

## UNESCO – PRIVATE COMMITTEES PROGRAMME FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF VENICE

In response to the appeal launched by the Director General of UNESCO in 1966, over 50 private organizations were established in a number of countries to collect and channel contributions to restore and preserve Venice. Over the years, the International Private Committees have worked closely with the Superintendencies of Monuments and Galleries of Venice, through UNESCO, to identify and address priority needs. Since 1969, they have funded the restoration of more than 100 monuments and 1,000 works of art, provided laboratory equipment and scientific expertise, sponsored research, publications and cultural events and awarded innumerable grants for craftsmen, restorers and conservators to attend specialist courses in Venice.

37 years on, the Association of Private Committees has 28 member organizations representing 11 countries (6 new Committees, based respectively in Denmark, the USA (2) and Italy (4), have joined in the last few years). Since 1997 the Association has enjoyed special relationship status as an N.G.O in operational relations with UNESCO.

In the period 2002 - 2003, twenty-two Committees – from Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, nine from Italy, Sweden, Switzerland and five from the United States of America – committed well in excess of € 5 million in finance for 86 restoration, research, maintenance and cultural promotion projects as well as several bursaries and substantial contributions to the cost of the 2003 ICCROM-UNESCO International Course on the Conservation of Stone. At the time of writing, in January 2004, a further 35 projects are financed and waiting to start.

The following pages offer an overview of the Private Committees' growing commitment to Venice, with a description of the various projects underway in 2002 and 2003

### **PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN DURING 2002**

A group of Committees led by the **AMERICA-ITALY SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA**, and including the **ARBEITSKREIS VENEDIG DER DEUTSCHEN UNESCO-KOMMISSION**, **THE WORLD MONUMENTS FUND**, **SAVE VENICE INC.**, **THE VENICE IN PERIL FUND** and the **STICHTING NEDERLANDS VENETIË COMITÉ**, responded to the Superintendency's suggestion that it was time to monitor the state of conservation of the mosaics in the Basilica di S.ta Maria Assunta on the Island of Torcello, restored some twenty years ago with funding provided jointly by the International Torcello Committee and the Italian State. Comprehensive physical and chemical tests showed that the mosaics in a sample area around the main door on the end wall, which had posed serious problems before and during restoration, are in an encouragingly healthy state and the opportunity was taken to carry out maintenance action. The exercise should now be extended to rest of the mosaics in the church.

**VENICE IN PERIL**'s campaign on behalf of historic housing in Venice moved into its second phase during the year. In the first part of the Superintendency-led project an international team of undergraduate and doctoral students, academics and professional engineers and architects produced a prototype, conservation-based plan for the restoration of a typical terraced house in Cannaregio. In May 2002 the British committee organized an international symposium on the conservation of vernacular residential buildings at the Istituto Veneto di Lettere, Scienze ed Arti in Venice. And, the City Council is scheduled to start work on the Cannaregio house, using Special Law funding, early in 2004. An important aspect of the project is that it is designed not to produce a museum but to add accommodation to the public housing stock for four family units of different size and type. **VIP** will publish and distribute a final report. In another innovative approach to helping the city (not part of the Joint Programme but undertaken with the support of UNESCO), **VENICE IN PERIL** is funding a 3-year research fellowship in association with Churchill College at the University of Cambridge. The intention is to gather all relevant published and unpublished information on the natural environment, both physical and

biological, of the Venice Lagoon and the city, with a view to providing decision-makers with an improved focus on the best ways of saving the city and its environs.

**SAVE VENICE INC.** completed two important projects in the Basilica of the Frari during the year. X-ray photography and infrared reflectograph technology were used to analyse the problems of the 660-year-old *Madonna and Child with Doge Francesco Dandolo* by Paolo Veneziano. The paint surface was cleaned and consolidated once the wooden panel support had been stabilized and the painting was returned to its original position in the lunette above the Doge's sarcophagus in the Sala Capitolare (part of its recent problems had derived from the variations in temperature and humidity in the Sacristy). **SAVE VENICE** also funded the restoration of one of the apse chapels containing the monumental tomb of Melchiorre Trevisan, who led the Venetian fleet against the Turks and died in 1500 after losing the Battle of Modone.

In Venice's other great Gothic basilica, the Church of SS. Giovanni e Paolo **SAVE VENICE** saw work completed on three paintings in the Chapel of the Holy Trinity – two by the XVI century artist Salviati and another by Leandro Bassano – and on the monumental entrance to the sacristy, a memorial to Jacopo Palma il Giovane with busts also of Palma's father and Titian. Relining and the removal of discoloured varnish quite transformed Tintoretto's altarpiece *The Birth of John the Baptist* in the Cappella Sant'Atanasio in the Church of San Zaccaria. The American committee also inaugurated the restoration of two large paintings by Palma Giovane – former organ doors depicting the *Triumph of David over Goliath* – that hang on the side wall of the same chapel.

**SAVE VENICE** financed the restoration of Gaspare Diziani's ceiling paintings in the headquarters of the Venetian Guild of Wine Merchants at the Church of San Silvestro in 2002. Preliminary tests are expected to start shortly on a XIV century painted and gilded wood polyptych that also belonged to the guild and there is a commitment to attend to Tintoretto's *Baptism of Christ* on the other side of the nave.

Two Committees - **SAVE VENICE** and **VENEDIG LEBT** – held a joint inauguration ceremony in the Church of San Lio in November: the Americans completed a four-year restoration campaign in the elegant late-XV century Cappella Gussoni, with its carved altarpiece by Tullio Lombardo, culminating in the removal of several layers of paint and plaster-wash from the umbrella-domed ceiling, thus revealing the original decorative design of the chapel. The Austrians saw work completed on the early XVII century high altar and the altarpiece by Palma il Giovane. In an exciting, though expensive, development it was discovered that the apparently stone statues set in niches on the altar were in fact wood and that their original polychrome and gilded finish was still largely intact beneath several layers of overpainting.

Two clocks received attention during the year: the **AMICI DEI MUSEI E MONUMENTI VENEZIANI** undertook the restoration of the mechanical parts and of the faces of the clock in the tower of the Church of S.ta Maria Formosa and **SAVE VENICE INC.** commissioned the restoration of the parchment surround of a small clock by Francesco Pianta il Giovane in the Church of the Frari.

**PRO VENEZIA SWEDEN** continued with its policy of focusing on neglected popular public art in Castello, commissioning a prize-winning graduate of the **ISTITUTO VENETO DEI BENI CULTURALI** to restore an XVIII century marble statuette of the Madonna in a niche set into the wall of a house in Salizada San Provolo. **SAVE VENICE** enabled a XV century wayside relief carving in Fondamenta Quintavalle to receive much needed attention, while the **AMICI DEI MUSEI E MONUMENTI VENEZIANI** provided funds to restore a wooden votive altar in Campiello dell'Erbarie at the Rialto, recently reopened to public use following the transfer of the wholesale fruit and vegetable market. And **VENICE IN PERIL** undertook the thankless task of funding the restoration of what very little is left of a relief carving by Antonio Rizzo, the sculptor of much work in the Doge's Palace, on a wall in Rio Terà Barba Frutariol in Cannaregio.

The **COMITATO ITALIANO** provided emergency funding to rid the Scuola Grande dei Carmini of woodworm and an insect whose canvas-consuming capacity had caused a famous ceiling painting by Tiepolo to fall from its frame. And not far away, the Church of the Eremite took another small step towards being able to reopen with the completed restoration of four wall paintings depicting the *Miracles of St. Augustine* by Francesco Pittoni with finance being provided by **THE VENICE IN PERIL FUND.**

**VENETIAN HERITAGE INC.** brought three important projects to conclusion during the year. Parts of the statue of Admiral Vincenzo Cappello, which surmounts the Renaissance entrance to the Church of S. Elena, were in an extremely delicate condition. Analyses and tests called for by the Superintendency led to the conclusion that the only safe way to remove damaging surface deposits was to use a laser cleaning technique. Once the restoration was complete, the Superintendency arranged for several experts to meet to discuss all the information gathered from the experience and perhaps reach decisions as to the authorship of this masterpiece of Renaissance statuary. It took seven cycles of soaking in a specially constructed tank to remove the destructive salts absorbed by the carved marble of the XIII century tomb of Doge Marino Morosini in the narthex of St. Mark's Basilica. The sections have now been reassembled and insulated from salt-bearing damp rising through the walls of the basilica. And two early XVI century painted and gilded wooden altars attributed to Paolo Campsa are now back in place in the Basilica on Torcello. Again, restoration of the monuments was accompanied by insulation work on the walls against which they stand.

**VENETIAN HERITAGE's** field of action embraces not only the conservation of Venetian monuments and works of art anywhere within the former domains of the Serenissima but also broader cultural promotion projects within Venice itself. The American committee has developed a special relationship with one of the city's leading cultural institutes, the Giorgio Cini Foundation, and in 2002 it enabled the Foundation to increase the efficiency of its web-site services with a substantial donation of computer hardware and software.

Another committee that interprets its role in the safeguarding of Venice as involving more than the funding of restoration work (though not excluding it, as conservation attention to four paintings – by Diziani, Tiepolo and Roberto Longhi – testifies) is the **VENICE INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION**; its policy of support for the city's museum system involved, amongst other initiatives, the purchase of stair-lift facilities for the disabled, production of a brochure giving information about the municipal museum circuit, the promotion of two series of lectures and substantial contributions to the organization of an exhibition at Cà Rezzonico - "Luci di taglio" – illustrating a day in the life of an eighteenth century Venetian noblewoman.

And the Venice Committee of the **DANTE ALIGHIERI SOCIETY** organized an exhibition and a conference at the Ateneo Veneto around a remarkable series of portraits by the Czech artist Lotte Frumi depicting personalities who were prominent in the cultural life of Venice in the 1960s and '70s.

### **PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN DURING 2003**

Major projects completed in 2003 included work on the Church of the Gesuiti, the Ala Napoleonica in St. Mark's Square, the Scuola Dalmata, the Scuola dei Calegheri and the Fenice Opera House.

The comprehensive consolidation and cleaning of the Baroque façade of the Church of the Gesuiti, financed by **VENETIAN HERITAGE INC.**, was preceded by extensive surveys and investigations but extra funding nevertheless had to be found to deal with the problems posed by the unexpectedly deteriorated condition of the massive statue of the Virgin Mary right at the summit of the pediment.

The **COMITÉ FRANÇAIS POUR LA SAUVEGARDE DE VENISE**, true to its traditional concern for those parts of the Venetian heritage that have French associations, arranged with Venice City Council in 2000 to finance a major restoration project on parts of the Ala Napoleonica, including the Sottoportico di San Geminiano, the monumental staircase with frescoes by Borsato, the ante-room, the Throne Room and the ceiling of the Ballroom. Work kept to schedule and the state rooms with their colonnaded entrance and the staircase have reacquired grace and dignity, the latter now bathed in light setting off the delicate colours of the marble and plasterwork with the reopening of four windows.

**SAVE VENICE INC.** financed work on two Venetian *Scuole* or guildhalls during the year. The Scuola of San Giorgio degli Schiavoni was built in the mid-1500s for the Dalmatian community

of Venice. The project provided for the cleaning and consolidation of the Istrian stone façade, with its two important marble reliefs over the entrance. The lower one, depicting the confraternity's patron, *St. George*, was carved by Pietro da Salò in 1552; cleaning of the other, the *Virgin Enthroned with St. John the Baptist and St. Catherine* (XIV cent.) revealed traces of vivid colours and gilding. The Scuola dei Calegheri in Campo San Tomà, was built for the Guild of Shoemakers in 1464. Again, cleaning of an early work by Pietro Lombardo – a relief carving over the entrance depicting *St. Mark healing Anianus the Cobbler* – revealed extensive traces of the colour and gilding that were once a common feature of external sculpture.

Along with UNESCO, several committees responded to the appeal, launched immediately after fire almost completely destroyed Venice's opera house, the Teatro La Fenice, in 1996. **SAVE VENICE INC.** financed the scrupulous reproduction of the painted ceiling of the auditorium while **VENICE IN PERIL** funded the recreation of the great XIX century chandelier (which had been made in Liverpool). The **COMITÉ FRANÇAIS**, the **AMICI DEI MUSEI** and **VENETIAN HERITAGE INC.**, each made substantial financial contributions.

Three other major restoration projects moved steadily forward to probable completion in 2004, in each case after extensive preliminary diagnostic surveys and analyses undertaken in 2000 and 2001. **THE VENICE IN PERIL FUND** responded to the Superintendency's urgent appeal for comprehensive attention to the Cappella Emiliani, attached to the façade of the Church of San Michele. Throughout its almost 500-year life the chapel has suffered from its salt-laden environment, the peculiar construction of its dome and the undermining effect of wave and wash movement. The current campaign aims to redress the effect of neglected maintenance rather than devise permanent solutions for the first two factors. The Fund has also made representations to the Magistrato alle Acque, the authority responsible for traffic regulation in the Lagoon, asking for speed limits to be strictly imposed on boats passing the island and for breakwaters to be re-installed in an attempt to reduce the damage constantly being caused to the building and its foundations by excessive wash. **SAVE VENICE INC.**, with its particular interest in early Renaissance buildings, raised scaffolding against the Pietro Lombardo-Mauro Codussi façade of the former Scuola Grande San Marco, now the City Hospital, in 2002. The restoration campaign is not only improving the condition of the monument but has also given scholars the opportunity to subject the façade and its precious decorative elements to close examination. Inside the hospital is the Church of San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti, where **PRO VENEZIA SWITZERLAND** (one of the committees with the privilege of being able to care for its own considerable national legacy to Venice's cultural heritage) is funding the restoration of Swiss architect Giuseppe Sardi's double-sided monument to Alvise Mocenigo. The outer face is already finished and work on the inner face, a sort of triumphal arch flanked by remarkable high relief carvings of *The Turkish attack on the fortress of Martenengo* and *The naval battle of Paros* is well advanced. It is hoped to combine the inauguration with an announcement of times when the church will be regularly open to the public.

Restoration to public view will also be the by-product of two projects involving frescoes and financed by **SAVE VENICE INC.**. Work on the Cappella Bernabò in the Church of San Giovanni Grisostomo, which features Tullio Lombardo's masterpiece relief of *The Coronation of the Virgin*, led to the entirely unconnected discovery of exceptionally fine, early XVI century paintings of the Evangelists in three of the pendentives below the dome. In the Church of San Salvador the Sacristy was frescoed with captivating scenes of birds, flowers and foliage in 1546. They were whitewashed out of sight when the Austrians used the Convent as a military barracks and though they were uncovered in the early 1900s the extensive damage is only now being properly addressed.

One of the most exciting projects of recent years – the restoration of Verrocchio's famous bronze equestrian statue of Bartolomeo Colleoni in Campo SS. Giovanni e Paolo financed jointly by the **WORLD MONUMENTS FUND** and **THE ITALIAN STATE** – finally got underway in the Autumn with the construction of a vast workshop around the statue itself. The work is expected to take around 18 months and is being fully described in English and Italian on a special web-site ([www.colleonirestauro.it](http://www.colleonirestauro.it)), sponsored by the Assicurazioni Generali.

Several important painted wooden crucifixes are currently receiving attention. They include a remarkable XVI century Tuscan work from the Church of San Fantin, originally carried in procession to comfort condemned prisoners on their way to execution. Another, housed in a wayside altar outside the Church of Angelo Raffaele, dates from the 1400s. A third – the most sacred and revered object in the town of Chioggia – is probably of German origin and dates from the 1350s. Finance for the first two comes from **THE VENICE IN PERIL FUND** and for the third from **SAVE VENICE INC.. VENETIAN HERITAGE INC.** is also funding the restoration of the XVIII century crucifix over the High Altar in the Basilica of SS. Giovanni e Paolo.

The **INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE ARSENALE** persisted in its efforts to promote a historically sensitive and economically viable future for the great dockyard of the Republic. In 2001 it was accorded formal consultative status as a member, with the Superintendency of the Architectural Heritage and the City Council, of the Naval Command's working group responsible for devising an integrated development plan for the whole area. And in 2003 it continued to provide valuable expertise to the newly constituted Arsenale di Venezia spa

Another substantial form of contribution to the future well-being of the city is being proposed by the Danish **PRO VENEZIAKOMITEÉN**, which in Summer 2002 commissioned a team of architects from the Royal Danish Academy to conduct a survey of the former infirmary wing of the Franciscan convent on the Island of San Michele. Subsequent talks with the City Council and the Franciscan Order have led to a draft agreement that the building should be leased to the Committee for use as a Danish Cultural Institute in return for an undertaking to carry out extensive repairs and renovation. It is hoped that this important project will be given *via libera* in 2004. Another project on the Island of San Michele has seen a group of committees – **VENICE IN PERIL/PRO VENEZIA-KOMITEEN, DENMARK/PRO VENEZIA FOUND. SWITZERLAND/PRO VENEZIA, SWEDEN/VENEDIG LEBT, AUSTRIA/SOC. DANTE ALIGHIERI/IST. VEN. BENI CULTURALI** – commission a detailed survey of the Protestant section of the Municipal Cemetery with a view to enabling the Superintendency to establish conservation guidelines persuading the authorities to act on them.

Finally, ongoing archival work funded by **SAVE VENICE** includes the cataloguing of historic parish archives in association with the Delmas Foundation; the project will be completed with those of the Church of the Gesuati in 2003 and all the catalogues compiled by the Patriarchal Archives will be made available on-line to scholars everywhere. The American Committee's fruitful collaboration with the municipal archives continued with the restoration and digitalisation of a further segment of the huge Giacomelli collection of photographic negatives, purchased by Venice City Council in 1995. **SAVE VENICE's** involvement has already enabled the systematic recovery of invaluable records of public works projects in the first half of the XX century. The focus of the current third and fourth phases of the project is the Venice Film Festival and the Fenice Opera House.