and spiritual grace of the Middle Ages, so violently denied its approbation to their work.

Just as we have already noticed in the history of criticism, the earliest tendencies toward primitivism in the history of art are to be found among the neo-classicists. After having learned everything and reasoned about everything they felt the need of something beyond reason. The neo-classical artists had rejected the sensory illusionism of the Baroque, and feeling the need for simplicity and severity in their style, they went outside the limits of classicism. So it is that among the reliefs made by Canova at the end of his life in the church at Possagno representing various scenes from the Gospels there is certainly simplicity and primitive rigidity. (Plate 54) It is true that there is little religious sentiment in them, and they reflect a Hellenistic type of archaism rather than a Christian primitivism. But disregarding the head of the Archangel, one cannot but admire the severity and the simplicity of the drapery which reveals a high human dignity. Canova achieved so much through his ability as an artist and his fine sensitiveness to moral values and he blazed a trail which is not to be despised although it is not the way of art. He even took the German Purists under his protection and obtained work for them.

At twenty-years old in 1849-50, he painted the "Carpenters Shop" (Plate 65) in which the realization of the materials and the details is striking, especially ~~thaxxtaxixkxaxdxkxkxixk~~ in the work of so young a man, and in which the religious nature of the theme is expressed in the sharpness of the execution. Discounting the errors in taste and its irritating pretensions, this work, which created such an unheard of scandal in academic circles was perhaps the best thing which the Pre Raphaelite movement produced, because the passion for careful detail was too intense not to justify in some way the errors.

At about the same time Millais painted "Lorenzo and Isabella" (Plate 66) The reconstruction of costumes and of a historical-literary motive annulled and destroyed the passion which is discernible in the "Carpenter's Shop." Among many things which are false, the preoccupation with technique is genuine and bespeaks a desire to set a standard. Today the absurd thing about it all is that the picture was ever considered an anti-academic model. A work of art is never anti-academic, but is simply outside the academy.

In his maturity, when his modest pictorial talents had borne their natural print, Millais painted in 1874 the Northwest Passage now in the National Gallery at Millbank. It is a serious academic work placed at the service of imperial patriotism, a good piece of social propaganda. Here we see the true Millais in his most sincere aspect. The "Carpenter's Workshop" was a juvenile error, a dream which was never realized.

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In an atmosphere so inimical to art as that of the nineteenth century only those men could be painters who maintained such attitudes and committed

such juvenile errors all their lives long and who opposed any chance of success.

When we read the reminiscences of the French Impressionists or the Florentine Macchioldi, we find always recurring like an idée fixe the fear of commercial success. Each one could easily have made fortunes for themselves and their families but an inner demon drove them on. If they had done what everyone requested of them, their art would have been destroyed.

Theodore Duret, the apologist of the Impressionists, wrote "It must be said in their praise that scorn, opprobrium and poverty never caused them to waver for a moment or to leave the path which they had chosen. They held to their style amidst all the uproar of misunderstanding and ridicule, without for an instant dreaming of changing it to make it more acceptable to the public." (1) Signorini and Cecioni were also in furious revolt against the commercial prostitution of art. We read in Fattori's autobiography written as an old man, "I never made my art a commercial matter and never submitted myself to the demands of the dealers who ruin art and artists." (2)

And yet in the eighteenth century, Guardi and Tiepolo created perfect works of art, never dreaming of putting themselves in opposition to public taste, nor of putting into their works for art's own sake elements contrary to public taste. Instead they always tried to satisfy their public and in that attempt they found the way to perfection.

(1) T. Duret, Les peintres impressionistes. New edition Paris, 1919, p. 22

(2) in Catalogo delle opere esposte nel palazzo delle belle arti. New Dictionary, 1925. Florence.

Appendix 2

The artworks illustrated in the Catalogue of the Riccardo Gualino Art Collection (1926)⁹⁹²:

PITTURE

- 1 – CIMABUE, Madonna con bambino e due angeli (tavola)
- 2 – GUIDO DA SIENA (?), Madonna col bambino (tavola)
- 3 – ARTE TOSCANA DEL XIII SECOLO, Quattro santi (tavola)
- 4 e 5 – LORENZO VENEZIANO, L'addolorata e S. Giovanni evangelista (tavola)
- 6 – GIOTTO, Ascensione (tavola)
- 7 – NARDO DI CIONE, Trittico (tavola)
- 8 – SPINELLO ARETINO, Angeli (tavola)
- 9 – TADDEO BARTOLI, Madonna col bambino, S. Jacopo e S. Domenico (tavola)
- 10 – GIOVANNI DA MILANO, Santi (tavola)
- 11 – SCUOLA DEL BEATO ANGELICO, Trittico (tavola)
- 12 – MANIERA DI FRANCESCO PESELLINO, Madonna col bambino, S. Giovanni Battista e S. Antonio abate (tavola)
- 13 – COSIMO ROSSELLI, Ritratto di monaco (tavola)
- 14 – LORENZO DI CREDI, Ritratto di giovane (tavola)
- 15 – SANDRO BOTTICELLI, Venere (tavola)
- 16 – LUCA SIGNORELLI, Natività (tela – originariamente su tavola)
- 17 – MATTEO DI GIOVANNI, Madonna col bambino, S. Gerolamo e S. Bernardino (tavola)
- 18 – BENVENUTO DI GIOVANNI, S. Girolamo (tavola)
- 19 – MELOZZO DA FORLÌ, Cristo benedicente (tavola)
- 20 – NICCOLÓ DA FOLIGNO (detto L'ALUNNO), L'incontro di Anna e di Gioacchino davanti a Gerusalemme (tavola)
- 21 – GIOVANNI BOCCATI, Crocifissione (tavola)
- 22 – ANDREA MANTEGNA, Madonna col bambino (tavola)

992 I have recorded author, title, and media as indicated in the catalogue. The numerical order follows the original plate number given in the catalogue.

- 23 – COSMÈ TURA, Madonna col bambino (tavola)
24 – ANTONELLO DA MESSINA, L'uomo del libro (tavola)
25 – ANDREA DE SALIBA, S. Sebastiano (tavola)
26 – BARTOLOMEO MONTAGNA, Cristo benedicente (tavola)
27 – LIBERALE DA VERONA, Madonna col bambino e S. Caterina (tavola)
28 – GIOVANNI FRANCESCO CAROTO, S. Sebastiano (tavola)
29 – NICCOLÓ DA VARALLO, La natività della Vergine (tavola)
30 – AMBROGIO DA FOSSANO, Madonna col bambino benedicente un certosino (tavola)
31 – ANDREA SOLARIO, Salome riceve la testa del Battista (tavola)
32 – AMBROGIO DE PREDIS, Madonna col bambino (tavola)
33 – ARTE NAPOLETANA DELLA SECONDA METÀ DEL QUATTROCENTO, Adorazione dei Magi (tavola)
34 – ANGELO BRONZINO, Ritratto di una figlia di Cosimo I dé Medici (tavola)
35 – GIOVANNI CARIANI, Ritratto d'uomo (tela)
36 – JACOPO PALMA IL VECCHIO, Ritratto di donna (tela)
37 – JACOPO PALMA IL VECCHIO, Madonna col bambino, S. Giovanni Battista S. Antonio da Padova (tela)
38 – SEBASTIANO DEL PIOMBO, La Venere della tartaruga (tela)
39 – TIZIANO VECELLIO, Leda (tela)
40 – TIZIANO VECELLIO, Ritratto di un senatore veneziano (tela)
41 – JACOPO TINTORETTO, Ritratto di Sebastiano Veniero (tela)
42 – PAOLO VERONESE, Venere e Marte (tela)
43 – PIETRO PAOLO RUBENS, Ritratto di Vecchio (tavola)
44 – PIETRO PAOLO RUBENS, Il guado (tavola)
45 – ANTONIO VAN DYCK, Ritratto di Sofonisba Anguissola (tavola)
46 – REMBRANDT VAN RIJN, Autoritratto (tavola)
47 – FERDINANDO BOL, Ragazza (tela)
48 – JACOB-ISAACKSZ VAN RUISDAEL, La strada del villaggio (tela)
49 – ROSALBA CARRIERA, Ritratto della sorella Giovanna (carta)
50 e 51 – FRANCESCO GUARDI, San Giorgio e La Salute (tela)
SCULTURE E OGGETTI D'ARTE
52 – ARTE EGIZIANA DELL'ANTICO IMPERO, Gruppo di famiglia (calcare)
53 – ARTE ROMANA DELLA FINE DEL I SECOLO A. C., Ritratto (marmo)
54 – ARTE ELLENISTICA DEL I SECOLO D. C., Fontana (marmo)
55 – ARTE DELL'IMPERO ROMANO, Sarcofago (marmo)
56 – ARTE DELL'IMPERO ROMANO, Fronte di sarcofago (calcare)
57 – ARTE DELL'IMPERO ROMANO, Nereidi (argento)
58 a 61 – ARTE DELL'IMPERO ROMANO, Novacula (manici di osso e avorio)
62 – ARTE GRECA – Oggetti di orificeria
63 – ARTE MEDIOEVALE, Oggetti di orificeria

- 64 – ARTE BARBARICA, Oggetti di orificeria
65 – ARTE BARBARICA, Oggetti di orificeria
66 – ARTE BARBARICA, Oggetti di orificeria
67 – ARTE BARBARICA, Oggetti di orificeria
68 – ARTE MEDIOEVALE E MODERNA, Oggetti di orificeria
69 – ARTE CINESE DELLA PRIMA METÀ DEL SECOLO VI, Stele votiva (calcare grigio)
70 – ARTE CINESE DELLA SECONDA METÀ DEL SECOLO VI, Testa di Bodisattva (Calcare grigio)
71 – ARTE CINESE DEL SECOLO IX, Bodisattva seduto (legno con tracce di policromia)
72 – ARTE CINESE DEI SECOLI VIII–IX, Testa di Bosatsu (legno laccato e dorato)
73 – ARTE BIZANTINA DEL XI SECOLO, Sportello di dittico (avorio)
74 – ARTE ITALO-BIZANTINA SEC. XIII–XIV, Cofanetto civile (avorio)
75 – ARTE RENANA, SECOLO XI, Cofanetto civile (avorio, smalto e bronzo)
76 – ARTE RENANA, SECOLO XIII, Cofanetto liturgico (avorio)
77 – ARTE ARABO-SICULA, SECOLI XIII–XIV, Cofanetto (avorio e bronzo)
78 e 79 – ARTE DI LIMOGES, SECOLO XIII, Châsse di rame smaltato e dorato
80 – ARTE ROMANICA DEL SECOLO XII, Crocifisso (legno)
81 – ARTE MARCHIGIANA DEL SECOLO XV, Madonna adorante (legno)
82 – PIETRO LOMBARDO, Adorazione dei Magi (marmo)
83 – FRANCESCO LAURANA, Volto di donna (pietra)
84 – BARTOLOMEO BELLANO, Nettuno (bronzo)
85 – ANDREA RICCIO, Satiro (bronzo)
86 – JACOPO SANSOVINO, Madonna col bambino (bronzo)
87 – ARTE VENEZIANA, SECOLO XV, Forziere
88 – ARTE VENEZIANA, SECOLO XV–XVI, Cofanetto di legno decorato a pastiglia bianca su fondo d'oro
89 – ARTE VENEZIANA, FINE SECOLO XV, Cofanetto di legno decorato a pastiglia nera su fondo colorato
90 – 1. ARTE DEI LENDINARA, SECOLO XV, Forziere / 2. ARTE DELL'ITALIA SETTENTRIONALE, SEC. XV, Forziere
91 – ARTE FIORENTINA, SECOLO XV, Tavolo
92 – ARTE FIORENTINA, FINE DEL SECOLO XV, Armadio
93 – 1. ARTE VENEZIANA, PRINCIPIO DEL SECOLO XVI, Forziere / 2. ARTE VENEZIANA, SECOLO XVI, Forziere
94 – ARTE FIORENTINA, SECOLO XVI, Armadio
95 – ARTE FIORENTINA, METÀ DEL SEC. XVI, Credenza
96 – ARTE ROMANA, ANNI 1605–1609, Armadio
97 – ARTE VENEZIANA, SECOLO XVI, Ostiario di rame decorato di smalto policromo

- 98 – ARTE VENEZIANA, SECOLO XVI, Reliquario di rame decorato di smalto policromo
- 99 – ARTE VENEZIANA, SECOLO XVI, Caraffa di rame decorate di smalto policromo
- 100 – ARTE VENEZIANA, SECOLO XVI, Coppa di rame decorata di smalto policromo

The number and variety of artworks included in the collection expanded remarkably by 1928. Of the new entries, Macchiaioli artists' paintings and Chinese artworks are a consistent group. Moreover, more items of furniture and decorative art were added.

This list worked as the basis for the Gualino donation. From this list, the only pieces not included in the donation were the painting by Cosimo Rosselli (pl. 13) and the goblet illustrated in plate 100. The donation was made on the condition that the artworks would be kept and exhibited in Turin.⁹⁹³

993 Venturi, *La collezione Gualino*; Tardito Amerio, "La donazione Gualino alla galleria Sabauda," 35–37.

Appendix 3

The Chinese sculptures, not including terracottas, purchased by Riccardo Gualino during the 1920s: (the names of the artworks are written as they are indicated in the temporary import documentation)

Document of temporary import 27 December 1925 (12 January 1923)

- **Stele Chinese (sic!) blocco in marmo [Wei]:** in Venturi 1926, pl. 69; Venturi 1928, pl. 85; Sirén 1925, pl. 138; Sirén 1960, p. 81; Suriano, fig. 3 (Figs. 17–18)
- **Statua di legno Budda:** in Venturi 1926, pl. 71 (reference to Sirén); Venturi 1928, pl. 94 (reference to Sirén); Suriano, fig. 13 (Fig. 16)
- **Testa in pietra:** in Venturi 1926, pl. 70; in Venturi 1928, pl. 87; Sirén 1925, pl. 304 a-b, Suriano, fig. 9

Document of temporary import 8 July 1927

- **Scultura Leone arte cinese sec. V [sitting]:** in Venturi 1928, pl. 84; Sirén 1960, p. 79–80; Suriano, fig. 2/2a; Bank of Italy, p. 89 (Both Sirén and Suriano published photographs before and after the accident) (Figs. 19–20)
- **Scultura Budda seduto in pietra arte cinese sec. VII:** in Venturi 1928, pl. 91; Sirén 1960, p. 91; Suriano, fig. 12; Bank of Italy, p. 100; Dagli ori antichi, pl. 100

Document of temporary import 19 March 1928

- **Stele votiva del period Wei in pietra scura con la data 544:** in Venturi 1928, pl. 86; Sirén 1925, pl. 182; Sirén 1960, p. 85 (before the accident); Suriano, fig. 5 (after the accident); Bank of Italy, p. 91–92
- **Statuetta di Bodisatva in piedi del period Sui:** in Venturi 1928, pl. 88; Sirén 1923, pl. 230; Sirén 1960, p. 88 (before the accident); Suriano, fig. 8 (after the accident); Bank of Italy, p. 93; Dagli ori antichi, pl. 99
- **Statua di Budda in pietra T'ang [the most damaged in the accident]:** in Venturi 1928, pl. 89; Sirén 1960, p. 91 (before the accident); Suriano, fig. 14/14a (before and after the accident); Bank of Italy, p. 104
- **Statua di Bodisattva in piedi T'ang:** in Venturi 1928, pl. 90; Sirén 1960, p. 90 (before the accident); Suriano, fig. 11 (after the accident); Bank of Italy, p. 98
- **Testa Yuan pietra:** in Venturi 1928, pl. 95; Sirén 1925, pl. 611; Sirén 1930, pl. 118; Suriano, fig. 16/16a (before and after the accident); Bank of Italy, p. 105

- **Testa laccata Sung:** in Venturi 1928, pl. 96; Suriano, fig. 19; Bank of Italy, p. 108; *Dagli ori antichi*, pl. 101

- **Testa Ming pietra:** in Venturi 1928, pl. 97; Suriano, fig. 18; Bank of Italy, p. 109

Document of temporary import 2 December 1928

- **Statua di Buddha in pietra, arte cinese della dinastia T'ang:** *

- **Statua in legno Buddha, arte cinese della dinastia Sung:** in Suriano, fig. 15; Bank of Italy, p. 102

Document of temporary import 10 December 1928

- **Stele votiva in pietra, arte cinese della dinastia Wei [527]:** in Sirén 1925, 152–153; Sirén 1960, p. 86–87 (before the accident); Suriano, fig. 4 (after the accident); Bank of Italy, p. 91–92; *Dagli ori antichi*, pl. 98

- **Statua di Buddha in pietra, arte cinese della dinastia T'ang:** *

- **Leone in pietra, arte cinese della dinastia Han [walking]:** in Sirén 1925, frontispiece; Sirén 1930, pl. 7; Sirén 1960, p. 77–78 (before and after the accident); Suriano (1995), fig. 1 (after the accident); Bank of Italy, p. 88 (Fig. 21)

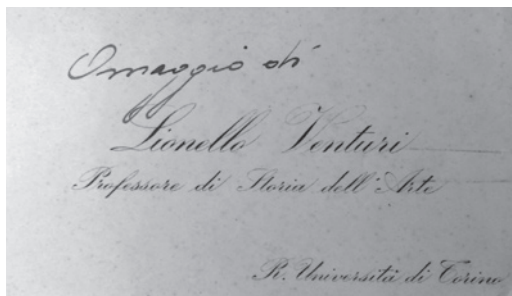
* These two artworks were not included in the catalogues of the Gualino Collection. Following a comparison with the collection's artworks presented by Sirén (1960) and Suriano, I identify them – although not with a clear correspondence – as:

- **Bodhisattva Northern Qi dynasty (550–577):** in Sirén 1960, p. 89 (before the accident); Suriano, fig. 7 (after the accident); Bank of Italy, p. 94

- **Eleven-headed Bodhisattva early T'ang period (691):** in Sirén 1925, pl. 379, 391 a-b, 392 a-b; Sirén 1960, p. 89 (before the accident); Suriano, fig. 10 (after the accident); Bank of Italy, p. 96

Appendix 4

FIGURES



Figs. 1–2. Cover of the first edition of Lionello Venturi's book *Il gusto dei primitivi* (1926) which was a gift to Osvald Sirén from the author. Venturi's business card which was kept inside his book to Sirén. Helsinki University Library.

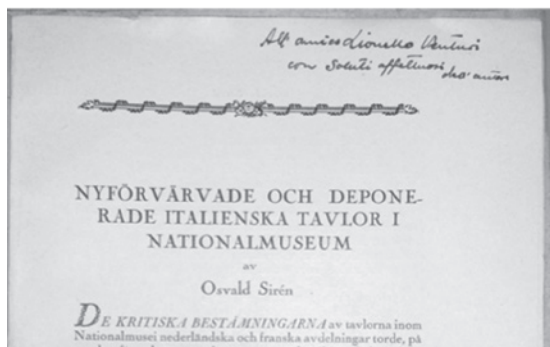


Fig. 3. Osvald Sirén's *Nyförfvärfvade konstverk i Stockholms högskolas samling* (1912), with a dedication to "All'amico Lionello Venturi con saluti affettuosi dall'autore". Courtesy of The Archivio Lionello Venturi, Dipartimento di Storia, Antropologia, Religioni, Arte, Spettacolo, Università di Roma La Sapienza

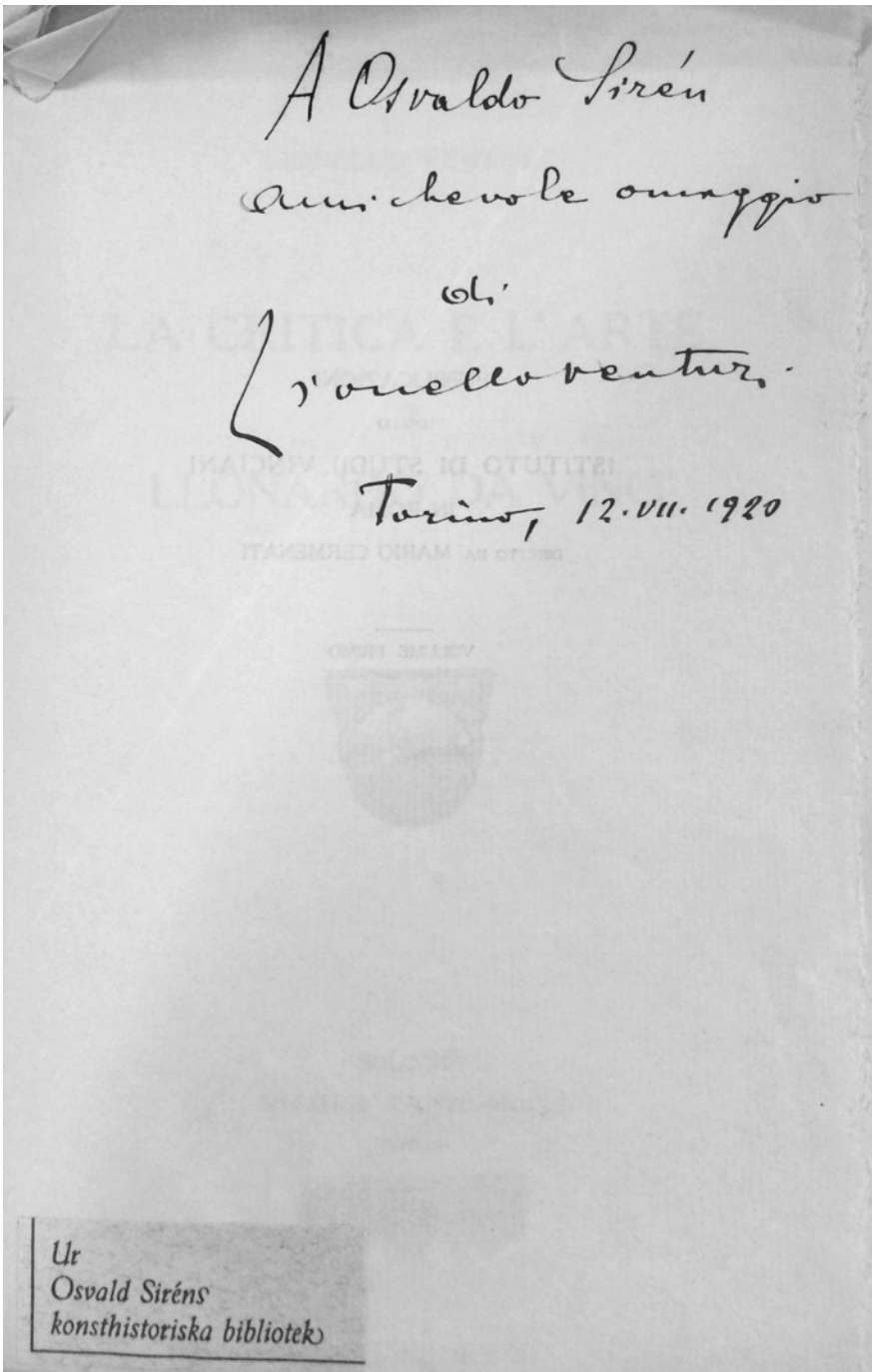


Fig. 4. Lionello Venturi's book *La critica e l'arte di Leonardo da Vinci* (1919), which includes a dedication to Osvald Sirén. Helsinki University Library.

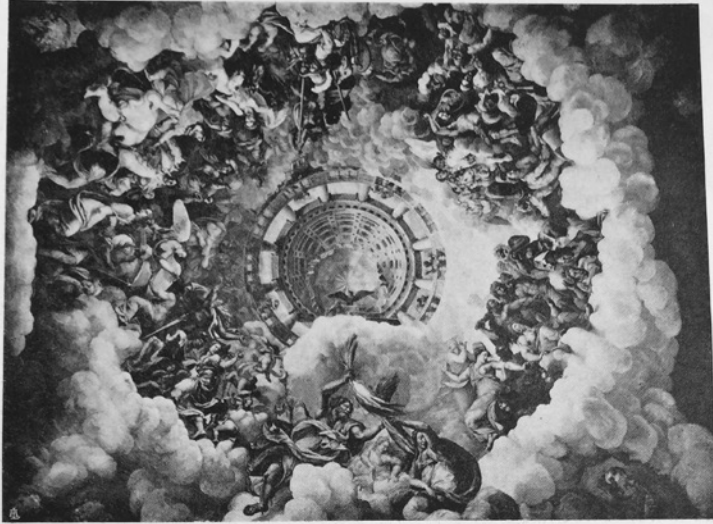


Tav. 21 - TIZIANO. LA MADONNA PESARO
Venezia, S. Maria de' Friari.

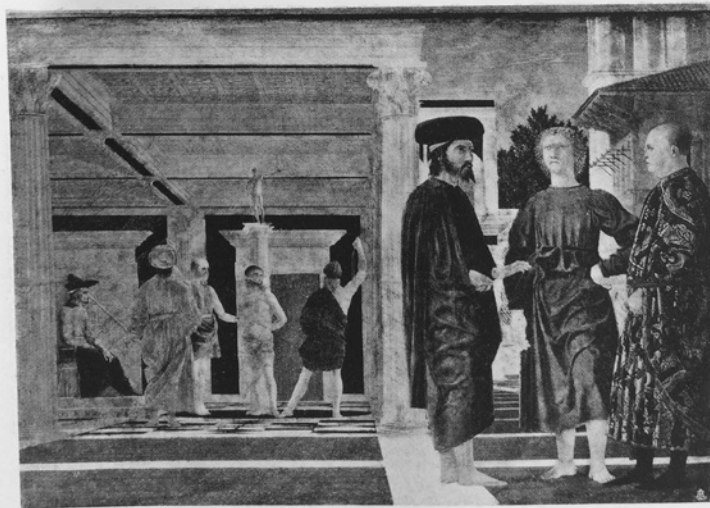


Tav. 22 - SIMONE MARTINI. S. LUDOVICO E ROBERTO D'ANGIÒ
Napoli, S. Lorenzo maggiore.

Figs. 5–8. Plates from Lionello Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi* (1926): Titian, *La Madonna Pesaro* (pl. 21); Simone Martini, *San Ludovico and Roberto d'Angiò* (pl. 22); Piero della Francesca, *Flagellazione* (pl. 44); Giulio Romano, *L'Olimpo* (pl. 43).



Tav. 43 - GIULIO ROMANO. L'OLIMPO
Mantova, Palazzo del Te.



Tav. 44 - PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA. FLAGELLAZIONE
Urbino, Galleria.



Figs. 9–12. Newspaper cuttings of reviews of the Catalogue of the Gualino Collection. Courtesy of The Archivio Lionello Venturi, Dipartimento di Storia, Antropologia, Religioni, Arte, Spettacolo, Università di Roma La Sapienza, Rome.

NEW FOREIGN BOOKS.

IL GUSTO DEI PRIMITIVI. By LIONELLO VENTURI. (Bologna: Zanichelli. 1926.)

Quite one of the most important books on art which has appeared in Italy for many years in this latest study of the Primitives by Lionello Venturi, who is Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Turin and son of the veteran art critic Adolfo Venturi. It contains a careful and often fascinating analysis of the work of great Italian masters from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century and of their different approaches towards art and strivings towards beauty, as compared with those of the late Renaissance artists, the German Northern, the English pre-Raphaelites, and the French Impressionists. The thesis is illustrated by numerous reproductions of pictures and sculpture, admirably chosen with the exception of those by Blake, Rossetti, Millais and Pevsner de Chavannes, which are by no means the best examples of their work. Indeed, his criticism of English Primitives is not always either appreciative or marked by knowledge. Who would recognize Blake as "a negative, an heathen"? Although much in sympathy with the Italian Primitives, Signor Venturi does not follow those who pit one age against another, as, in his opinion, this tends to depreciate the value of personality and to encourage an artist to accept the mask of antiquity as a loan. "allora l'artista nuovo, e nel migliore dei casi nasce il ragazzino che veste da soldato romano." [This book is a contribution to art criticism as a study of "revelation" in art, of "universality" and inspiration, felt more or less directly and in greater or lesser degree by different men. He shows that an artist is interesting in so far as he is a means of revealing to others, even in the smallest degree, the eternal values of truth and beauty. Partly because of tradition, partly for convenience of classification, art critics have laid too much stress on schools and terms. The Primitives have been excluded from the various categories, and Signor Venturi takes them mainly as his theme, hardly out of compassion for their neglect, but because they provide a perfect example of what is meant by inspiration—"la fantasia umana condotta da un afflato divino"; and later painters are brought in to prove his point that the motive power is the same and eternal, whether the artist be Giotto, Rembrandt, or Manet. He calls the common link between all true painters their intellectual sense and taste, and applies Croce's passage in *La Critica* on classical poetry to the painter who is driven by a compelling force to give expression to his vision.]

FRANZÖSISCHER GEIST IM NEUEN EUROPA. Von ERNST ROBERT CURTIUS. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlag-Anstalt.)—Dr. Curtius, in his volume of essays, "Die Literarischen Wege des neuen Frankreichs," and his volumes on "Baudelaire und Manet," has not only made him-

self a name in German literature, but, by the mere fact that he brings a fresh German philosophical outlook to the study of French writers, has made no small original contribution to the criticism of French literature in general. In this latest collection of essays he continues the work he began with his earliest publication, an exposition of the personality, the methods, and above all the philosophical significance of contemporary French writers and of the modern French literary movement. He begins with Marcel Proust, a long essay devoted mainly to showing the philosophical foundation of the novelist's method, the analogy between his technique and music, like the analogy he later establishes between Paul Valéry's technique and architecture. He also examines the influence of Bergson's "Matter and Memory" on Proust's "cherche du temps perdu," and develops the suggestion thrown out by Mr. Logan Pearsall Smith of the relation between Proust's fiction and the Platonic philosophy. The succeeding essay on Paul Valéry is less diffuse than that on Proust, and gives the impression that Dr. Curtius has found his subject rather more congenial. Certainly on a writer about whom there are the most violent differences of opinion, a writer whose obscurities are either denounced as meaningless or extolled as profundities, Dr. Curtius writes with admirable clarity. He illustrates his arguments fully with extracts from M. Valéry's prose writings and with an analysis of "L'Aurore," which concludes with a suggestively drawn comparison between Valéry and Hölderlin, between the German poet in whom language was a "Werden," and the Latin poet who finds words ready to his hand and from them must draw the hidden relationship between them. The remainder of the essays are of less importance and originality.]

BAVERNS POSTWERTEZEICHEN, 1849-1920. Im Auftrag der Gesellschaft zur Erforschung der Postgeschichte in Bayern. Bearbeitet von JOHANN BRUNNER. (München: Bayerland-Verlag; 5m.)—[Herr Brunner, in equipping his elaborate monograph on the postage stamps of Bavaria with a most careful catalogue and a series of coloured reproductions of the various issues, has provided the collector not merely with an admirable guide to the postal history of the country, but almost with a collection of its stamps as well. More than that, he includes accounts and reproductions of the various essays prepared as possible alternatives to the designs actually adopted for the series issued in 1911 in honour of the nineteenth birthday of the Prince Regent Leopold, when Bavaria finally discarded the not very inspired types, with arms in white relief, which had superseded the strictly utilitarian designs of the first issue some forty years before. Among these essays are those of Herren A. Fuks and F. von Stack, showing the Regent in his handsome sixteenth century costume as Grand Master of the Order of St. Hubert, and Herr Joseph Fatterer's fine head to the right. Bavaria first issued postage stamps on November 1, 1849, and after a long period of severe formalism, philatelic art blossomed vigorously at the end of the Regency and during the reign of the son of King Ludwig III.]

New Books and Reprints.

ANTHROPOLOGY. THE STONE AGE IN RHODESIA. By NIGELLE JONES. With foreword by Sir AVERTY KING. London: Milford. 12s. 6d. n. See Review, p. 735.

ARCHAEOLOGY. SARDIS (Publications of the American Society for the Excavation of Sardis). Volume X.—Terra-Cotta. Part I.—Architectural Terra-Cotta. By THORNDIKE LITTLE SHERMAN. 111 pp. Press. 63s. n. See Review, p. 743.

GREEK FICTILE REVELMENTS IN THE ARCHAIC PERIOD. By E. DOUGLAS VAN BUREN. 101 pp., 25. + 208 pp., xxxix. plates. Murray. 24s. n. See Review, p. 743.

CLEOPATRA'S NEEDLES: And Other Egyptian Obelisks. A Series of Descriptions of all the Important Inscribed Obelisks, with Hieroglyphic Texts, Translations, &c. By SIR E. A. WALLIS BUDGE. 81 x 9, xxii. 308 pp. 12.5s. 10s. 6d. n. See Review, p. 745.

ARCHITECTURE. THE IMPERIAL PALACES OF PEKING. In three volumes. With a short historical account by OSWALD SINCLAIR. Volume I. 131. 101. 67 pp. and 32 plates. Paris: G. Van Oest. 23 8s. See Review, p. 737.

THE BRIDGE. A chapter in the history of building. Illustrated by FRANK BRADGOWN, R.A., and written by CHRISTIAN BARHAM. 101 x 8, xvii. + 249 pp. John Lane. 35s. 6d. n. See Review, p. 738.

ART. THE RICHMOND PAPERS from the Correspondence and Manuscripts of GEORGE RICHMOND, R.A., and his son, SIR WILLIAM RICHMOND, R.A. By A. M. W. STIRLING. 91 x 61, xiv. + 444 pp. Heinemann. 32s. 6d. n. See Review, p. 729.

CATALOGUE OF AN EXHIBITION OF DRAWINGS, ENCHIRINGS, AND WOODCUTS BY SAMUEL PALMER AND OTHER DISCIPLES OF WILLIAM BLAKE. October 29-December 31, 1926. With an introduction and notes by A. H. PALMER. 91 x 71, vii. + 87 pp. and xxxix. plates. Board of Education. 3s. 6d. n. See Review, p. 739.

MAIOLI, CANEVARI AND OTHERS. By G. D. HOBSON, M.V.O. 114 x 9, xvi. + 178 pp. 64 pp. Ernest Benn. 7s. 6d. n. See Review, p. 735.

BIOGRAPHY. A NINETEENTH CENTURY TEACHER: JOHN HENRY BRIDGES. By his niece SUSAN LIVINGSTONE. With a Preface by PROFESSOR L. T. HOUBOURN, and an Introduction by PROFESSOR PATRICK GEORGE. 71 x 51, xv. + 261 pp. Kegan Paul. 10s. 6d. n. See Review, p. 737.

FROM COWBOY TO PILF. By the Rev. Sir CHARLES CANNING-GAVER. 81 x 6, ix. + 212 pp. Herbert Jenkins. 16s. n. See Review, p. 737.

BLACK NEW BOOKS

SHOE AND STOCKING STORIES.

By ELINOR MORDAUNT. In colour and black and white. See Review.

BLACK'S BOYS' AND GIRLS' LIBRARY. Cosplay.

Printed on good paper, with jackets in colour. 2s.

ANNESLEY'S DOUBLE.

By P. F. WESTERMAN.

BETWEEN THE WICKETS.

By JACK HOBBS (Barry and I).

THE HOUSE OF HIDDEN.

By G. F. RICHARDSON.

THE NEW BOY AT BAXTE.

By R. A. H. GOODFELLOW.

TOM MCGRAITH OF RANBY.

By HOWLAND WALKER.

THE PLUCK OF THE COW.

By Mrs. A. C. O. HANN.

THE HORSE. [Life Stories]

By GEORGE JENKINSON, M.A.

ČZECHOSLOVAKIA. Lands and Cities.

By HELENA C. SCROTT. With illustrations (4 in colour), and Picture jacket in colour. 7s.

OLD ENGLISH SINGING GAMES.

Selected and Edited by L. M.B.E., B.Sc. With Melodist ANNE O. WARBURTON. Picture jacket in colour.

NURSERY RHYMES.

Selected and Edited by L. M.B.E., B.Sc. Harmonized with Melodist and Tonic Set-In, as outline pictures for colour with jacket in colour.

TEDDY TAIL'S ADVENTURE. THE A.B.S.A.

By CHARLES MACKAY.

LE SUE. Che la pittura abbia anche una funzione decorativa, è stato, in genere, dimenticato. Veduto infatti nei quali il buon senso...

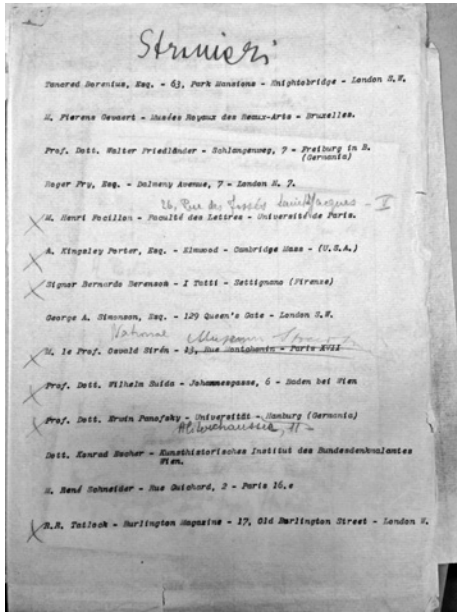


Fig 15. List of foreign scholars to whom Lionello Venturi sent a copy of *Il gusto dei primitivi*. Courtesy of The Archivio Lionello Venturi, Dipartimento di Storia, Antropologia, Religioni, Arte, Spettacolo, Università di Roma La Sapienza, Rome.

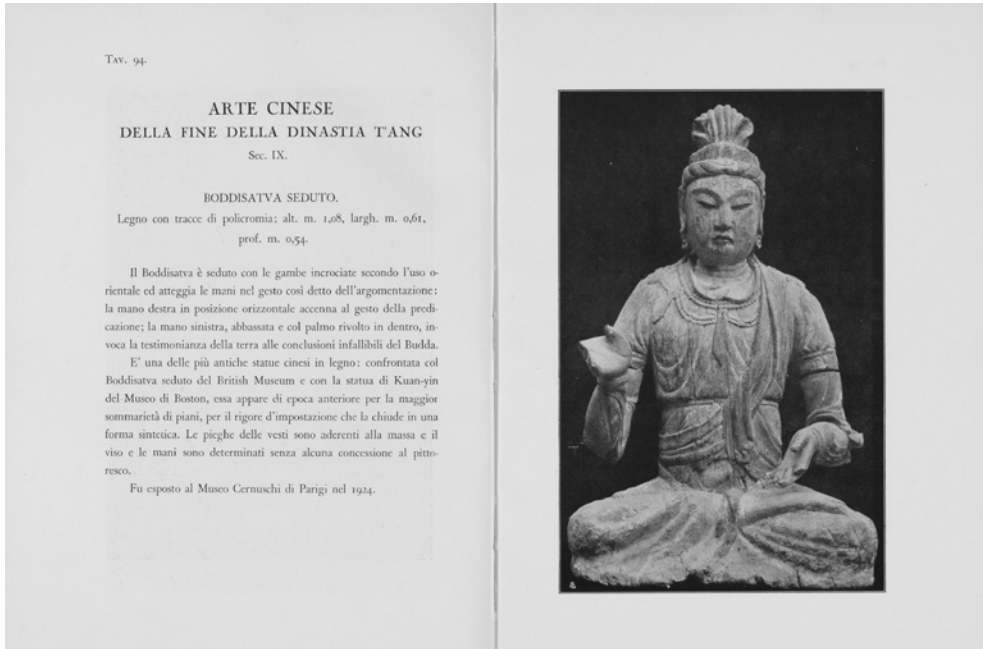


Fig. 16. Plate 94 from Venturi, *Alcune opera della collezione Gualino* (1928): *Sitting Bodhisattva*.



Fig. 16 b. Chinese art, *Sitting Bodhisattva (Bodhisattva Seated in the Lotus Position)*, 10th century, painted wood. Galleria Sabauda. Photo: Courtesy of Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo – Torino, Musei Reali – Galleria Sabauda.

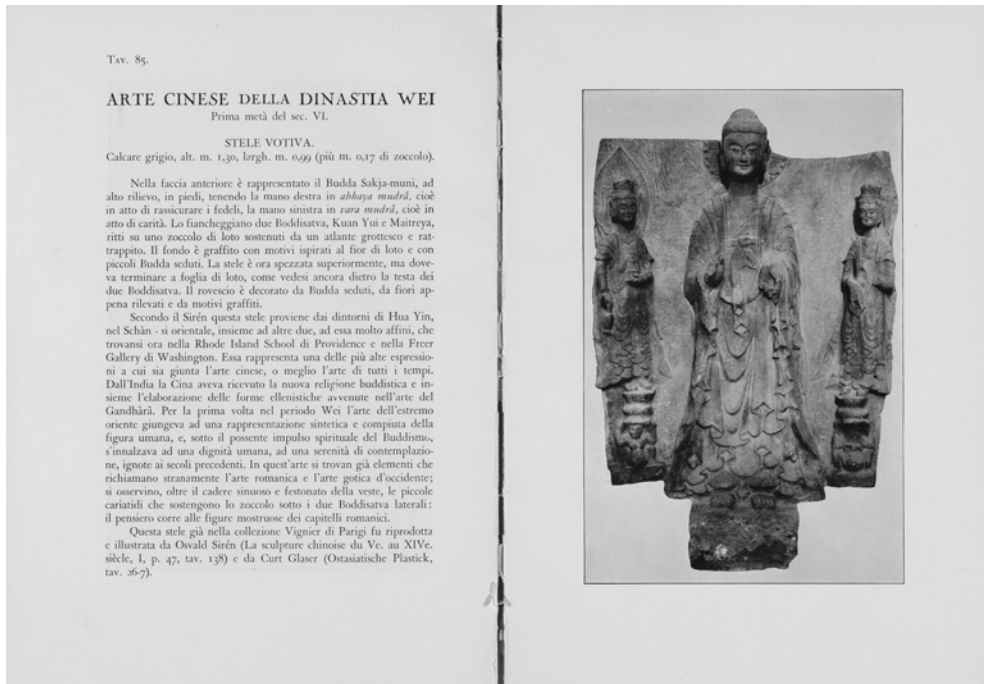


Fig. 17. Plate 85 from Venturi, *Alcune opera della collezione Gualino* (1928): *Wei Stele*.



Fig. 18. Chinese art, *Wei Stele (Stele with Buddhist Triad)*, 6th century, grey limestone. Galleria Sabauda. Photo: Courtesy of Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo – Torino, Musei Reali – Galleria Sabauda.

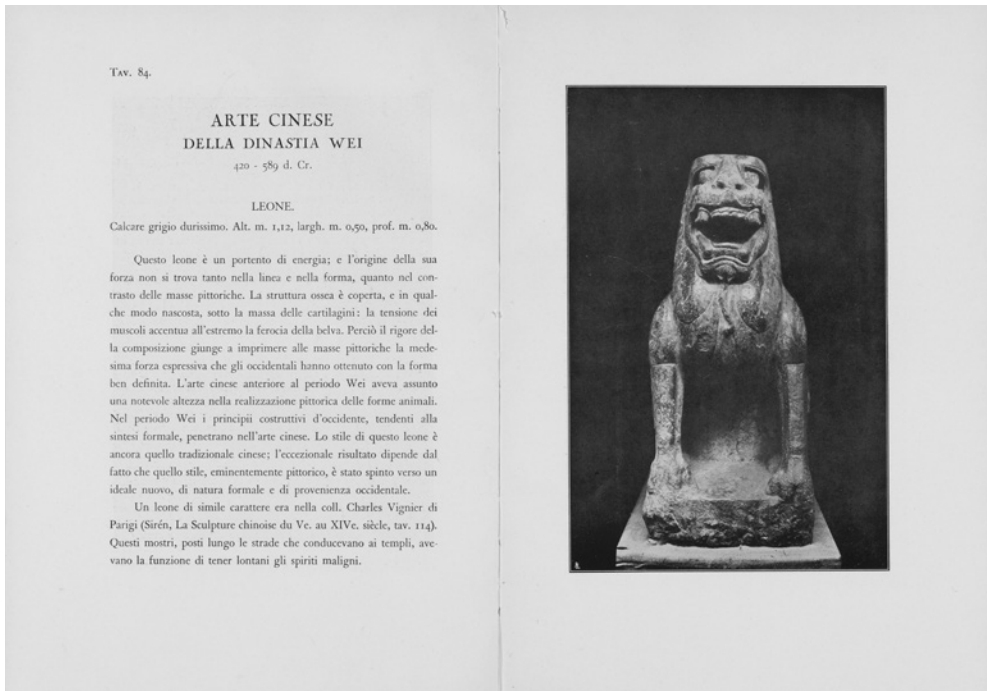


Fig. 19. Plate 84 from Venturi, *Alcune opera della collezione Gualino* (1928): *Sitting Lion*.



Fig. 20. Chinese art, *Sitting Lion*, 4th–6th centuries, grey limestone. Collezione d'arte della Banca d'Italia. Photo: Courtesy of the Bank of Italy.



Fig. 21. Chinese art, *Walking Lion*, 3th century, black stone. Collezione d'arte della Banca d'Italia. Photo: Courtesy of the Bank of Italy.



Fig. 22. Maestro della Madonna di Rovazzano, *Madonna and Child*, ca. 1250, tempera on wood. Collezione d'arte della Banca d'Italia. Photo: Courtesy of the Bank of Italy.



Fig. 23. Plate 7 from Osvald Sirén's *Toskanska målare på tolvhundratalet: Lucca, Pisa, Florens* (1922): Berlinghiero Berlinghieri (now attributed to Maestro della Madonna di Rovezzano), *Madonna*.

MOD. 32.
Antichità e Belle Arti

MINISTERO DELLA PUBBLICA ISTRUZIONE
AMMINISTRAZIONE DEI MONUMENTI, MUSEI, GALLERIE E SCAVI DI ANTICHITÀ

Visto l'art. 5 della legge 20 giugno 1909, n. 364, per le Antichità e le Belle Arti;
Sulla richiesta del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione io sottoscritto messo comunale di Torino
ho notificato al Signor Avv. Riccardo Gualino
Via Galliani 47
in Torino
che il dipinto in tela attribuito al Veronese
raffigurante la Madonna con il
 Bambino
ha importante interesse ed è quindi sottoposto alle disposizioni contenute negli articoli 5, 6, 7, 12, 14, 29, 31, 34 e 37 della citata legge e agli articoli 1, 2 e 3 della legge 23 giugno 1912, n. 688;
E affinché abbia di ciò conoscenza a tutti gli effetti di legge ho rilasciato copia della presente all'indirizzo di cui sopra, consegnandola nelle mani di Bruno
Marquetti
(Data) 13 Dicembre 1930 anno IX

IL MESSO COMUNALE
Luigi Agnelli

Bollo
del Comune


Bollo
della Soprintendenza
ai Monumenti

Fig. 24. Notification of public interest, 13 December 1930. Courtesy of the Fondo Riccardo Gualino, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.

MODELLO I.

28 mag 1925 N. 928-926
DICHIARAZIONE

della merce che il Sig. Antonio
 domiciliato Roma
 da Monaco Germania Roma chiede di importare temporaneamente
 per conto M. Gualini Gualini
 L'IMPORTATORE
Antonio
 Roma, addì 25 1925

Num. d'ordine dei colli e contrassegno	Marca	NATURA E DESCRIZIONE DELLA MERCE
928 1925		<p>Opera contenente pitture ad olio <u>Madonna</u> <u>di età bizantina, affa bene conservata. Telle</u> <u>di univisioni e Telle forma indicata a margine.</u></p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">  <div style="margin-left: 20px;"> <p>Vi è rappresentata una <u>Madonna</u> <u>di profilo, Telle ginocchia in n, intem</u> <u>te con ambo le mani un bambino,</u> <u>pure di profilo, colla mano destra</u> <u>aperta, alzata e in una croce nella</u> <u>sinistra. Il bambino ha capigliatura</u> <u>rosso bruno con flettatura nera, e veste un abito</u> <u>grigio - da Madonna. In veste di loro veste - fono</u> <u>con quadratini gialli - ro ed è avvolto in</u> <u>manto rosso (suato pure con quadratini</u> <u>gialli) con bado bianco in quella</u> <u>parte che incornicia la testa. Aureola</u> <u>da bambino bruno in una rosa;</u> <u>quella delle Madonne a fondo</u></p> </div> </div>

Figs. 25–26. Declaration and registration of temporary import, 25 October 1925, referring to Maestro della Madonna di Rovazzano's *Madonna and Child*. Courtesy of the Fondo Riccardo Gualino, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.

N. *28 Ef. 1928-926* MODELLO 13°



Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione

R. UFFICIO DI ESPORTAZIONE
d'oggetti di antichità e d'arte

Registrato nelle importazioni temporanee al N. *28*

ROMA il *10 ottobre* 19 *28*

Si attesta avere il Sig. *Cotto e Bonomi*
domiciliato *via*

importato temporaneamente da *Udine*

a *Roma* per conto *galleria Saugizi*
coll. N.

contenent *una pittura su tavola*

merce specificata nella dichiarazione di pari numero.

Presentando il presente certificato il Signor *galleria Saugizi*

potrà esportare per la stessa via la merce sopraindicata, in

esenzione di tassa.



L. *Diutone*

MINISTERO DELLA PUBBLICA ISTRUZIONE

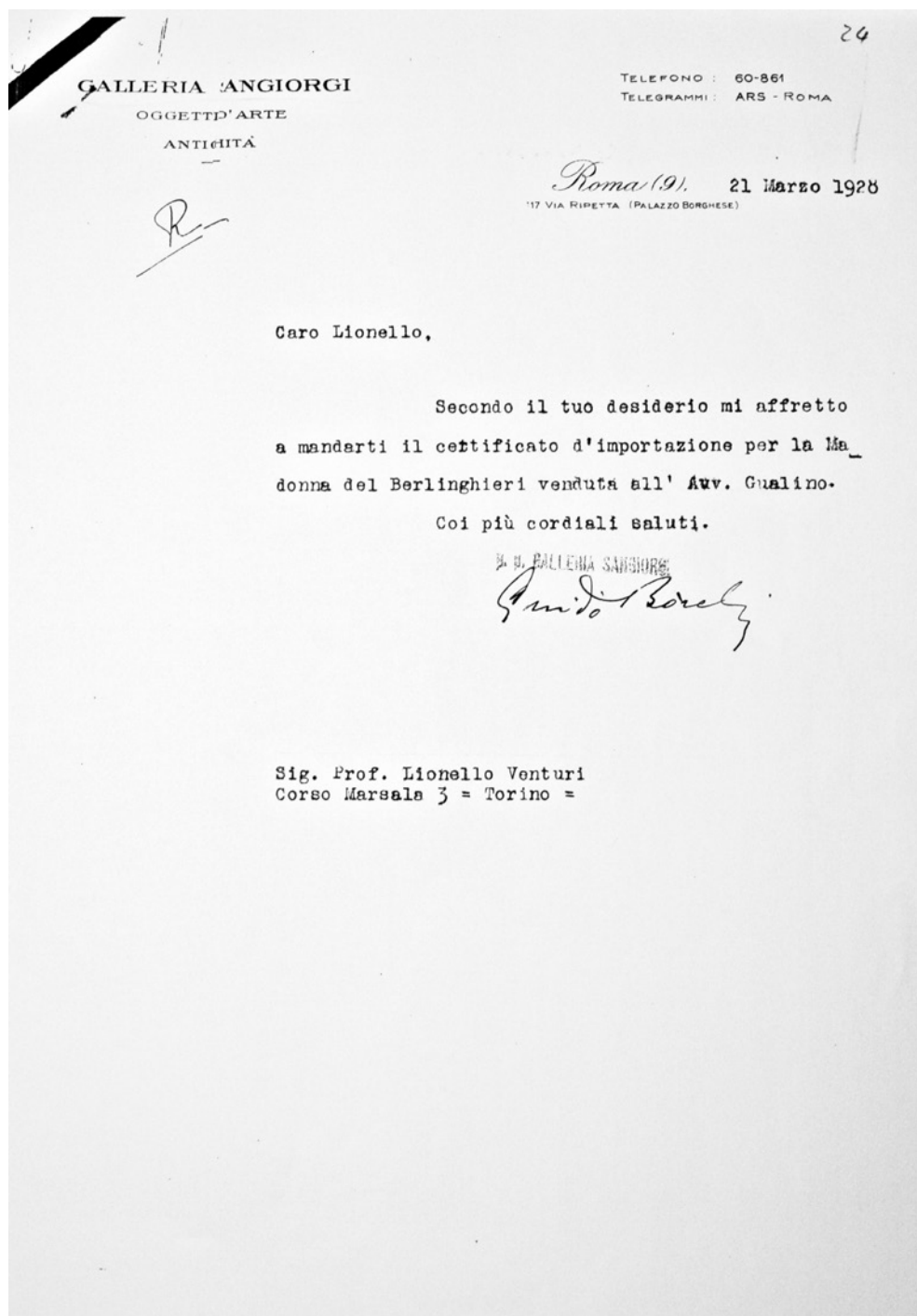
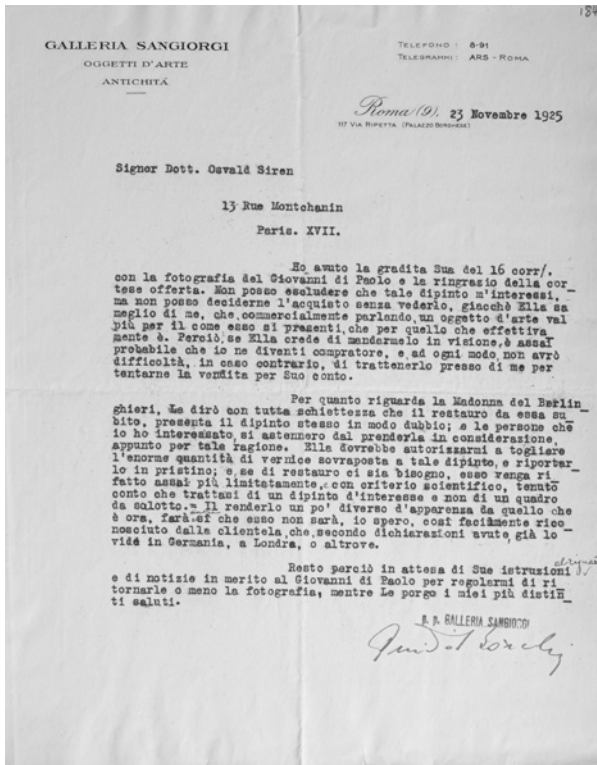


Fig. 27. Letter from Galleria Sangiorgi to Lionello Venturi, 21 March 1928. Courtesy of the Fondo Riccardo Gualino, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.



Figs. 28–29. Letters from Galleria Sangiorgi to Osvald Sirén, 23 November 1925 and 2 December 1925. Courtesy of the Sirén Archive, Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm.

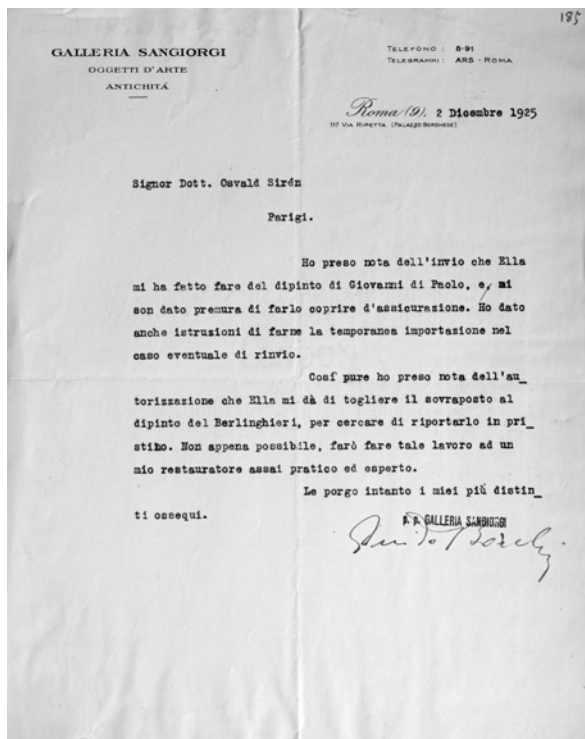




Fig. 30. Duccio di Buoninsegna, *Madonna and Child*, ca. 1280, tempera on wood. Photo: Courtesy of Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo – Torino, Musei Reali – Galleria Sabauda.



110. CIMABUES STIL, MADONNA.
Signor Verzocchi, Milano. Privatfoto.

Fig. 31. Plate 110 from Osvald Sirén *Toskanska målare på tolvhundratalet: Lucca, Pisa, Florens* (1922).

nr. 52 *Duplicato del N° 47*
12 gennaio 1923 MODELLO 1

DICHIARAZIONE

della merce che il Signor *Caro V. Pirella Gualino* domiciliato *Verona*
 chiede di importare *temporaneamente dalla Francia* per conto *Verona*
 diretta al Signor *V. Pirella Gualino*
Verona addì *27/12* 1925

LO SPEDITORE


NUM. D'ORDINE DEI COLLI	MARCA E CONTRASSEGNO	PESO DENUNCIATO	NATURA E DESCRIZIONE DELLE MERCI	VALORE DICHIARATO	STIMA UFFICIALE	STIMA DEFINITIVA	OSSERVAZIONI
4			<i>1- Stela Chinesa</i> <i>(Blocco in marmo)</i> <i>2- Stela lignea (Budda)</i> <i>3- Testa lignea</i> <i>4- Testa in pietra</i>				
			<i>V. Pirella Gualino</i> <i>Verona</i>				
							

Fig. 33. Document of temporary import no. 52, 27 December 1925 (duplicate of document no. 47, 12 January 1923), four Chinese sculptures. Courtesy of the Fondo Riccardo Gualino, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.

2

Venezia li 11 Marzo 1927
(Anno V°)

DIREZIONE RR. GALLERIE
DI VENEZIA
R. UFFICIO ESPORTAZIONE
=====

OGGETTO
Dipinte attribuite a DUCCIO=

Dai documenti di queste Ufficio di espertazione risulta che la grande tavola di metri 1,85 X 1,11 trecentesca senese "Madonna con Bambino" attribuita a Duccio è stata importata il 22 aprile 1924 proveniente da Vienna.

Con essequie

/ IL DIRETTORE
Firm. C. SORANZO

All'Illmo Sig. Direttore
della R. Pinacoteca di
TORINO
XXXXXXXXXX

Il Direttore
C. Soranzo

Fig. 34. Letter from the Royal Galleries in Venice (exportation office) to the Director of the Royal Painting Gallery in Turin, 22 March 1927. Courtesy of the Fondo Riccardo Gualino, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.

Fig. 35. Document of temporary import, no. 136, 25 May 1929, (previous custom declaration 2 February 1925). Courtesy of the Fondo Riccardo Gualino, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.

DICHIARAZIONE

Numero di mat.	NATURA E DESCRIZIONE degli oggetti provvisti	VALORE DICHIARATO	Dichiaro depositare di <i>1000</i> <i>prospetto</i> di <i>1000</i> <i>prospetto</i> di <i>1000</i> <i>prospetto</i> di <i>1000</i> <i>prospetto</i>	OSSERVAZIONI DELL'ISPEITORE
1	<i>Dipinto in tavola attribuito a Duccio di Rembrandt rapp. Madonna col Bambino, di m. 1,85 X 1,11</i>			
	<i>Il Direttore</i> <i>Soranzo</i>			

Il Direttore
Soranzo



Fig. 36. Lorenzo di Credi, *Portrait of a Young Man*, ca. 1490, tempera on wood. Galleria Sabauda. Photo: Courtesy of Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo – Torino, Musei Reali – Galleria Sabauda.



Fig. 37. Photograph of Lorenzo di Credi's painting *Portrait of a Young Man*, with Bernard Berenson's comments on the back. The Berenson Library, Villa I Tatti – The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, Florence. Photo: Courtesy of the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

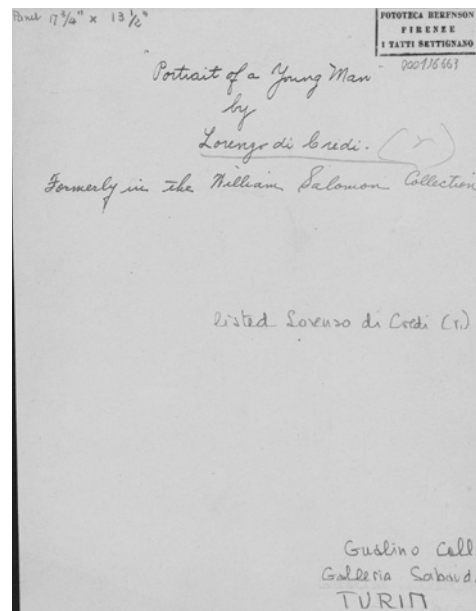
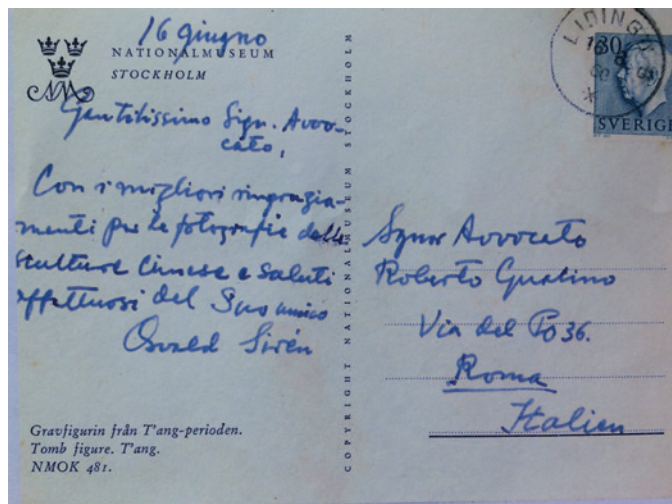




Fig. 38. Unknown artist active in Padua, *Crucifixion, Nativity, and Annunciation*, ca. 1320–1330, tempera and tooled gold on panel. Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection. Photo: Courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, John G. Johnson Collection.



Figs. 39–40. Postcard from Osvald Sirén to Riccardo Gualino, 16 June 1960. Courtesy of the Fondo Riccardo Gualino, Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome.



The bronze statue reproduced
in this photograph, which I have
examined in original, is
according to my opinion a
characteristic work of the Sui
period. Its form of representation,
its ornamental attire, rich in
very interesting details, and its
facial type correspond closely to
statues dated between 580 and 590,
as may be seen by a comparison
with plates 305, 322, 325 a. r. in my
book on Chinese Sculpture.
Early bronze figures in this large
size are however very rare, and the
present one is one of the very best
known to me.

29. April 1927
signed: Osvald Sirén.

hauteur 46 cm.

OGAR WORCH
FORM. LUDWIG GLENK
BERLIN W. 10
BERGARTENSTR. 2

2



Figs. 41–42. Osvald Sirén's autograph notes on the reverse of the photograph of a Chinese sculpture, appraisal, 29 April 1927. Courtesy of the Fondo Riccardo Gualino, Archivio centrale dello Stato, Rome.

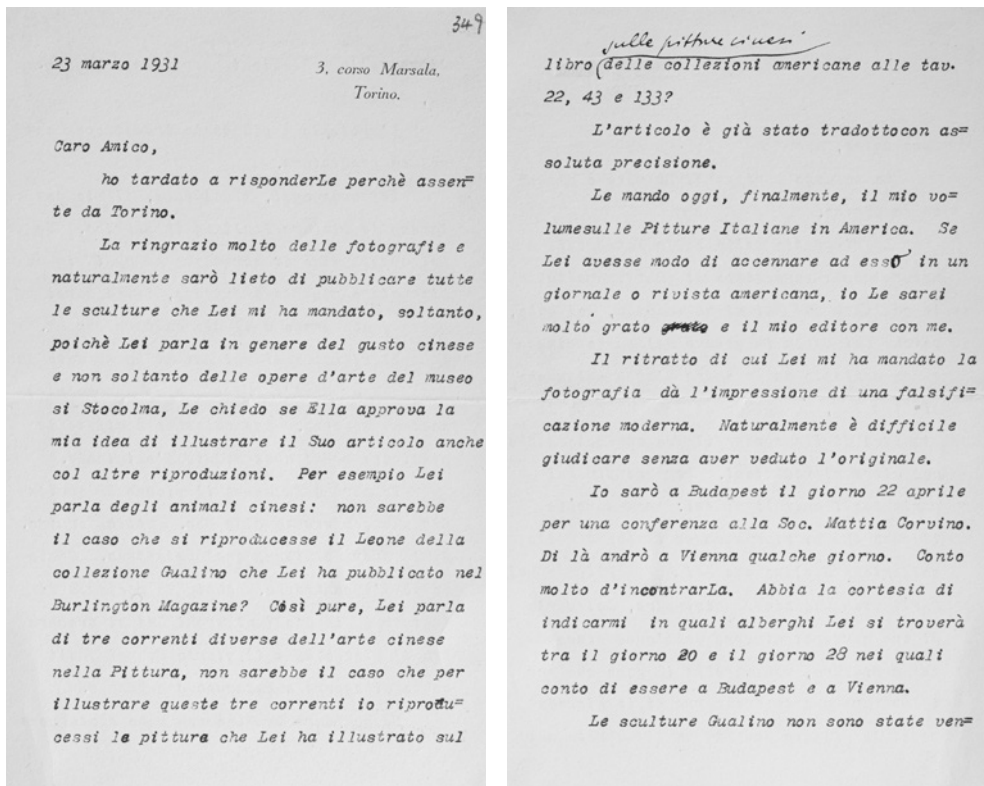


Fig. 43. Letter from Lionello Venturi to Osvald Sirén, 23 March 1931. Photo: Courtesy of the Sirén Archive, Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm.

Fogazzino G. delimito 5 fogia
Febr. 21. 1960

K

Caro Antonio

When I was in Rome and saw again some of the sculptures of the former Gualino collection, it seemed to me worth while to try to reconstruct as far as possible this remarkable collection, and I promised to be something of the kind in an article for Tucci's review *East and West*. But while doing some work on this article I have felt some hesitation or wonder as to the opinion or possible interest that Signor Gualino might have in this matter. In other words, I do not know to what extent he still may be the owner of these sculptures, and whether my article would please or displeasure him. This question I forward to you rather than to himself, because you can doubtless give me the proper advice (possibly after discussing the matter with Gualino).

I wonder whether the article in its present shape would meet with his approval or not? Or would a more detailed catalogue raisonné be more desirable? It could eventually also include one or two of the stone sculptures that are in his house. (The wooden sculptures can hardly be considered works of art. If Signor Gualino is no longer the proprietor of any of the statues formerly in his collection (now in Turin and Rome) there is hardly any need to ask his opinion regarding the matter, but I am sending you nevertheless the main part of the article, so as to have your opinion about it. Please write into the manuscript whatever corrections and deletions that you may find necessary and return it to me as soon as possible.

Con saluti e ringraziamenti del Suo
Lionello Venturi

Fig. 44. Letter from Osvald Sirén to Lionello Venturi, 21 February 1960. Courtesy of The Archivio Lionello Venturi, Dipartimento di Storia, Antropologia, Religioni, Arte, Spettacolo, Università di Roma La Sapienza, Rome.

Torino, 17 luglio 1918

Caro Professore,

Si riferisce da una breve avvezzo nuovo qui in prestito del dell'ò come, alla quale debbo in conseguenza rispondere con ritardo, del che Ella non tenermi per tenuto.

Ma occorrendo d'altro in presentazione che Ella mi fa, essendo in realtà troppo noto il di Lei nome e quello di Suo padre.

Le collezioni che da qualche anno sono state facendo sono certo importanti alla fama ed alle di Lei aspettative; tuttavia, quali esse sono, non pare che un loro piacere farli vedere e udire il di Lei padre.

Per quanto mi/ette la visita, devo dirle che tutti, o quasi tutti miei ospiti stanno in attesa di un'occasione, non da altro che di averli in Agosto o Settembre, e volendo dedicarle a me, sarei ben lieto di condurlo meco a Cervaseto il sabato sera per ritornare a Torino il lunedì così Ella vedrebbe gli ospiti che desidero visitare, ed anche la casa, per la quale cerco di eguire nella costruzione e nell'arredamento una stretta linea d'arte.

Non posso prelevarle fin d'ora il giorno, perché sono talmente preso dagli impegni che non so quando avrà una domenica libera; se lei la vorrà fissarmi in quali settimane di Agosto e Settembre si troverà a Torino, ed avrà l'utile intendermi per telefono o altrimenti.

Nella speranza di presto avere il piacere di conoscenza personalmente e di averla mio ospite a Cervaseto,

Con migliori ossequi la saluto

Alto Prof. Lionello Venturi
TORINO
CORRISPONDENTE 53

Fig. 45. Letter from Riccardo Gualino to Lionello Venturi, 17 July 1918. Courtesy of The Archivio Lionello Venturi, Dipartimento di Storia, Antropologia, Religioni, Arte, Spettacolo, Università di Roma La Sapienza, Rome.

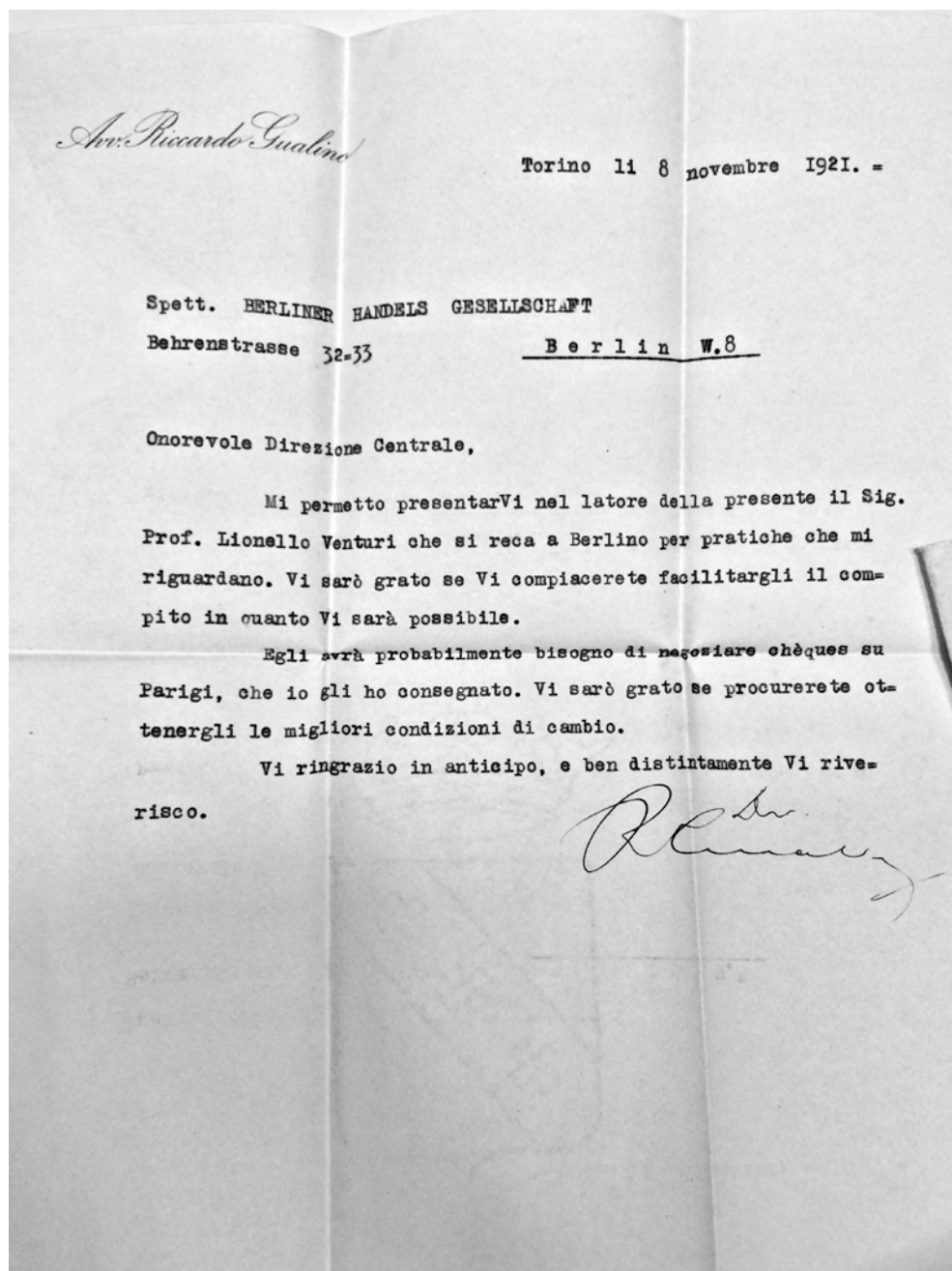


Fig. 46. Letter from Riccardo Gualino to the Director of the Niederoesterreichische escompte ges. Berliner Handels Gesellschaft, 8 November 1921. Courtesy of The Archivio Lionello Venturi, Dipartimento di Storia, Antropologia, Religioni, Arte, Spettacolo, Università di Roma La Sapienza, Rome.

X

AA
Gualino

PRO-MEMORIA

SCONTI-ANTICIPAZIONI	
Corrispondenti	
DEPOSITI DI TERZI	
Pratica	AA
Fascicolo	Gualino
Docum.	1496

Dopo non brevi trattative, l'Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale ha dato la propria accettazione alla proposta a suo tempo avanzata per l'acquisto, da parte della Banca, della metà dei mobili ed oggetti d'arte a tutt'oggi residuati dalla liquidazione Gualino, e per i quali è stato concordato un valore complessivo di L.2/milioni, per modo che l'acquisto in parola si è concretato con il versamento di un milione di lire all'I.R.I. rimanendo la Banca esclusiva proprietaria dei mobili ed oggetti d'arte di che trattasi.

Un cospicuo blocco di tali oggetti, specialmente quadri e tappeti, trovasi già da tempo, com'è noto, presso questa Amministrazione Centrale. Il rimanente però, che rappresenta il blocco quantitativamente e qualitativamente più importante, trovasi tuttora custodito presso la n/ Sede di Torino ed è formato, oltre che da un gruppo di oggetti e mobili di arredamento casalingo di non ingente valore (letti, tavoli, sedie e poltrone, soprammobili vari), da opere di rilevante interesse artistico dell'Oriente asiatico (statue in pietra, terracotta, legno; vasi, miniature, quadretti), da oggetti d'arte Medioevale, del Rinascimento e Barocca (quadri, sculture, cassapanche intarsiate, ecc.) nonché da non molti elementi artistici dell'800 e contemporanei (sculture e quadri).

Sino ad oggi la predetta n/ Sede si è occupata, nell'interesse comune della Banca e dell'I.R.I. fra cui andavano divisi per metà i ricavati, delle vendite degli oggetti di che trattasi, ripartendo pure in eguale misura fra la Banca e l'I.R.I. le spese inerenti alla comune gestione, di cui più sensibili quelle relative al mantenimento di un custode e al fitto dei locali occupati, di n/ proprietà, fissato in cifra tale da compensarci di quanto si ricava-

Figs. 47-50. Documents and letters regarding Riccardo Gualino and his collection. Archivio storico della Banca d'Italia. Courtesy of the Bank of Italy. Document, Rapporti con l'estero, pratt. no. 95, fasc. 3; Document, Segretariato, pratt., no. 1455, fasc. 3; Letter, s.d., Rapporti con l'estero, pratt. no. 95, fasc. 3; Letter from Joe Nathan to Vincenzo Azzolini from London, 28 December 1933, Rapporti con l'estero, pratt. no. 95, fasc. 3.

Nella raccolta Gualino il gruppo appartenente alle opere d'arte dell'Oriente Asiatico e in particolare modo a quelle cinesi, occupa un posto a parte.

Il loro valore artistico in alcuni casi di prim'ordine ha fatto convergere sugli stessi molti sguardi ed ha acuito molti desideri.

Ma il prezzo venale ad essi attribuito è così rilevante che tranne due o tre oggetti di poca entità, tutti gli altri sono sempre in attesa dell'acquirente.

D'altra parte sarebbe desiderabile che gli oggetti non andassero dispersi e tutto il gruppo, che fu già vanto della raccolta qui a Torino, non solo non uscisse dall'Italia, ma rimanesse nella città che lo ha visto sorgere.

Qualche tentativo in questo senso si avrebbe intenzione di fare presso il Comune di Torino dallo stesso Direttore del Museo Civico, che non avendo disponibilità finanziarie per accaparrarlo, amarebbe trovare il modo di farlo rimanere a Torino.

L'idea è buona e va coltivata.

Per facilitare in qualche modo l'esecuzione sarà bene aver sott'occhio un elenco esatto degli oggetti e il valore della perizia ad essi attribuito.

L'elenco di tali oggetti già in deposito presso la R.Pinacoteca, come risulta dall'inventario, è depurato del prezzo di quelli finora venduti o inviati a Roma presso la Sede Centrale della Banca. - Esso risulta di L. 1.158.100,-- secondo la perizia non sottoposta ad alcuna riduzione. - Gli oggetti venduti e presentemente in possesso della Banca d'Italia (Sede di Torino) sono i seguenti :

RICCARDO GUALINO

Parigi
242 Rue de Rivoli
Indirizzo priv. Hôtel Mlysée Park, Rue Montai-
gne.

Malgrado i rovesci di fortuna subiti nel passato, il G. sembra disporre ancora di mezzi importanti, e conduce una vita dispendiosa. Si dice che egli sia ancora amministratore di alcune società del gruppo Ehrlich, assieme al suo amico Oustric. Egli sarebbe di nuovo in relazione con un certo Farovitch, con il quale ebbe a intraprendere una delle sue prime operazioni immobiliari, allo scopo di costituire un'organizzazione di vendita di prodotti alimentari simile a quella dei grandi magazzini tipo Printemps o Samaritaine. Il G. è, ad ogni modo, l'animatore occulto del COMPTOIR PRIVE!, costituitosi per 99 anni il 1° Gennaio 1932, capitale fr. 1.000.000, originariamente fr. 100.000 in 100 azioni, interamente liberate per contanti; portato alla cifra attuale su rogito del notaio Laine, Parigi, il 10 Gennaio 1933, con la creazione di 900 azioni sottoscritte da una Società che si è liberata del montante integrale di dette azioni, 900.000 fr., compensando un credito per cifra uguale verso il C.P. Scopo della società: studi, ricerche, acquisto e sfruttamento di brevetti e marche di fabbrica di qualsiasi genere, come pure la loro cessione totale o parziale, acquisto locazione o vendita di immobili urbani e rurali, e in generale tutte le operazioni relative.

Sede sociale: 242 Rue de Rivoli, in locali di un fitto annuale di

LONDON REPRESENTATIVE:
DR. JOE NATHAN.

TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS: ITALCAMBI.
TELEPHONE: LONDON WALL 7886.

Confidenziale
BANCA D'ITALIA
&
ITALIAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EXCHANGE.
(ISTITUTO NAZIONALE PER I CAMBI CON L'ESTERO)
39, OLD BROAD STREET,
LONDON, E.C.2.

No. 10445

28 Dicembre 1933,
XII

Sua Eccellenza
Cav. di Gr. Cr. Dr. VINCENZO AZZOLINI,
Governatore della Banca d'Italia,
R. O M A.

dm

*Com. a 1.3.75
2-1-1944*

Eccellenza,

Secondo quanto mi viene riferito, /sarebbe stata segnalata a Londra, in questi ultimi mesi, la presenza dell'Avv. Riccardo Gualino.

Il recapito del suddetto signore a Londra sarebbe al N. 17 di Waterloo Place, dove sono gli uffici della SERVICE PETROLEUM CO. Ltd.; e le visite del Gualino sarebbero state motivate da "ragioni di affari" ed in relazione agli interessi che egli avrebbe attualmente in una Società rumena di Petroli, connessa col gruppo della Service Petroleum Co.

La Società in questione é stata fondata il 1mo Aprile 1927, con un capitale di £380,000. Nell'Agosto dello stesso anno il capitale fu aumentato a £1,000,000, con la emissione di £480,000 di azioni preferenziali e £140,000 di azioni ordinarie. Attualmente il capitale risulta composto di £807,520 di azioni preferenziali da £1, interamente pagate ed emesse alla pari, e di £189,988. s. 10 di azioni ordinarie da uno scellino interamente pagate. Tuttavia, sembra che la Società contempli una riduzione di capitale, da effettuarsi entro l'esercizio in corso.

La Service Petroleum Co. sarebbe venuta ad un accordo con la SPIES PETROLEUM CO. Ltd. per cedere a quest'ultima l'intero capitale

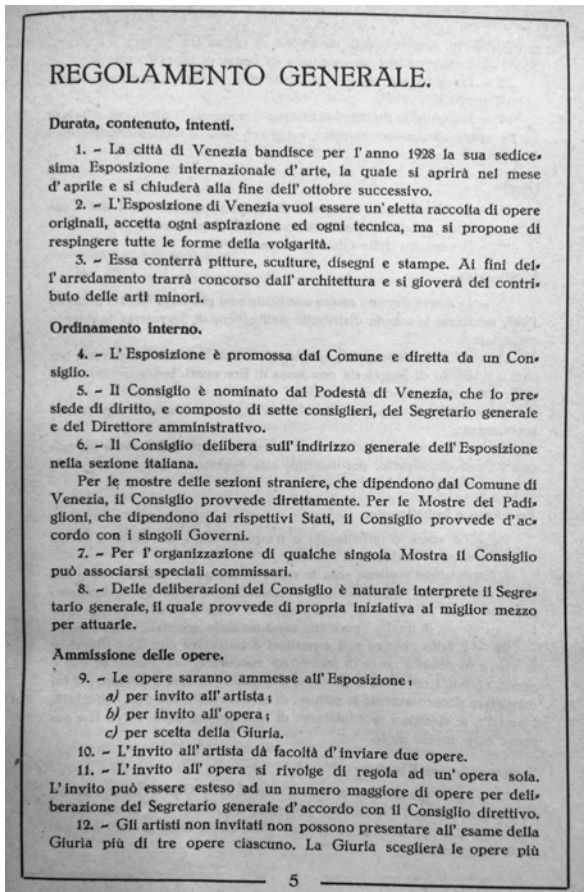


Fig. 51. Regulations of the Venice Biennale from the Catalogue to the exhibition.



Fig. 52. Photograph of the Amedeo Modigliani retrospective exhibition at the 17th Venice Biennale in 1930. Photographer unknown. Image source: Wikimedia Commons (Public domain).



Fig. 53. A gathering of Futurist artists. From left: Luigi Russolo, Carlo Carrà, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Umberto Boccioni, Gino Severini. Photographer unknown. Image source: Wikimedia Commons (Public domain).

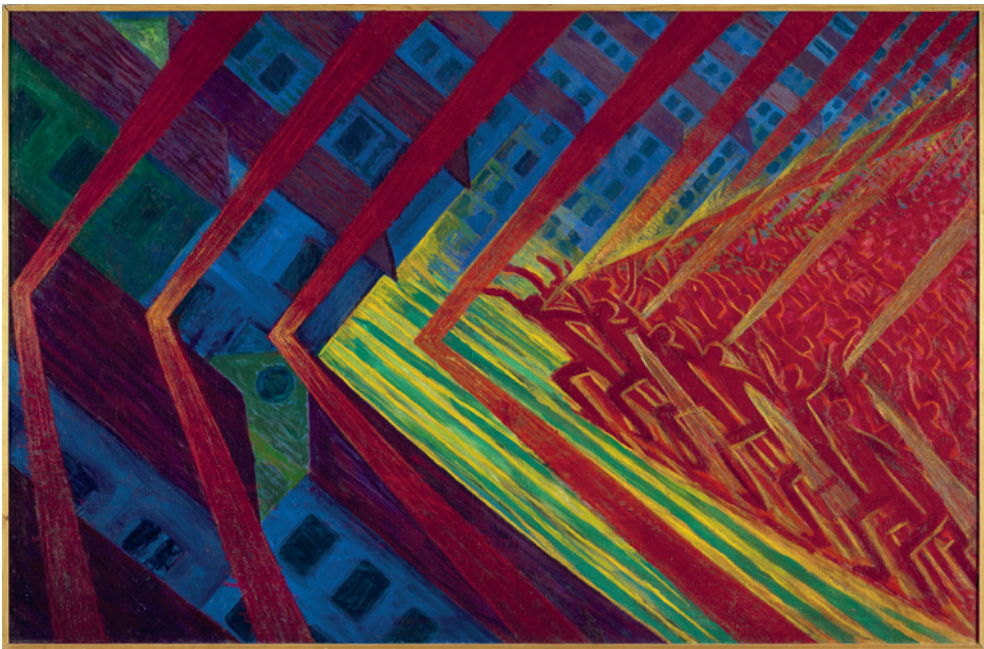


Fig. 54. Luigi Russolo, *La rivolta*, 1911, oil on canvas. Kunstmuseum Den Haag. Photo: Courtesy of the Kunstmuseum Den Haag.



Fig. 55. Filippo de Pisis, *Parigi*, 1925–1939, oil on canvas. Museo Collezione Mazzolini, Bobbio. Photo: Courtesy of Ufficio per i Beni Culturali Ecclesiastici della Diocesi di Piacenza-Bobbio. © LUIGI FILIPPO TIBERTELLI DE PISIS, by SIAE 2019.



Fig. 56. Pietro Marussig, *Corsetto rosso*, 1929, oil on canvas. Museo collezione Mazzolini, Bobbio. Photo: Courtesy of Ufficio per i Beni Culturali Ecclesiastici della Diocesi di Piacenza-Bobbio.



Fig. 57. Pietro Marussig, *Paesaggio*, (dated) 1914, oil on canvas. Museo collezione Mazzolini, Bobbio. Photo: Courtesy of Ufficio per i Beni Culturali Ecclesiastici della Diocesi di Piacenza-Bobbio.



Fig. 58. Giorgio de Chirico, *Piazze d'Italia*, 1956, oil on canvas. Museo collezione Mazzolini, Bobbio. Photo: Courtesy of Ufficio per i Beni Culturali Ecclesiastici della Diocesi di Piacenza-Bobbio. © GIORGIO DE CHIRICO, by SIAE 2019.



Fig. 59. Mario Sironi, *Periferia con camion*, 1920, oil on canvas. Mart, Museo di arte moderna e contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, Collezione L.F., Rovereto. Photo: Courtesy of Mart – Archivio Fotografico e Mediateca. © MARIO SIRONI, by SIAE 2019.



Fig. 60. Carlo Levi, *Autoritratto*, 1928, oil on canvas. Fondazione Guido ed Ettore De Fornaris, Gam – Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin. Photo: Studio Fotografico Gonella 1986. Courtesy of Fondazione Torino Musei. © Carlo Levi, Raffaella Acetoso, by SIAE 2019.

Fig. 61. Carlo Levi, *Ritratto di Alberto Rossi*, ca. 1947, oil on canvas. Torino, Gam – Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin. Photo: Studio Fotografico Rampazzi 1993. Courtesy of Fondazione Torino Musei. © Carlo Levi, Raffaella Acetoso, by SIAE 2019.





Fig. 62. Gigi Chessa, *Nudo seduto (Nudo)*, ca. 1932, oil on canvas. Torino, Gam – Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin. Photo: Studio Fotografico Paolo Robino 2019. Courtesy of Fondazione Torino Musei.



Fig. 63. Carlo Carrà, *Le figlie di Loth*, 1919, oil on canvas. Mart, Museo di arte moderna e contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, Collezione VAF-Stiftung, Rovereto. Photo: Courtesy of Mart – Archivio Fotografico e Mediateca. © CARLO CARRÀ, by SIAE 2019.



Fig. 64. Felice Casorati, *Ritratto di Riccardo Gualino*, 1922. Private Collection. © FELICE CASORATI, by SIAE 2019.

Fig. 65. Armando Spadini, *Bambini che studiano*, 1918, oil on canvas. Collezione d'arte della Banca d'Italia. Photo: Courtesy of the Bank of Italy.





Fig. 66. Sandro Botticelli, *Venere*, ca. 1475–1495, tempera and oil on canvas. Galleria Sabauda. Photo: Courtesy of Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo – Torino, Musei Reali – Galleria Sabauda.

Appendix 5

Photographs

Unless otherwise indicated, all photographs from the Riccardo Gualino family album.
Courtesy of the Gualino family.



Lionello Venturi with Riccardo and Cesarina Gualino aboard ship sailing to North America.



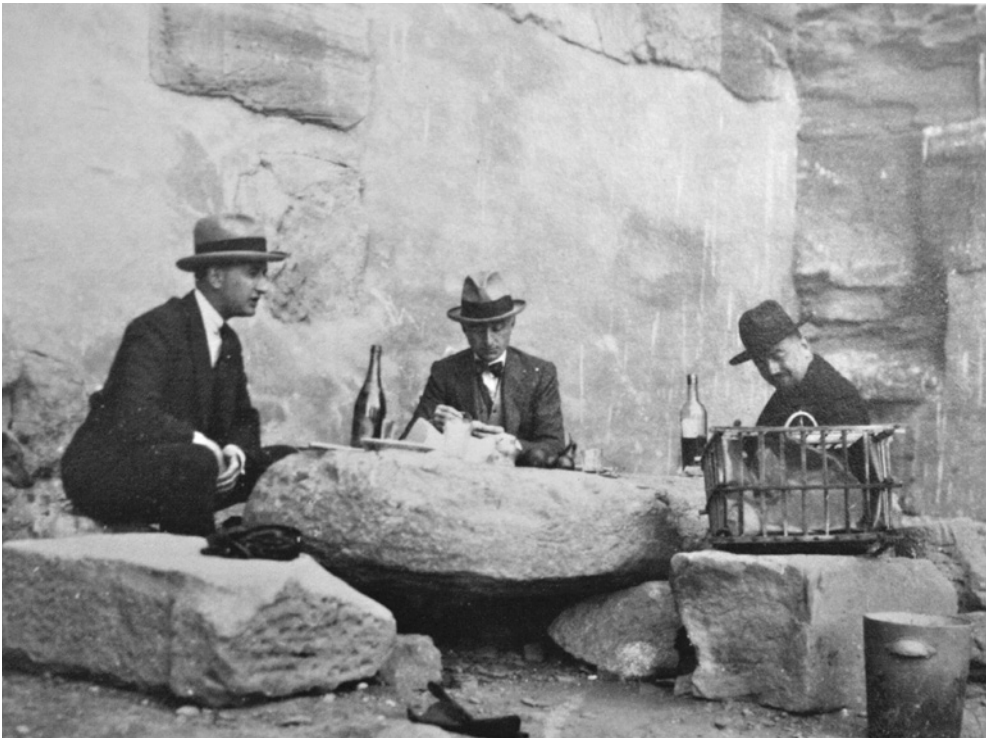
Lionello Venturi with Riccardo Gualino on their way to North America.



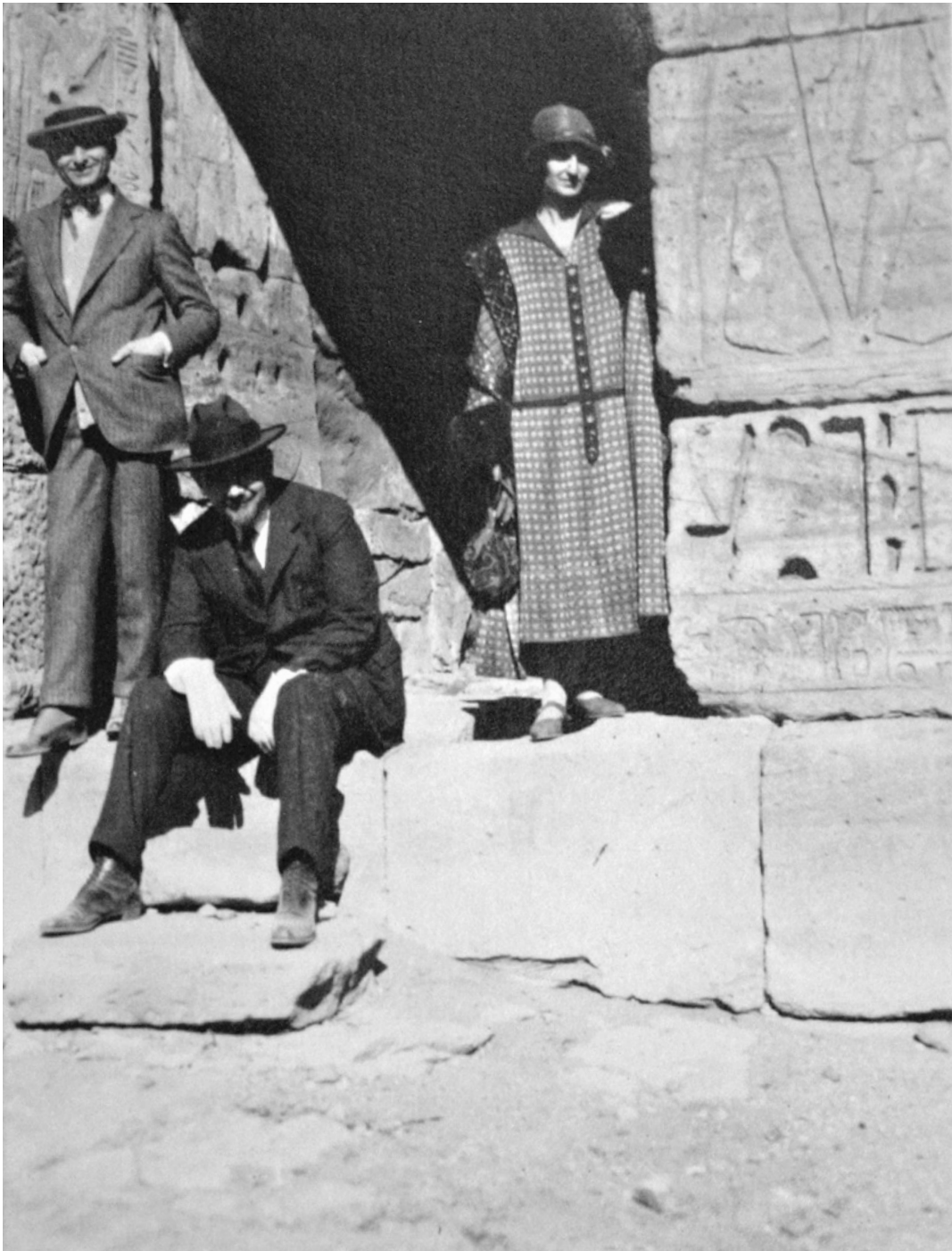
On the way to North America.



On the way to North America;



Lionello Venturi with Riccardo Gualino. A restorative break in Egypt.



Lionello Venturi with Riccardo and Cesarina Gualino in Egypt.



Lionello Venturi with Riccardo and Cesarina Gualino in Egypt.



Lionello Venturi with Riccardo and Cesarina Gualino in Egypt.



Lionello Venturi with Riccardo Gualino.



Riccardo Gualino and Lionello Venturi riding mules in Egypt.



Interior view of the Castle at the Sestri Levante.



Alexandre and Clotilde Sakharoff posing with old masters and antiquities at Cereseto's castle.



Dance practice.



Dance practice.



Cesarina Gualino posing with the Sakharoffs.



View of the Castle at Cereseto Monferrato.



Riccardo Gualino.



Riccardo Gualino and Lionello Venturi.



View of the Castle at Cereseto Monferrato.



Interior view of the Castle at Cereseto Monferrato.



Interior view of the Castle at Cereseto Monferrato.



Costume party at the Gualino's.



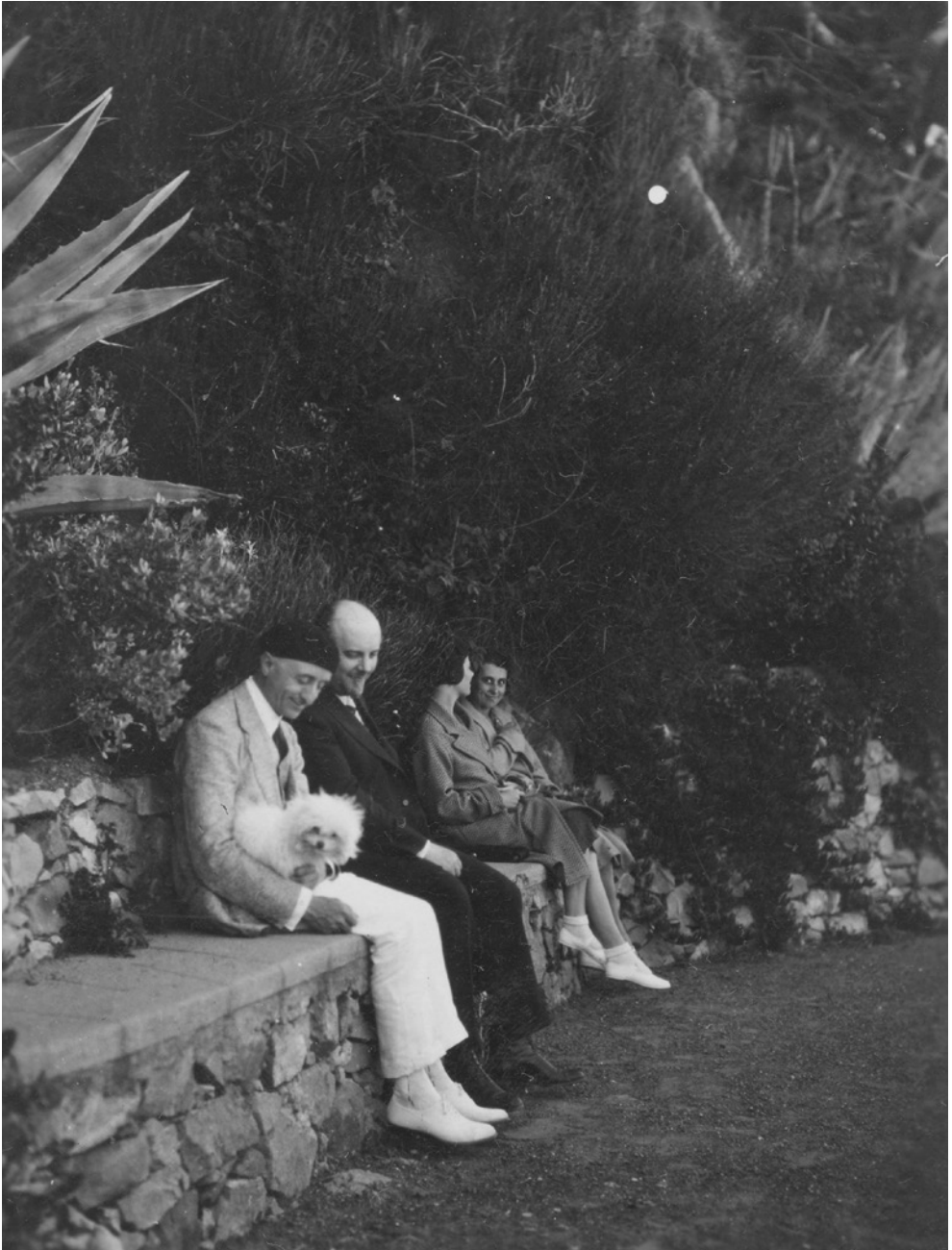
Lionello Venturi posing.



Riccardo Gualino and Lionello Venturi.



Riccardo Gualino and Lionello Venturi.



Riccardo Gualino and Lionello Venturi.



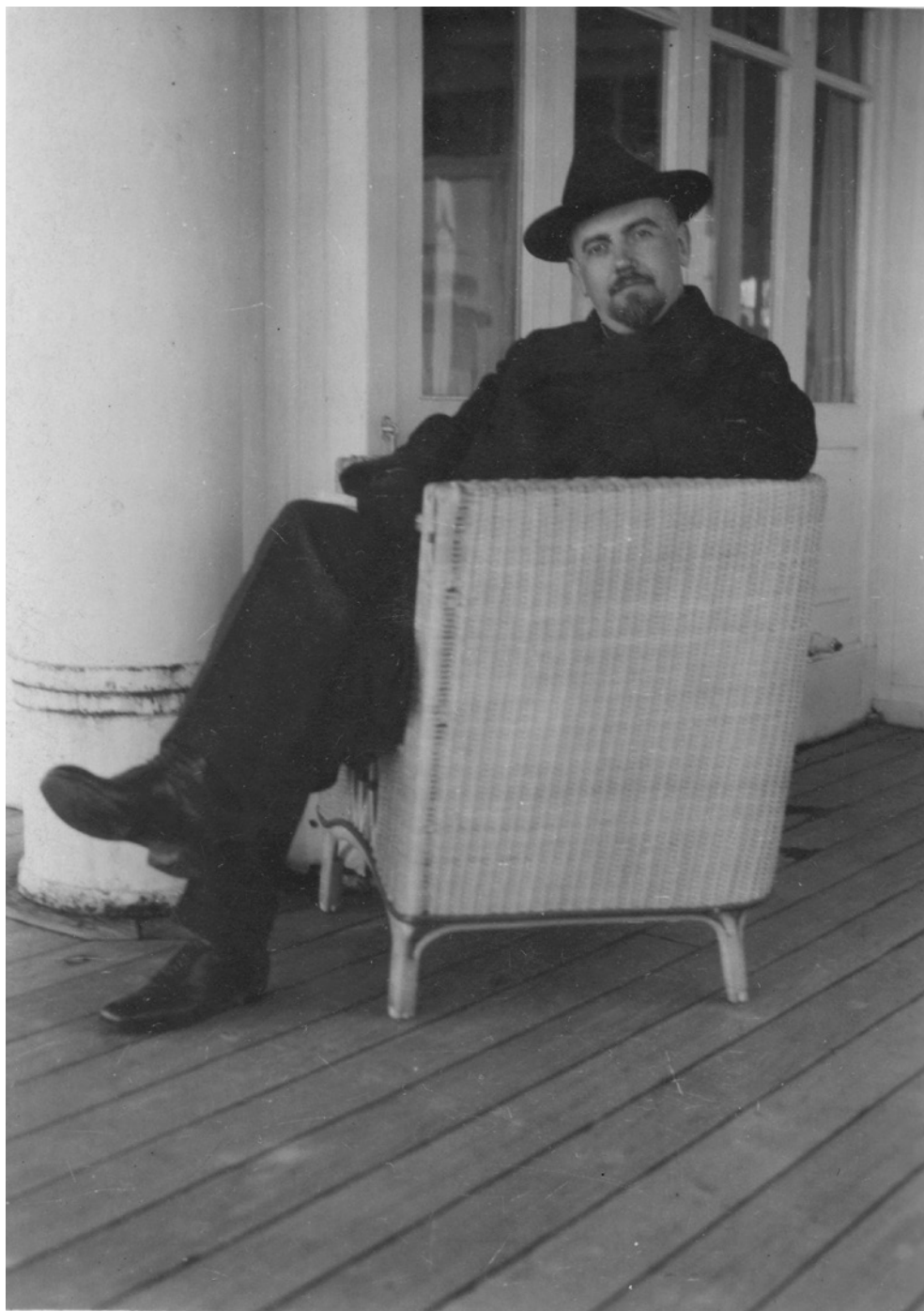
Lionello Venturi with Riccardo and Cesarina Gualino on the beach at Sestri Levante.



Osvald Sirén, Photographer and date unknown. Världskulturmuseerna, Östasiatiska Östasiatiska museet (Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities), Stockholm. Courtesy of the Sirén Archive, Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm.



Riccardo Gualino with government officials. Courtesy of The Archivio Lionello Venturi, Dipartimento di Storia, Antropologia, Religioni, Arte, Spettacolo, Università di Roma La Sapienza, Rome.



Lionello Venturi on his way to North America.



Lionello Venturi and Riccardo Gualino in San Gimignano, Italy.