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MUSEO DI PALAZZO GRIMANI  
first floor

## INTRODUCTION

Palazzo Grimani was the home of one of the most important families of the Venetian patriciate until the mid-nineteenth century. It was purchased at the end of the fifteenth century by the patrician Antonio Grimani, protagonist of the political and military life of the Republic of Venice, who became *doge* in 1521. The property was subsequently donated by Antonio to his four children and became the home of this branch of the family, since then called *di Santa Maria Formosa*. In 1981 the palace was purchased by the Italian state. A long restoration has allowed to bring the building back to its original beauty. The Museo di Palazzo Grimani was therefore opened to the public in December 2008.

Today the visit to the Palace and its collections, as a result of the security protocols for the COVID-19 emergency, follows an obligatory itinerary, which we kindly ask you to follow in compliance with the obligations and standards indicated in signage. We designed this short guide to take you on the itinerary, which starts from the courtyard. Then move to the so-called *Loggia dei Cesti*, just beyond the ticket office. Enjoy your visit!

### 1. COURTYARD

The original palace, an ancient *casa da stazio*, was an L-shaped building located at the intersection of the rios of San Severo and Santa Maria Formosa. In the

sixteenth century overall alterations were carried out for thirty years at the expense of Vettore and Giovanni Grimani (after Vettore's death, only of Giovanni, Patriarch of Aquileia); two new wings were added to the building, doubling its size and gaining an inner courtyard, Roman-style, with loggias of marble colonnades, unusual in sixteenth-century Venice. At the time the vast space of the courtyard, with its asymmetrical porticoes laden with artfully arranged sculptures, relieves and inscriptions, must have appeared a stunning invitation to visit the rest of the collection and the pictorial wonders held in the upper floors of the palace. The *loggia* where you stand was entirely frescoed with plant motifs and completed by the wonderful stucco baskets that you can still admire.

### 2. STAIRCASE

Between 1563 and 1565 the vault of the monumental Staircase, which leads to the *portego*, was richly ornamented with stuccoes and painted figures by Federico Zuccari. The subjects seemed to represent religious allegories; the painted decoration was completed with "grottesche" and floral arabesques while the stuccoes represented various sea creatures, based on ancient gems and cameos in the family collection. Overall, the staircase could compete for magnificence only with the *Scala d'oro* of Palazzo Ducale and that of the Marciana Library.

### 3. ROOM OF THE FIREPLACE

This large room was frescoed in the 1560s with the decorations composed of monochrome columns, only few fragments of which survived. Dominating the space is the monumental fireplace in coloured marble and white stucco. Look at the elegance and the quality of some details, such as the garlands and the wide-open mouth monster visible in the centre, typical of the mannerist style. Niches and shelves housed other archaeological pieces from the Grimani collection.

### 4. CHAMBER OF APOLLO

Situated in the area of the medieval building, the chambers of Apollo, Callisto and Psyche were decorated between 1537 and 1540 by mannerist artists. As we enter, the vault reproduces a scheme from the ceiling of a Roman tomb showing the dispute between Apollo and Marsyas, as narrated in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The four frescoes are by Francesco Salviati from Florence. The stucco works are by Giovanni da Udine, and so are the small figures of deities, the grotesques and the extraordinary birds. In the lunette on the back wall an allegorical representation of Roman setting refers to the origins and the glories of the Grimani Family.

## 5. ROOM OF THE DOGE ANTONIO, VESTIBULE AND CHAPEL

In a decorative style quite alien to Venetian culture a sumptuous display of rare marbles set in stucco frames adorns these rooms which belong to the final phase of the construction of the palace concluded by 1568. In the room the space was dominated by two walls, facing each other, treated with the same decorative motif. The chimneypiece wall was adorned with marble vases and portrait busts, including that of Antonio himself, now lost. This was the privileged place for honouring him, as an inscription placed at the top of the wall, still visible, indicates. The Chapel was used by Patriarch Giovanni Grimani for private celebrations of the Mass. In the place of the splendid marble altar, missing now, stands the altarpiece with a *Deposition* by Giovanni Contarini, a Titian's pupil. On one side a small window overlooks the spiral staircase of probable Palladian inspiration.

## 6. DINING ROOM

Camillo Mantovano painted the ceiling of the Dining Room, decorated with fish and birds motifs. The seventeenth-century painting in the centre of the ceiling, portraying *St. John Baptizing the People*, is derived from a painting by Nicolas Poussin, conserved at the Louvre, and replaced the painting with the *Four Elements* attributed to Giorgione in a

nineteenth-century guide. The oval shape is taken up again in the decoration of the pavement in *pastellone*, a characteristic type of crusted marble floor widely used in Venetian buildings of which we have a great number of examples in this palace.

## 7. NEOCLASSICAL ROOM

This room was refurbished at the end of the eighteenth century on the occasion of the wedding between the Roman princess Virginia Chigi and Giovanni Carlo Grimani, celebrated in 1791. The pictorial decoration of the ceiling was executed by an artist from Verona, Giovanni Faccioli. The subject of the wedding was illustrated by the mural painting which is a copy of the famous scene known as the *Aldobrandini Wedding*, a Roman fresco.

## 8. CHAMBER OF CALLISTO

The chamber dedicated to the nymph Callisto and her metamorphosis is also related to the text by Ovid depicted in the Chamber of Apollo. The story unfolds through five panels with gold background, starting from the first - on the wall opposite the windows - where the nymph is seduced by Jove whilst in her sleep, to the epilogue - at the center of the ceiling - where Callisto and her son Arcas are both transformed into constellations. Here Giovanni da Udine, rediscovered the technique of antique stucco, demonstrates his great skill by reproducing animals, still life scenes as

well as twelve putti. The latter symbolize the months of the year and are accompanied by four signs of the zodiac which refer to the four seasons. Round mirrors embedded in the stucco frames embellish the composition and, in accordance with the story narrated, recall the stars of the firmament.

## 9. CHAMBER OF PSYCHE

This room and the next once formed the Chamber of Psyche. It was divided into two separate rooms in the nineteenth century. In the original layout, which dates back to the thirties of the sixteenth century, the ceiling was decorated with five paintings dedicated to the story of *Cupid and Psyche* by Apuleius. The octagonal oil painting on the wall is probably a copy of a painting by Francesco Salviati dated 1539. It was once the center of the pictorial composition and represents Psyche worshipped as a goddess for her beauty.

## 10. PORTEGO AND DOMUS GRIMANI

The *portego* was the traditional main room of the Venetian house. In fact this is the space that most of all recalls the medieval past of the building. Here the portraits of the illustrious members of the family were housed in large stucco frames and the family used to hold banquets and performances of musical theater, an art in which the Grimani were important patrons.

From here starts the itinerary of the exhibition *Domus Grimani 1594-2019*. The collection of classical sculptures reassembled in its original setting after four centuries, realized in collaboration with the Venetian Heritage Foundation and Civita Tre Venezie, which is configured as a real rearrangement of some rooms of the palace, and in particular of the Tribuna. In fact, a considerable part of Giovanni's original collection of antiquities was brought back to Palazzo Grimani, which he donated to the Serenissima Repubblica in 1587 (today part of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale). In the museum rooms, ancient works are joined by bronzes, paintings, tapestries, furnishings, in a set that intends to evoke the atmosphere of a sixteenth-century patrician residence.

On the sides of the access door to the Camaron d'Oro there are two bronze busts of the XVI century, coming from the monastery of San Giovanni in Verdara in Padua, depicting the emperor Hadrian and the empress Sabina as Ceres. Once inside, we kindly ask you to continue immediately to the next room.

### 11. FOLIAGE ROOM

The ceiling of this room, painted in the early sixties of the sixteenth century by Camillo Mantovano, is covered with a spectacular decoration that celebrates nature, luxuriant with plants and flowers, a dense forest inhabited by numerous

animals, frequently in predatory attitude and rich in symbolical meaning. In the lunettes surmounted by grotesque, complex figurations in the form of a rebus allude to a long and troubled heresy trial suffered by the patriarch Grimani, that marked his life by denying him access to the cardinal career. On the walls, there are two family portraits with Antonio Grimani (right) and Domenico and Marino Grimani (left). The room also displays precious boxes used to host collections of gems, coins and cameos, of which the Grimani were passionate collectors.

### 12. ANTITRIBUNA AND TRIBUNA

The *Antitribuna* recently returned to host the canvas - in a valuable copy made by Factum Foundation - which was located in the center of the ceiling inspired by the Pantheon. The copy depicts *Contest of the Attica between Athena and Poseidon*, the original painting created by Giuseppe Porta known as Salviati and now preserved at the Jacquemart-André Museum in Paris.

From here you access the most important and significant place in the house, the real fulcrum and final destination of the itinerary along the rooms that precede it: the *Tribuna*. This environment, formerly known as Antiquarium, originally housed more than one hundred and thirty ancient sculptures, among the most valuable of the collection. Severe,

solemn, lit by the light falling from the central lantern, the room had a vaulted ceiling decorated with lacunars and the walls displayed niches and shelves for housing statues and busts, following an ascending path that led to the *Rat of Ganymede* in the center of the ceiling. The variety of architectural sources (Pantheon, Michelangelo's architecture) suggests a direct involvement of Giovanni Grimani himself in the design.

### 13. CAMARON D'ORO

The walls of this room, already known in the sixteenth century as the Camaron d'Oro - Large Gold Room - were entirely covered with gold tapestries featuring Bible scenes. From the Giovanni Grimani collection we can recognize the bust of Athena, the statue of Camillus and the head of Mercury (once assembled) and the sleeping Eros on the mighty sixteenth-century wooden table, with a series of precious bronzes. The plaster statue depicting the Laocoonte group is a very rare eighteenth-century cast of the well-known sculpture of the first century BC, that great interest aroused in Cardinal Domenico Grimani. The group, found in Rome in 1506 at the Terme di Tito, is kept in the Vatican Museum.