

VITTORIO CINI



It was here that he arranged his personal collections. Every room contains Tuscan and Veronese chests, Tuscan sixteenth-century furniture, eighteenth-century lacquered works, tapestries, bronzes, silver, porcelain and medals that maintain a harmonious functionality and reveal the taste of the zealous collector. But it is especially in the collection of early paintings, which Zeri so often mentioned, that one grasps Cini's voracious, wide-ranging enthusiasm and independently cultivated knowledge enlivened by encounters with famous people and important scholars of his time. (Some of these collections are visible today thanks to the donation of Palazzo Cini at San Vio by Cini's daughter Yana, and his other daughter Ylda's willingness to exhibit the Ferrarese masterworks.)

Cini's entrepreneurial spirit and his loyal patronage of art remained with him even in the last years of his life. When he bought a house in the countryside near Rome (S. Urbano alla Caffarella in the archaeological area of Appia Pignatelli), he decided to philologically restore the deteriorated Roman temple on the property, which had been painted by numerous eighteenth-century view painters.

Photographs from the archives of the family and of the Cini Foundation and from the documentary *'Si monumentum...'* by Gianni Di Capua, 2002



The Palazzo Cini Gallery at San Vio in 1984

When Vittorio Cini entrusted Barbantini with the restoration and layout of the Castle of Monselice in 1935 he was most certainly aware of his friend and advisor's focus. Barbantini had by now become Venice's director of fine arts as well as an important museologist and active cultural organiser, overseeing the Gallery of Modern Art at Ca' Pesaro in 1907 and collaborating with Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Ateneo Veneto and the Venice Biennale. This was his first chance (the second 'calling' was in 1952 for the renovation of San Giorgio) to do a restoration that would conserve the monument's structures in the order in which they had been layered, from the Romanesque era to the eighteenth century, and to create an ambience that would reflect the varied history of a building that had been in turn a medieval and Renaissance abode, passing from military to residential use.

The monumental interiors, so animated by scenographic effects, were the perfect setting for an armoury, for objects of great art historic interest and those of simple day-to-day life and customs. The furniture and numerous objets d'art were selected and purchased from the most famous Italian dealers (Contini Bonacossi, Accorsi, Sangiorgi, Jandolo, Barsanti, Barozzi, Carrer) based on their chronological and stylistic affinity. The exquisite taste with which they were arranged recreated the atmosphere of an authentic, lived-in and welcoming historical dwelling. At times the pieces of furniture, Renaissance chests from Tuscany and the Veneto, sculptures, paintings and Flemish tapestries were taken from early Venetian collections. At others a great deal of research went into seeking out individual pieces to form typologically homogeneous groups exemplifying the quality of the art of the Veneto (the Renaissance maiolicas) or reflecting the history of the monument and its commissioners.

The same process was repeated on the Island of San Giorgio where, upon completion of the restoration, the spaces had to be furnished to meet both functional and aesthetic requirements. The halls of the Foundation were refurbished with hundreds of tables, chairs, book cases, wardrobes, chests and chandeliers, many of which were genuine antiques, several coming from the Castle of Monselice.

The same careful positioning of splendid objects for everyday living can also be found in the Venetian residence Cini created when he united Palazzo Caldagno Valmarana with Palazzo Loredan, which once belonged to the Prince of Bourbon and was purchased in 1917.

(Many of these works have been catalogued and are now part of Italy's artistic heritage.)

The relationship formed between a collector and an expert is very important. In this case the expert was the art critic Nino Barbantini, whom Cini met in 1934 in Ferrara, their common hometown. It was the year of the legendary exhibition on fifteenth-century art of the Este, organised by the scholar at the end of a long period of theoretical reflection and active defense of his city's historical and artistic heritage. Perhaps Cini and Barbantini actually met through their efforts to recover and call attention to Ferrara's culture of figurative art.

This 'nostalgia' was modelled on the ideal of the Renaissance of the Este. Barbantini worked on the idea of the past as a 'living' present in two ways. The first was theoretical, through the critical formulation of a painting school of Ferrara centred on the art of the humanistic court from Cosmè Tura to Dosso Dossi (in 1941 Cini began putting together the panels of the Renaissance masters of Ferrara, which is perhaps the most important group in his collection). The second was the practical issue of reviving a monument with the awareness of its importance as a 'fragment of a symbolic landscape' and something more than merely an historical testimony to be conserved according to scientific criteria.



The Castle of Monselice, one of the Armory rooms

VITTORIO CINI COLLECTOR

Federico Zeri succinctly described the figure of the 'true art collector' as an enthusiastic and sagacious individual belonging to the upper middle class, someone who was cultured but respectful of other's expertise, who worked only with qualified dealers and almost always with the help of an expert. The collections Zeri found most interesting, from the point of view of both collectors and scholars, were those containing works by both famous and lesser known artists, the latter of which were intriguing for reasons of attribution or iconography. Along with Angelo Costa's collection in Genoa and Luigi Magnani's in Parma, he always cited that of Vittorio Cini among the few real collections formed in Italy between 1950 and 1970, after a somewhat 'lame' period in collecting.

Zeri's testimony might not be altogether impartial given that he succeeded Nino Barbantini and Bernard Berenson as Cini's primary advisor during the last twenty years of his life. But the opinion of such an insightful and key intellectual figure is nonetheless convincing.

And so it is possible to glimpse Vittorio Cini's most prominent traits: his vast and varied knowledge of culture, his sure taste, his curiosity about all forms of beauty, and the regal generosity with which he shared his appreciation for beautiful objects. To fully grasp the breadth of his personality, however, one needs to understand the collector and patron within the context of his life and his propensity to apply entrepreneurial skills to his passion for art. His innate artistic sensitivity and predilection for beauty first surfaced between 1910 and 1915, when he was in his twenties. In his residence in Ferrara, he began to collect a group of paintings exemplifying the artistic culture that had developed in the Este capital from the Renaissance on, including contemporary works by Giovanni Boldini. In the decades that followed his interest grew, expanding to include the minor and applied arts, with careful consideration for the quality of each work and its potential insertion into real living spaces.

By not succumbing to passing fads or following archeo-historical methods, the collection retained a distinct 'domestic' flavour. This is reflected in the harmony and simplicity with which the works are displayed in the Castle of Monselice, at San Vio and on the Island of San Giorgio in Venice, grouped to evidence their origin.

After the death of his first wife in June 1959, Cini married Maria Cristina Dal Pozzo D'Annone on 16 February 1967. In the last years of his life he was awarded numerous honours including the 'cavaliere del lavoro' (4 June 1959), membership to the Académie des beaux-arts de l'Institut de France (9 October 1968) and the collar of the Supremo Ordine della SS Annunziata (11 March 1975).

Cini died in Venice on 18 September 1977 and is buried at the Certosa of Ferrara.

(from the entry 'CINI, Vittorio' by Maurizio REBERSCHAK, in the "Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani" Istituto dell'Enciclopedia italiana, 1981)



Vittorio Cini and the Patriarc Giovanni Urbani in an audience with Pope Paul VI



Vittorio Cini was born in Ferrara on 20 February 1885 to Giorgio and Eugenia Berti. After completing secondary school in Venice, he studied business at the Institut International Schmidt in St Gallen, Switzerland (1903) and the following year moved to London to work in banking. In 1905 he returned to Italy to join his father's business, where he gained his first entrepreneurial experience. Founded in 1885, the firm specialised in construction (road, rail, river and maritime infrastructures) and interdependent affiliated sectors (extraction of raw materials, supply and transport on company-owned means, storage in warehouses and building-sites, workshop and plant repairs). This kind of integration would become a *modus operandi* for Cini's later work.

In 1910 Cini took over management of the firm and founded a sister company (Ditta Vittorio Cini, based in Chioggia), with which he gained recognition by winning important contracts.

During the First World War he volunteered as a cavalry officer. On 19 June 1918 he married the theatre and film actress Lyda Borelli, with whom he had four children (Giorgio, 1918; Mynna, 1920; the twins Yana and Ylda, 1924).

Between 1918 and 1919 Cini began an involved process of disinvestments and re-investments, after which he reorganised the business



Vittorio Cini with Pietro Badoglio and Giuseppe Volpi

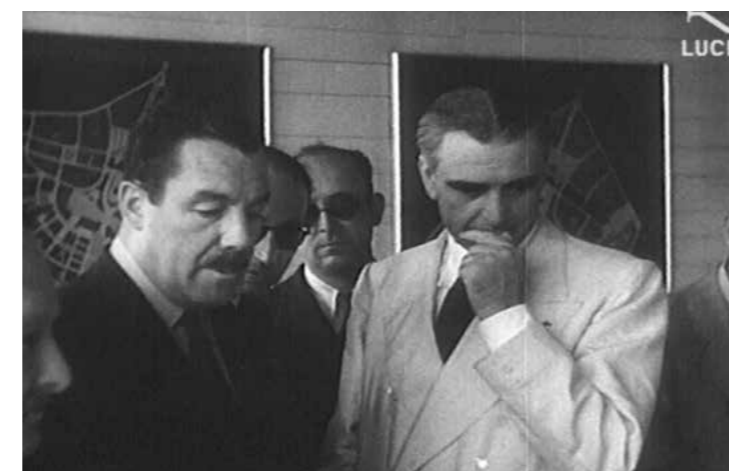
to provide a solid financial structure for his initiatives. Having verified the impact of transport on the volume of business and in response to increasing traffic and the expanding international market, he extended his operations in the maritime-shipbuilding sector. He backed the start-up of various shipping companies and began taking control over the management of other shipping and maritime-insurance companies, broadening the financial and management efforts which would conclude between the twenties and thirties. This growth culminated in 1932 when the Venice-based 'Compagnia adriatica', a fusion of six shipping companies under Cini's management, practically took control of traffic in the Adriatic. From there it was easy to join with other affiliated shippers in dominating traffic in the Eastern Mediterranean and the East. The result of this expansion was the founding of the 'Società Italiana di Armamento Sidarma' in Fiume in 1938.

Cini's initiatives after 1919 are best understood in light of his participation in the 'Venetian group' headed by Giuseppe Volpi, whom Cini often described as 'a brother and a friend'. In 1920 Cini began managing the 'Società italiana costruzioni (Sitaco)', which was about to start building in the urban area of Marghera next to the industrial zone, and the 'Credito industriale (Credindustria)', which was both the group's holding and credit company. On behalf of the 'Venetian group' he got involved in sectors that showed potential for working together: development of Marghera's industrial zone; expansion of electrical works (Sade); control of water works; textiles (Cotonificio veneziano); transport (shipping, Compagnie internationale des vagns-lits, and the company that built and operated the railways); radio and telecommunication; iron and steel works, metallurgy and mechanics; tourism (Ciga). The full extent of this diversification can be gauged by the sheer number of companies in whose finance and management Cini maintained a conspicuous role as president or advisor (29 groups in 1930-1931).

In 1921 Cini was appointed special commissioner for the reorganisation of the Ilva iron and steel works and in slightly over a year the company was able to buy back its own plants. In March 1935 he succeeded O. Sinigaglia as president, a position he held until 1939. In September 1927 Mussolini put Cini in charge of studying and providing provisions for the political, social and economic organisation of the province of Ferrara, an area that remained tricky for the Fascist

regime. Cini was appointed Senator (XXI category) on 23 January 1934. He started his term by provoking a highly charged debate on the State's role and function in the economy. Afterwards, however, he only intervened rarely and sporadically, showing signs of disinterest and perhaps a feeling of superiority towards official politics.

In October 1936 Cini was considered as a possible successor to A. Beneduce as president of the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction (I.R.I.). Mussolini and Cini, however, were concentrating on another assignment, the office of General Commissioner of the Universal Exhibition of Rome (E 42) planned for 1942. The appointment was approved the following 31 December. As soon as Cini took up the post, he presented a general programme drawing up the guidelines that, with a few modifications, were to be followed in the years to come. Despite the inevitable rhetoric exalting the 'Olympics of civilisation', the 'sense of Rome' and the 'works of fascism', the main points of the project were noteworthy. The works were to be permanent, so as to avoid unprofitable expenditure and permit the implementation of a comprehensive plan. They were to be confined to one area, around the Abbazia delle Tre Fontane, as opposed to the three separate areas of Rome, the Magliana and the Lido. Lastly, a new managerial and residential quarter was to be built.



Vittorio Cini as commissioner of the E42 (EUR)

As commissioner of the E 42 Cini also carried out a mission in the United States in June 1939 on the eve of the war. The official aim of his journey was to obtain a commitment from America to participate in the exhibition. The real objective was to meet with President Roosevelt on behalf of the Italian government and to informally clarify the respective positions in the imminence of foreseeable events.

The Second World War marked a period of contradictions and decisive turning points for Cini. After receiving the title of Count of Monselice on 16 May 1940, he was appointed Minister of Communications in the governmental reshuffling of 5 February 1943. The appointment, which he often later insisted was unexpected, came after he had already turned down a number of other posts during the course of 1942. Though the split in the Fascist regime had not yet become evident, there was nonetheless a growing awareness of the need for change in the system by removing Mussolini and mending relations with the United States and England.

Cini rapidly established contacts with 'dissenting' voices within the Fascist party (E. Caviglia, V. Ambrosio, G. Ciano, D. Grandi, E. De Bono, G. Bottai), claiming that a "disengagement from Germany" was inevitable and that it was necessary to face the 'mad' Mussolini and "have the courage to get rid of him". As minister, he was critical of the political and military direction of the war, to the point of surprising Mussolini, who during a meeting declared he was "grateful for the clear and explicit exposition which only today, 10 March 1943, is represented in its full reality". The climax was reached at the session of the Council of Ministers on 19 June, when Cini openly declared the situation unsustainable, somehow anticipating the stance taken by the Fascist Grand Council on 24-25 July. A few days later, on 24 June, Cini handed in his resignation, which, however, was not accepted and rendered public until 23 July. Mussolini did not forgive Cini and probably caused his arrest by the S.S. in Rome on 23 September and subsequent imprisonment in the concentration camp of Dachau. But the disregard of the Reich towards measures adopted by the Italian Social Republic and, perhaps, the respect in which Cini was held in political and economic circles in Germany, resulted in his being transferred to a clinic in Friedrichroda. What appeared to be an escape flight organised by his son Giorgio provided cover for the tacit consent to his liberation. Between July and August 1944 Cini

stayed at a nursing home near Padua, where he established contact with E. Meneghetti, chairman of the Veneto Region Committee of National Liberation, giving conspicuous financial support to the resistance movement.

Cini took refuge in Switzerland (Tour de Peilz) from September 1944 to December 1946. In January 1946 he sent a petition and a report to the High Court in which he contested the charges against him. The proceedings, for which both C. Sforza and Alcide De Gasperi took active part in the session of the Council of Ministers on 5 March 1946, were resolved with the ordinance of 12 March, which re-established the legitimacy of Cini's position as a senator for having taken 'a clear position against the policies of the regime' and for having shown 'zealous patriotism and violent aversion to Fascism and the German invader'. The outcome of these proceedings may have been determined by the judgement of the commission appointed in July 1945 by the Veneto Region Committee of National Liberation.

After the Second World War Cini's interests turned once again to shipping, in particular to the enterprises of the Sidarma company. It was the electrical industry, however, that engaged him most fully, as president of the SADE. Between 1953-1962 the company consolidated a vast number of the thermo-electric and hydro-electric plants



Vittorio Cini and his half brother Clemente Gandini with Nino Barbantini

in the Veneto and Friuli, ranging from the thermo-electric stations of Marghera, Fusina, Porto Corsini and Monfalcone to the hydro-electric dams of Cellina, Cordevole, Piave and Vajont. Having ceded its installations to the state-run electric company in accordance with the law of 6 December 1962, in August 1964 the SADE decided to merge with the Montecatini company, thereby anticipating its fusion with Edison.

On 20 April 1951 Vittorio Cini created the Giorgio Cini Foundation in Venice in memory of his son, who had died in an aeroplane crash on 31 August 1949. The idea of setting up a cultural institute on the Island of San Giorgio had been suggested to Cini by various friends, including Nino Barbantini, who had already promoted the restoration of the Castle of Monselice in 1935-1940 (donated to the Foundation in 1971) and who later became the Foundation's first president. The Foundation made it possible for Cini to satisfy a life-long passion that had already taken concrete form in the art collections at his Venetian palazzo and the castle in Monselice, and in other projects such as the donation of the Palazzo di Renata di Francia to the city of Ferrara for "continuing educational purposes" (it would later be granted to the University) and the creation of the 'Casa Giorgio Cini', a cultural institute in the family home donated to the Jesuits in 1950.

Cini saw the Foundation as an important cultural and political possibility for Venice. In a conference on the 'problem of Venice' organised in October 1962 on the Island of San Giorgio, Cini supported safeguarding the 'insularity' of the lagoon as a cultural incubator and placed emphasis on the mainland's role in financing the city's revitalisation. Venice was to provide culture and direction, Marghera and Mestre the strength of production and services. The idea was sustained by Cini's theories on the division of skills and labour, from which he only strayed once, as he himself acknowledged, in the 'colossal error' of backing the bridge linking the city and the mainland (inaugurated in April 1933).

Venice was also symbolic of Cini's link with the Catholic Church, which revealed itself in various ways, including the leadership of the Procuracy of St Mark between 1955 and 1967, during which he supported important restoration work in the Basilica of St Mark under the guidance of F. Forlati. In these years he formed a close relationship with Popes John XXIII and Paul VI.