Market Spaces, Production Sites, and Sound Landscape of European Cities: From History to Regeneration

Edited by Elena Svalduz

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Elena Svalduz

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On the Market: Buying and Selling Artworks in Early Modern Venice

Laura Moretti

Starting from the Trecento, collecting practices gradually expanded in the Italian peninsula. The trend developed steadily in the following centuries, not only in terms of quantity, but also of quality of the objects gathered by private individuals.[1] The early modern collector was at the centre of a complex system of purchases, commissions, exchanges, attributions, evaluations, restorations, studies, and production of artworks.[2] With the spread of these practices in wide sectors of the society, in the early Cinquecento – thanks to the initiative of strong-minded personalities and the work of artists of the highest calibre – collectors started to be depicted surrounded by artworks, and more broadly by objects characterised by substantial cultural values.[3] These pictures testify the vitality of the phenomenon, offering an important indication of how it was seen and interpreted by contemporary eyes.[4] One of the most significant examples is the portrait of Andrea Odoni (1488-1545) by Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1557), signed

[1] For an introduction, see De Benedictis, *Per la storia del collezionismo italiano*, with further references.
[2] Franzoni, '"Rimembranze d'infinite cose"', p. 303. Cfr. Cecchini, 'Collezionismo e mondo materiale', p. 165.
[3] See esp. Borean, 'Ritratti di collezionisti', with further references.
[4] Franzoni, '"Rimembranze d'infinite cose"', p. 303.

and dated 1527 (fig. 6).[5] This work, along with the portrait of a collector by Parmigianino (1503-40) now at the National Gallery, London – executed perhaps a few years earlier[6] – paved the way for a series of portraits which represent the sitter in close contact with specific categories of objects, such as ancient and contemporary sculptures, antique coins, books, and precious craftworks. In these portraits, the personality of the sitter is defined not only by their physical presence and clothing, but also by the surrounding objects and the relations established between the sitter and the objects.

Together with Rome and Florence, Venice was undoubtedly one of the major centres for the development of collecting practices in the Italian peninsula.[7] New furnishings and artworks «sine quibus commode vivi non potest», as Giovanni Pontano wrote in 1498,[8] could be commissioned and acquired in various ways. Giovanni Bellini (ca. 1430-1516) produced dozens of «ritratti di naturale», which were displayed «per tutte le case di Venezia» – as Giorgio Vasari wrote in the first edition of his *Lives.*[9] Along with portraits, Venetian houses were more and more filled with artworks and precious objects. Some collectors expressed particular interest in displaying their belongings in well-organized and sophisticated ways, as testified by the opening of a manuscript, currently preserved at the Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, which shows the display of Andrea Vendramin's collection at the turn of the seventeenth century (fig. 7).[10] The setting included vases, amphoras, urns of different sizes and dimensions, possibly one painting or a sculptural relief in the middle, several statuettes (probably in bronze or terracotta), a bust, a couple of animal heads, and statues on pedestals in two niches.

But where could the sixteenth-century Venetian collector find these objects? Which were the channels that facilitated the transfer of large quantities

[5] On this portrait, see esp. Schmitter, '"Virtuous Riches"'; Schmitter, 'Odoni's Façade'; and, more recently, Schmitter, *The Art Collector in Early Modern Italy.*

[6] See esp. Vaccaro, *Parmigianino*, cat. n. 39, pp. 192-3, with further references.

[7] On this theme, see esp. Hochmann, Lauber and Mason (eds.), *Il collezionismo d'arte a Venezia*; Borean and Mason (eds.), *Figure di collezionisti*; Aikema, Lauber and Seidel (eds.), *Il collezionismo a Venezia e nel Veneto.*

[8] Pontano, *De beneficentia.* Cfr. Welch, 'Public Magnificence and Private Display'.

[9] Vasari, *Vite* (1550), p. 456: «Rimasto Giovanni vedovo di Gentile che sempre amò tenerissimamente; andava lavorando & passandosi tempo, ancora che egli fusse vecchio: & perché e' si era dato a far ritratti di naturale, introdusse una usanza in quella città: che chi era niente di grado, si faceva fare da lui o da altri il suo ritratto: come appare per tutte le case di Venezia, che son tutte piene di quegli: & vi si vede per infino in quarta generazione i discendenti, nella pittura». See esp. Humfrey, 'The Portrait in Fifteenth-Century Venice'; and, specifically on Bellini's portraiture, cfr. Tempestini, *Giovanni Bellini.*

[10] Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS D'Orville 539, cc. Vv-VIr. Cfr. Borenius, *The Picture Gallery of Andrea Vendramin*; Lauber, *Andrea Vendramin*, with further references.

of works of art and precious craftworks into these residences? Each case should be analysed separately, but in what follows we shall try and make some general observations, before focussing on a significant case study.[11]

The main area for the sale and purchase of objects in Venice in the early modern period was, of course, Rialto.[12] This was the centre for the exchange of goods, but also an important node for the circulation of ideas and knowledge. It is not uncommon to recognise in the visual representations of the Rialto bridge area and market something that looks like a work of art or a piece of furniture that could perfectly fit into the house of a wealthy and enthusiastic collector. A good example is the painting by Canaletto representing the Campo San Giacomo di Rialto (ca. 1760) now in Berlin (fig. 8). On the right you can see a painting, and various pieces of furniture leaning on the pillars of the Fabbriche Vecchie di Rialto, while on the left we see a few "things", not better identifiable, which could easily fall into these categories.

We could also ask ourselves where supply and demand could meet in early modern Venice. There were several different places in which you could go if you wished to assemble – but also dismantle – your collection of artworks. For instance, you could go and buy an artwork directly into a painter's workshop. There you could see various items, compare them, discuss about the price, establish a personal relation with the artist and other artisans and craftsmen gravitating around him.[13] Another portrait by Lorenzo Lotto (fig. 9) conveys a sense of what a collector could find going to an artist's workshop to buy something.

An important channel for the purchase of works of art were the auctions, or *incanti*, which were held in the Campo of San Giacomo di Rialto.[14] The auctions had to take place in the open air – and not below the porticoes – and a full list of items had to be circulated in advance. Normally the lists were not categorised, so works of art could be found alongside pieces of furniture and other kinds of goods. If we delve into Canaletto's depictions of Campo San Giacomo (figs. 8 and 10), we can easily imagine some auctions in progress, with people bidding on their favourite pieces. From the acts of the *Giustizia Vecchia*, we know that in the mid-sixteenth century *incanti* were held daily,[15] while in the seventeenth

[11] For a general introduction, see Cecchini, *Quadri e commercio*, pp. 192-263.
[12] See, among others, Cecchini, 'A cosa serve una piazza mercantile?'; Matthew, 'Were there open markets for pictures'; Welch, 'Luoghi e spazi di mercati e fiere'. See also the essays by Donatella Calabi and Martina Massaro in this volume.
[13] Cfr Mason, 'Ritratti, perizie, acquisti e vendite'; Cecchini, 'Troublesome Business', p. 125; Cecchini, 'Al servizio dei collezionisti'; Cecchini, *Quadri e commercio*, p. 198.
[14] See, among others, Cecchini, 'A cosa serve una piazza mercantile?', p. 417, with further references.
[15] Archivio di Stato di Venezia (henceforth ASVe), Giustizia Vecchia, b. 23, quoted in Corazza, *Il*

century they had to be regulated and scheduled in advance.[16] An embarrassing episode occurred in 1506 when Isabella d'Este, hearing the news of the death of the jeweler Michele Vianello, wrote to three of her correspondents because she wanted to acquire the *Submersion of the Pharaoh* attributed to Jan van Eyck (now lost).[17] Vianello's assets were auctioned off to repay his creditors, but Isabella's emissaries let the painting escape. It was bought by Andrea Loredan, the doge's brother. After much insistence, Loredan sold it to Isabella at the purchase price. This was not at all uncommon: the same Lorenzo Lotto, in his will dated 1546, wrote that he wished his properties were «poste a l'incanto».[18]

The lottery – a game introduced in Venice in the early modern period – spread very quickly and could be played at San Polo and Rialto.[19] It consisted in raising funds from a private individual by selling tickets, and giving the possibility for players (i.e. buyers) to win any kind of object, including artworks, but also jewels and even land property, as testified by a rare print listing the items of the *Lotto dell'università de creditor del Banco Dolfin*.[20] The lotteries of works of art (or which included them) began to spread in the sixteenth century; and although they cannot be considered a primary vehicle for sales but rather a complementary circuit, they gave the possibility to all citizens to participate and – if lucky – to own some objects of a certain commercial and aesthetic value.

And then there was the Fiera della Sensa, which was held on the occasion of the feast of the Ascension (in Venetian, Sensa), which lasted several days and is still celebrated today.[21] Gabriele Bella, in a famous painting now preserved at the Pinacoteca Querini Stampalia (fig. 11), represents the temporary structure which was erected in St Mark's Square for this festivity. On the bottom-right corner we see various items of clothing, but also pieces of furniture, a couple of mirrors and one painting, while on the left, several paintings are up for sale. Through an opening on the wall we can see two men, who are probably discussing the price of one of the paintings. The products on display were on sale at every price range, within the reach of even those with little in their pockets. The "Arte dei Pittori" had a specific place where painters could sell their works,

mercato di quadri, p. 131.

[16] Cecchini, 'Collezionismo e mondo materiale', p. 182; Cecchini, *Quadri e commercio*, pp. 199-200.

[17] Corazza, *Il mercato di quadri*, pp. 133-4. Cfr Brown and Lorenzoni, 'An Art Auction in Venice in 1506'.

[18] Lotto, *Il Libro di spese diverse*, p. 304, quoted in Corazza, *Il mercato di quadri*, p. 133.

[19] Sanudo, *I Diarii*, vol. XXXII, pp. 500-1. For a general introduction, see Lorizzo, 'Per una storia delle lotterie'; Dolcetti, *Le bische e il giuoco d'azzardo*. Cfr. Corazza, *Il mercato di quadri*, pp. 134-40; Cecchini, 'I modi della circolazione', pp. 146, 148; Cecchini, *Quadri e commercio*, pp. 200-1.

[20] Biblioteca Museo Correr, Venezia (henceforth BMC), Opuscolo Cicogna, 686, n. 13, quoted and reproduced in Corazza, *Il mercato di quadri*, pp. 136-7 and fig. 3, p. 139.

[21] Welch, 'Luoghi e spazi di mercati e fiere', pp. 83-7; Cecchini, *Quadri e commercio*, pp. 203-4.

and also well renown painters participated in the event. Giorgio Vasari wrote that he saw a portrait of the doge Leonardo Loredan by Giorgione at the fiera della Sensa,[22] alongside a magnificent self-portrait by Palma il Giovane.[23] Artists like Albrecht Dürer, Lorenzo Lotto, and Jacopo Bassano regularly participated in the sales.[24]

As Sanudo attests, there were two weekly markets, one in Campo San Polo and the other in Piazza San Marco.[25] The one in San Polo was held on Wednesdays, while the one in Piazza San Marco on Saturdays. Venetians went there to buy and sell all kinds of objects. Probably the one in Campo San Polo, considering its proximity to the Rialto bridge, was more active. In 1534 the Provveditori di Comun stated that it was forbidden to «tenir tende» (i.e. to mount temporary structures) in these spaces in other days of the week, confirming in fact that these places were used for market purposes also on different days.[26] *Rigattieri* and *strazzaroli* (i.e. second-hand dealers) were authorized, since 1233, to sell textiles and other objects that were given to them at a predetermined price.[27] The *rigattiere* in particular was a profession, with a training of 5 years.[28] They were forbidden to sell newly manufactured objects, but the line was clarly feeble – we know of several artisans declaring that some *rigattieri* were selling new products. Several *rigattieri* came from abroad: we can find frequent mentions of «ebrei Tedeschi», the only group which was allowed to sell and buy second-hand products, operating in the ghetto.[29] The products were clearly given to them by former owners who wanted to sell them. Some illegal practices like theft and burglary were apparently quite common. The shops were located mainly in the Ghetto Nuovo, but also in the areas of Rialto and San Marco, where local *rigattieri* could be found.[30] They operated also during auctions and *incanti*. As demonstrated by Isabella Cecchini, this was the circuit frequently used by rich Venetians who were in financial difficulties and gave their objects to sell to *rigattieri* and *strazzaroli*, who could operate lawfully.[31] In 1577 they

[22] Vasari, *Vite* (1568), vol. II (part III, vol. I), p. 13; Cecchini, *Quadri e commercio*, p. 204.
[23] Vasari, *Vite* (1568), vol. II (part III, vol. I), pp. 140-1.
[24] Corazza, 'Il mercato di quadri', p. 143; Dal Pozzolo, 'Cercar quadri e disegni', p. 52.
[25] Sanudo, *De origine, situ et magistratibus urbis venetae*, p. 25, quoted in Corazza, 'Il mercato di quadri', p. 144.
[26] ASVe, Provveditori di Comun, Atti, b. 10, reg. 8, c. 16v, quoted in Corazza, 'Il mercato di quadri', p. 144.
[27] Cecchini, 'Collezionismo e mondo materiale', p. 182.
[28] Allerston, 'The market in second-hand clothes', pp. 179-81; Corazza, 'Il mercato di quadri', p. 145.
[29] Corazza, 'Il mercato di quadri', p. 265.
[30] Cecchini, 'Collezionismo e mondo materiale', p. 182.
[31] Cecchini, *Quadri e commercio*, pp. 233-6.

were allowed to sell also jewels and precious metals, and we know they were often asked to evaluate collections of works of art (this testifies that they were active in the circuit of the Venetian nobility).[32]

It was also possible to buy works of art directly on the streets. This was quite frequent in Piazza San Marco, but also elsewhere, if in 1551 il Consiglio dei Pregadi forbade to occupy public spaces with goods and stuff of any sort.[33] Feast days were special occasions for doing business: in 1577 it was forbidden to sell objects outside the churches, and in the following years this was reiterated several times, attesting that the practice was rather common.[34] The main advantage of this kind of exchange was that it was released from the rules of the corporations or guilds. It is also important to notice the kind of visibility this practice allowed. In Canaletto's view now at the National Gallery, London (fig. 12), for instance, we see some paintings displayed in Campo San Rocco, on the façade of the Scuola Grande and on adjacent buildings.

And, of course, works of art passed from generation to generation. We could consider, for example, the two panels by Hans Memling, owned by the Bembo family in the early sixteenth century, which were possibly part of the same small altarpiece (figs. 13-14).[35] Pietro Bembo's father Bernardo, art lover and bibliophile, probably acquired these and bequeathed them to his son. Bernardo's collection passed in fact «di padre in figlio» to Pietro. The same happened between Pietro and his son Torquato, who though showed a very different attitude and dispersed his father's collections.

Another channel was of course the direct trade between collectors. The so-called Frick St Francis (fig. 15), for instance, in 1525 was in the house of Taddeo Contarini, and later ended up in the house of a certain Zuan Michiel, a secretary of the Consiglio dei Dieci, together with some illuminated parchment sheets decorated by Jacometto Veneziano, which passed into different hands before landing in Michiel's house.[36] These exchanges were certainly prompted by the specific needs of the parts involved (whether of the buyer or of the seller) and the peculiarities of the objects in question. An important role was played by experts and *connoisseurs*, who could participate in the sales acting as brokers or agents. For example, we could mention the Flemish broker Daniel Nijs (1572-1647), who established himself in Venice and in the 1620s played a prominent role in the sale of the Gonzaga collections.[37]

[32] Allerston, 'The market in second-hand clothes', p. 55; Corazza, 'Il mercato di quadri', p. 146.
[33] ASVe, Provveditori di Comun, Atti, b. 1, c. 343r, quoted in Corazza, 'Il mercato di quadri', p. 147.
[34] ASVe, Giustizia Vecchia, b. 5/12, c. 33v, quoted in Corazza, 'Il mercato di quadri', p. 148.
[35] Gasparotto, Tura and Beltramini (eds.), *Pietro Bembo e l'invenzione del Rinascimento*, p. […].
[36] See, for all details and further references, Rutherglen and Hale (eds.), *In a New Light*.
[37] On Daniel Nijs, see Anderson, *The Flemish Merchant*.

A Case Study: Leonardo Mocenigo

Around the mid-sixteenth century, the Venetian patrician Leonardo Mocenigo (1523-75) gathered one of the most important collections of the time, mentioned among the "Studi di Anticaglie & di medaglie" by Francesco Sansovino in his *Venetia citta nobilissima et singolare*.[38] Tommaso Garzoni, in his *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*,[39] lists Mocenigo among the «sommi amatori d'anticaglie» («greatest lovers of antiquity») in the chapter titled «De' professori di medaglie, et d'altre Anticaglie, Antiquarij detti», while Vincenzo Scamozzi, in 1615, still recalls the collection among the «studij di Nobili» he saw during his youth. The highlights of the Mocenigo collection included a coin cabinet modelled on the Arch of Constantine (now lost), designed by Andrea Palladio, a marble statue at the time known as *Endymion* (fig. 16), and the so-called *Adorante* (fig. 17), a bronze statue considered the work of Boedas – one of the sons of the prolific and famous Greek sculptor Lysippus (active ca. 370-315 BCE).[40] This case study is of particular interest in this context because the collection – or at least a conspicuous part of it – was assembled and dismantled in a relatively short period of time, allowing us to reflect upon methods of acquisition but also of sale.

Leonardo Mocenigo, of the branch «dalle zogie» or «dalle perle», was born in Venice on January 23, 1523, the son of Antonio, a Procurator of St Mark. In 1544 he married Marina Capello, the niece of Cardinal Francesco Pisani, and they had two sons, Antonio and Alvise.[41] The name of the family branch was due to Leonardo's grandfather Alvise (1480-1541), a rich merchant. Leonardo held several appointments for the Republic of Venice: between 1557 and 1559 he he was the Venetian ambassador at the court of the Emperor Ferdinand I, who made him a *cavaliere* and granted him the privilege of using the imperial eagle in his coat-of-arms. When he left Vienna, the Emperor presented him a «coppa d'oro» later valued 1,200 *ducati* and acquired by Guglielmo Gonzaga.[42]

From a «lasciate passare» dated June 18, 1570, we know that a group of 20 busts, five «pilli antichi» and two other marble bases for statues, two marble figures «del naturale» and two smaller statues, three «putti di mezo rilievo che dorme», a piece of musaic, and two marble pieces left Rome directed to Ven-

[38] Sansovino, *Venetia citta nobilissima et singolare*, cc. 138r-v.
[39] Garzoni, *La piazza universale*, p. 918.
[40] For an introduction, see Borean, 'Leonardo Mocenigo'; Brown and Lorenzoni, 'The "studio del clarissimo Cavaliero Mozzanico"'.
[41] See esp. Stefani, 'Famiglia Mocenigo'.
[42] Brown and Lorenzoni, 'The "studio del clarissimo Cavaliero Mozzanico"', p. 56.

ice.[43] The document states that Mocenigo could bring the objects wherever he preferred.

Unfortunately, we don't know for sure where Leonardo kept his collection. In the *Condizione di decima* of 1566,[44] he stated to own several properties in Venice and Padua, but to reside in the house of Francesco, Giacomo and Zuane Marcello at San Vidal (current Palazzo Cavalli Franchetti). In the 1550s and 1560s he commissioned Palladio to rebuild his family palazzo in Padua (works carried out between 1558-66); a villa in Dolo, near Venice (built 1560-64, now destroyed); another villa in Marocco, near Treviso (designed 1560-61, partially built and now destroyed).[45] Clearly Leonardo was financially exposed on many fronts, and in late 1573 he went bankrupt. His son Alvise lent him conspicuous sums, derived from his wife's dowry, and several properties and goods – including his artwork collection – were used as security («cauzione»).[46]

Leonardo died in 1575, and in the the following decade Alvise sold the vast majority of his objects. Part of the collection was acquired by Mario Bevilacqua (1536-93), the most important collector in Verona in the second half of the Cinquecento, and was displayed for more than 200 years in the family palazzo.[47] The so-called *Adorante* is currently preserved at the Antikensammlung of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. After its sojourn in Venice (where it had arrived in 1503) and Verona, the statue travelled throughout all Europe, becoming a property of Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga (1562-1612), King Charles I (1600-49), Nicolas Fouquet (1615-80, from 1653 Superintendent of Finances of Louis XIV), Prince Eugene de Savoy (1663-1736), Prince Wenzel of Liechtenstein (1696-1772), and Emperor Frederick the Great (1712-86). Several marble statues with a Mocenigo provenance were sold in 1811 by Bevilacqua's heirs to Prince Ludwig I of Bavaria who had them installed in the Glyptothek in Munich. *Endymion* – originally in the Maffei collection in Rome, where it was seen and depicted by several artists, including Marteen van Heemskerck[48] – was not included in the «lasciate

[43] Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Roma, Diversa Cameralia, t. 237, c. 107, Rome, 18 June 1570: «Lasciate passare – (a) dodici teste con li petti, antiche et restaurate, – (b) sei teste senza petti, antiche, restaurate, – (c) un pezzo di musaicho antico grande palmi tre e mezo in circa, – (d) cinque pilli antiche, doi grandi et tre piccoli, – (e) un triangolo per posamento d'une figurina et un altro pure posamento, – (f) tre putti di mezo rilievo che dorme, ristaurati, tutti in un pezzo – (g) un Cupido alto palmi doi in circa, – (h) un Baccho del naturale, – (i) una Venere similmente del naturale, – (j) doi pezzi de istiria [sic] alti palmi tre in circa, – (k) una figurina alti palmi tre in circa, – (i) doi teste moderne con li petti, quali l'ostensor delle presenti conduce da Roma a Venetia [...] per servitio del [...] cavalier Lionardo Mocenigo, gentilhuomo venetiano».

[44] ASVe, Dieci savi alle decime, Redecima 1566, b. 127, c. 472.

[45] See esp. Puppi, 'Palladio e Leonardo Mocenigo'.

[46] BMC, Ms P.D., b. 506/4, 6. Cfr Puppi, 'Palladio e Leonardo Mocenigo'.

[47] See, for all references on the Bevilacqua collection, Moretti, *In the House of the Muses*.

[48] Moretti, 'The Te Papa Endymion', with further bibliography.

passare» of 1570, but was possibly brought (somewhat illegaly) to Venice in 1573 via the sculptor Giovanni Battista della Porta. Mocenigo was fined for this transferal.[49]

As far as the collection of coins and medal was concerned, we know that Leonardo Mocenigo was in touch with some of the most influential collectors operating in the Italian peninsula (Celso, Contarini, Foscarini and Loredan).[50] He negotiated the purchase of his objects with the main brokers and antiquarians of his time, like for instance Ercole Basso, Cesare Targone, Giulio Calestano and Domenico dalle Due Regine, all active on the Venetian art market with profit. When the Mocenigo collection was dispersed, it attracted the interest of Francesco de' Medici, Alessandro Farnese and Fulvio Orsini.

It is possible that Leonardo was thinking of displaying his collection in his Paduan residence. The building has been altered over the centuries, but it presents several features that suggest that it was – at least in part – used for artwork display. The main building was frescoed by Zelotti, and the property presents a conspicuous garden, which was in direct communication with a water way, as can be seen in Giovanni Valle's map (1784).

We saw very briefly the birth and death of a Venetian collection. The objects were acquired in various ways – inheritance, import from abroad, direct exchange, purchase via intermediaries – and sold rapidly by Leonardo's son.

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[49] ASVe, Notarile, Atti, notary Vettor Maffei, 8172, cc. 278v-279v. I am currently working on this document.

[50] Brown and Lorenzoni, 'The "studio del clarissimo Cavaliero Mozzanico"', p. 56.

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