

# Displaying Art

## Exhibition Choices of Italian Museums Through Time

edited by Daria Brasca, Paola D'Alconzo and Donata Levi



Federico II University Press



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Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II  
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## *Abstracts*

Paola D'Alconzo, Donata Levi, *Historical Displays of Italian Museums: a Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas*

The paper outlines the aims of the national research project *The Forms of the Museum: Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums*, funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research. It focuses on one of the project's main outcomes: the database entitled *Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* (DAIM), a repository of images – paintings, drawings, engravings, photographs and audiovisual materials – depicting the displays of Italian museums, collected and cataloged during the research project.

DAIM has been structured and implemented within the e-Dvara platform, developed by the L.I.D.A. (ICT Laboratory for the Art Historical Documentation) of the Department of Humanities and Cultural Heritage of the University of Udine in collaboration with infoFactory. The paper illustrates the features and potential of the e-Dvara platform, highlighting in particular its ease of use in modelling data-archiving structures without requiring advanced technical or IT expertise. Open to further implementation, DAIM is conceived as a tool for museums of all types, enabling the collection and filing of visual materials that allow for the reconstruction of the history of their own displays. DAIM is complemented by an additional tool, developed by the Fondazione Memofonte of Florence, which makes it possible to easily create and develop virtual exhibitions focused on specific materials or topics (such as showcases, audiences, etc.).

By integrating research and dissemination, the project “The Forms of the Museum” promotes sustainable, flexible digital tools that foster critical awareness of the museums’ complex history and layered meanings, and that reveal to a broader audience their role as dynamic agents in the production, mediation, and transformation of cultural knowledge.

Antonella Gioli, *The Tribuna of the Galleria degli Uffizi in the Digital Atlas of Italian Museums: Visual Sources and the History of Display, 1715-1970*

The Tribuna of the Galleria degli Uffizi provides a paradigmatic case for examining how visual sources contribute to the reconstruction of the history of museum display, as demonstrated by the *Digital Atlas of Italian Museums*. Beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, drawings, engravings, paintings, photographs, and later newsreels document successive reconfigurations of the space, tracing transformations in its display from 1715 to 1970.

Originally conceived in 1583 for Francesco I de' Medici as an octagonal and symbolically charged space integrating paintings, sculptures, and precious objects, the Tribuna acted as an embodiment and microcosm of Medicean collecting.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, its densely packed and symmetrical Baroque display epitomized the aesthetic experience of the Grand Tour. Enlightenment reforms around 1780 introduced a more selective and didactic display, reducing the number of objects and privileging canonical masterpieces.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the overall spatial configuration remained relatively stable, although individual works were frequently relocated in response to aesthetic, scholarly, and practical considerations. The rise of photography contributed to the standardization and dissemination of a canonical view centered on the *Venus de' Medici*.

20<sup>th</sup>-century interventions alternated between modernist simplification and historically informed reconstructions.

The evolving display of the Tribuna thus reflects broader transformations in taste, museological theory, and cultural ideology.

Martina Lerda, *Images of the Galleria degli Uffizi in the Illustrated Press and Publications for the General Public between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*

Starting from a survey of engravings and photographs of museum interiors published in illustrated magazines and popular publications between the early decades of the nineteenth century and 1945 – carried out for the *Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* – this essay studies the dissemination of images of the Uffizi interiors in magazines, popular monographs, and museum guides. Taking into account the circulation of images from a quantitative point of view, the channels

of dissemination, the selection of iconic environments, the ways in which these are represented and, finally, the dates of publication, the analysis allows for a reflection on the forms of representation and the public perception of the Florentine gallery between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Camilla Parisi, *Works of Art and Territorial Identity: The Role of the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo*

The paper explores the role of curatorial choices in the exhibition of Renaissance art at the Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo in L'Aquila during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. These decisions not only safeguarded but also reshaped the popular identity of Abruzzo, formed between the late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period.

L'Aquila's history of seismic events, and the 19<sup>th</sup>-century secularization of ecclesiastical properties, led to the dispersion of numerous Renaissance and Baroque artworks from local churches. By the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these works were recovered and, in 1951, brought to the Museo Nazionale, where a selection was exhibited, emphasizing the connection of each work with the territory.

Through this initiative, the Museum's display of Renaissance artworks preserved the territory's cultural heritage, influencing scholarly research. Praised by Federico Zeri, this exhibition returned the works of art to the population as material heritage, but also representing intangible heritage, both recovering and redesigning it. Moreover, the exhibition's omission of Baroque works – despite their inclusion in the museum's collections – unintentionally shaped subsequent scholarship and the public understanding of Abruzzo's history.

This case study highlights the role of curatorship in shaping cultural narratives and underscores the importance of comprehensive representation to preserve and interpret regional identity.

Daria Brasca, *American Perceptions and Representations of Italian Museum Installations from World War II to the late 1950s*

The paper explores the American perceptions and representations of Italian museum installations from World War II through the late 1950s, arguing that U.S. print culture did not produce a comprehensive account of Italian reconstruction but rather a selective map of 'readable' cases that could be aligned

with American categories of modernization and framed as transferable technical solutions. The experience of the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Program (MFA&A) within the United States Army in Italy facilitated a significant exchange of contacts and knowledge between American and Italian art historians, archaeologists, and museum professionals, all engaged in safeguarding and re-locating Italy's cultural heritage. This interaction led to a reciprocal exchange of museum perspectives and installation methodologies, influencing an evolution in museum studies. This study examines how rarely American specialized magazines and journals portrayed Italian museum installations during this period, and what this selective visibility tells us about postwar cultural politics and professional exchanges. By scrutinizing articles from American magazines, the research uncovers how Italian installations were received and critiqued, highlighting shifts in curatorial approaches and aesthetic values. The findings suggest that the wartime and early postwar collaboration between American and Italian professionals enriched the cultural landscapes of both nations and contributed to global museum practices and installation strategies. This paper sheds light on these influences that shaped the postwar museum and installation debate, reflecting broader cultural currents of the late mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

Silvia Cecchini, *Renaissance Reclaimed: Brera 1943-1957*

The paper examines the history of exhibition design at the Pinacoteca di Brera during the years of post World War II reconstruction (1943–1957). Drawing on archival documentation and private correspondence, it analyzes Fernanda Wittgens's engagement, as a museum professional, with the French concept of the *musée vivant* and her appropriation of American models of museum education. On the basis of this analysis, the study reconstructs the interpretation of the museum's role articulated through Brera's architectural restoration and display strategies, which sought to redefine the institution as an instrument of social renewal in a city undergoing reconstruction.

At a moment marked by the rapid development of cinema, a second line of inquiry focuses on Wittgens's use of film as a tool for shaping Brera into a telegenic symbol of Milan's cultural and economic revival.

In keeping with the methodological framework proposed by the Research Project of National Interest (PRIN) *The Forms of the Museum. Pilot Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums* – which aims to narrate the history of muse-

ums by foregrounding visual materials so as to allow the images themselves to communicate the evolving forms of museums over the centuries – the article is accompanied by an extensive iconographic apparatus.

Annalisa Laganà, *Photographic Documentation of the Displays of the Galleria Nazionale in Parma (1912-1967): the Case Study of the Sala Ovale*

The visual history of the Galleria Nazionale of Parma is extensively documented by photographic sources produced or commissioned by the Ministry of Education, which was responsible for the conservation, protection, and promotion of Italy's public historical and artistic heritage until 1975. This vast documentation allows for an in-depth study of the museographic history of Parma's public heritage, whose layout was designed by some of the most influential Italian officials of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Particularly interesting is how the museum retained Corrado Ricci's 19<sup>th</sup>-century design for an extended period. It was only updated to 1930s museographical models after World War II, following Armando Ottaviano Quintavalle's intervention. In the late 1940s, the need to rebuild the museum – which had been severely damaged by bombing in 1944 – facilitated a radical transformation of the exhibition. This redesign was finally based on modern display techniques and advanced historical and artistic research. Sources regarding the *Sala Ovale* summarize this transformation between 1912 and 1967, culminating in Augusta Ghidiglia Quintavalle's layout, which aimed to enhance both the works on display and the exhibition space itself.

*Editorial Note*

The essays by Silvia Cecchini, Antonella Gioli and Martina Lerda were translated from the Italian into English by Helen Glanville; all other essays were revised by Helen Glanville (hkag13@gmail.com).



## *Abbreviations*

- AAM: American Alliance of Museums  
ACS: Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome  
    MPI: Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione  
    AABBAA: Antichità e Belle Arti  
AFW-FEB: Archivio Fernanda Wittgens, Fondazione Elvira Badaracco, Milan  
Archivio Ex-SBSAE-Milano: Archivio ex Soprintendenza Beni Storico Artistici ed Etnoantropologici, Milan  
ASAg: Archivio Storico della Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per le province di L'Aquila e Teramo, L'Aquila  
ASMI: Archivio Storico Macrosismico Italiano (online)  
BBM-ApBM: Ministero della Cultura, Musei nazionali del Vomero, Biblioteca Bruno Molajoli, Archivio privato Bruno Molajoli, Naples  
BEIC: La Fondazione Biblioteca Europea di Informazione e Cultura, Milan  
DAIM: Digital Atlas of Italian Museums (online)  
DOS: U.S. Department of State, Washington D.C.  
IAS: Italian Art Society  
ICCD: Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione – MiC, Rome  
INGV: Istituto Nazionale di Geofisica e Vulcanologia, Rome  
MFA&A: Monuments, Fine Arts & Archives  
MiC: Ministero della Cultura, Rome  
MuNDA: Museo Nazionale d'Abruzzo, L'Aquila  
NARA: National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.  
USIS: United States Information Service, Washington D.C.



Antje Gamble, Rebecca Howard

*Preface from the Italian Art Society*

Since its founding in 1987, the Italian Art Society (IAS) has been dedicated to supporting the study of Italian art and architecture from prehistory to the present. The IAS fosters a wide range of scholars' research and the society was honored to support the early efforts that were developed into this volume. Building from an IAS-sponsored conference session held at the 2025 Renaissance Society of America Conference, this volume brings to light the efforts of Italian museums to create meaning about Italian Renaissance and Baroque art. This volume adds to the already growing research on exhibitions of Italian art; and this project is particularly important because the majority of existing scholarship on exhibitions focuses on Italian modern art.<sup>1</sup> These kinds of studies are vitally important not only to understand the role museums play in framing artworks and their contexts, but also to understand the historiographic implications of museum exhibitions and their programming. The IAS is glad to be able to support this kind of scholarship.

This volume joins a growing field of museum and exhibition studies and also reflects recent efforts to diversify the IAS programming. The IAS board has been working to support the widest range of academic scholarship on art, architecture,

<sup>1</sup> Many of these studies are also by current IAS members. See: Bedarida, Raffaele, Silvia Bignami and Davide Colombo eds. *Methodologies of Exchange: MoMA's "Twentieth-Century Italian Art" (1949)*. Monographic issue of *Italian Modern Art* 3 (January 2020); Bedarida, Raffaele. "Operation Renaissance: Italian Art at MoMA, 1940-1949." *Oxford Art Journal* 35, 2 (2012): 147-169; Colombo, Davide. "Chicago 1957: Italian Sculptors. Qualche vicenda attorno alla scultura italiana in America." *LUK Studi e Attività della Fondazione Ragghianti* 23 (January-December 2017): 138-154; Hecker, Sharon and Raffaele Bedarida eds. *Curating Fascism: Exhibitions and Memory from the Fall of Mussolini to Today*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2022; and Gamble, Antje. "Exhibiting Italian Democracy in the 1949 "Twentieth Century Italian Art." In *Modern in the Making: MoMA and the Modern Experiment, 1929-1949*, ed. by Sandra Zalman and Austin Porter, 215-229. London: Bloomsbury Press, 2020.

and even design across the long history of human artistic production on the Italian peninsula. Recently, IAS has been working to connect to not only the field of museum studies but also to grow their membership with scholars working in museums. Supporting the editors' conference panel reflects the value the IAS sees in this field of study.

With robust representation from Italian scholars, this volume shows the important connections made through the IAS among international scholars. Founded in the USA, the IAS has long fostered a strong relationship between scholars in North America and those in Italy. This is not only a logical connection for scholars working on Italian art, but also an important institutional mission of the IAS. The society strives to make connections and foster Trans-Atlantic research through a variety of programming, from sponsored sessions at US-based conferences to the annual IAS lecture in Italy, which has been generously supported by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation since 2010.

In recent decades, many of the society's new initiatives have been dedicated to encouraging the work of emerging scholars in the field. Young scholars in the field are encouraged to chair IAS-sponsored conference panels, apply for publication and travel grants, and attend workshops organized by the Emerging Scholars Committee, which develops such programs for early career scholars of art and architectural history. In the IAS, "emerging scholars" include anyone currently enrolled in a masters or doctoral program, and anyone who has earned their degree within the past six years.

The IAS has additionally focused much of its growth efforts on maintaining an international presence. The Program Committee plays an essential role in soliciting and promoting sponsored sessions, and has recently expanded its efforts to support new scholarship through the sponsorship of panels and roundtables at a growing number of annual international conferences beyond North American on art and architectural history from prehistory to the present day. IAS sponsorship at conferences is ever expanding, as the Program Committee continually seeks out events at which the society can help its members to make an impact.

For the 2025 meeting of the Renaissance Society of America in Boston, the editors of this volume submitted an organized panel for sponsorship consideration with the IAS. After being reviewed by a group of peer scholars in the field, the panel, "Displaying Renaissance and Baroque Art: Exhibition Choices of Italian Museums Through Time," was enthusiastically chosen for sponsorship. The Program Committee was particularly excited about the varied institutions and scholars represented in the original panel, and an expanded variety of thought

is represented in this volume, as well. The panel's success was relayed to the IAS representatives after the conference took place, and the project's compilation into an edited volume reiterates the scholarly importance and timeliness of this topic. The IAS Program Committee receives many panel proposals for international conference sponsorship each year and continues to solicit submissions on such new and timely projects. Sponsoring panels like the one here developed into a published edited volume helps to further the IAS initiative of supporting the next generation of innovative and exciting new scholarship in the field of Italian art history. The IAS is honored to be involved in this volume's exploration of the fascinating histories and display of Italian art.

If you are interested in the Italian Art Society and its programming, please check out the IAS website <https://www.italianartsociety.org/> or social media @ItalianArt-Society.



Victoria Reed

*Introduction*

That's why we have the Museum...to remind us of how we came, and why: to start fresh, and begin a new place from what we had learned and carried from the old.

Lois Lowry, *The Messenger* (2004)

This volume brings together expanded and augmented versions of the papers that were presented during the session “Displaying Renaissance and Baroque Art: Exhibition Choices of Italian Museums Through Time” held at the Renaissance Society of America’s Annual Meeting in Boston, March 22, 2025. The panel introduced a global academic audience to DAIM, or the *Digital Atlas of Italian Museums*, an open-access, online research portal. As the essays in this volume will show, DAIM gathers together a variety of visual sources that document historical displays and interpretation at Italian museums, information that has not been widely accessible until now. Paola D’Alconzo introduced our RSA audience to the project, outlining the practical applications it will have for museum studies programs, academia more broadly, and indeed, the general public. Annalisa Laganà discussed how ministerial photographs of the Galleria Nazionale, Parma, contributed to changes in its gallery displays between World War I and the 1960s. Camilla Parisi explored how the Museo Nazionale d’Abruzzo in L’Aquila has served as a site of belonging and collective sense of self for its community. Finally, Daria Brasca examined the American perception of Italian museum installations during and after World War II. Their essays are complemented here by contributions from scholars who were not at the Boston meeting: Antonella Gioli and Martina Lerda, writing on the Tribune gallery at the Galleria degli Uffizi, and Silvia Cecchini on the Pinacoteca di Brera.

Although the focus of the panel was Italian institutions, all of the papers opened up larger questions about the role of museums in society, questions appli-

cable to organizations in the United States (like my own institution, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, or MFA) and elsewhere. Each scholar touched on the idea that a museum is the locus of identity, whether national or local, and explored how that identity has persevered through (and despite) periods of natural disaster and war. Italian museums – like many European cultural institutions – are normally funded and administered by the city, region, or national government, and have collections that reflect the history and artistic production of their specific geographical area. They differ in this way from American museums, which are usually privately run and may be encyclopedic in scope (for example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the MFA), focused on a particular artist or subject (like the Rodin Museum in Philadelphia), or affiliated with a university or individual private collector (such as the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston). This is not to say, however, that American museums are not sites of identity-building as well. Historically, museum collections in the U.S. were formed in large part by their local communities. Boston’s Gilded Age elite (or “Brahmins”) collected Impressionism when it was still contemporary, and as a result the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston boasts a world-class collection of paintings by Monet, Renoir, and Degas. Meanwhile, the MFA’s proximity to Harvard allowed its staff to participate in sponsored archaeological expeditions in Egypt and Sudan, enriching its antiquities collection through the division of finds, or *partage*. Today, these collections are just as much a part of Boston’s cultural heritage as the silverwork of Paul Revere or Colonial-era portraits by John Singleton Copley. Regardless of the provenance of their collections, however, the question museums everywhere must grapple with today is how we use those collections to continue to shape our identities and thereby serve our various audiences.

Only by understanding the legacies we inherit can we fully appreciate the work that lies ahead of us – the second theme that runs through these essays. Documenting our past practices, successes, and failures allows museums to draw invaluable lessons left by our curatorial and administrative predecessors. Provenance researchers, for example, are tasked with reconstructing paper trails that have been mislaid, misidentified, or lost over time. One challenge in this process is knowing where to start: who might have generated the documentation to begin with? In what context? Given the time period, how might relevant paperwork have been handled and filed? Curators, too, must look to the example of their forebears. If the attribution or authenticity of a museum object is no longer what it once purported to be, curators should ask how and why the museum acquired the artwork to begin with. What red flags were ignored at the time of its acquisi-

tion? Mistakes are an inevitable part of any museum's history. Curators in charge of building a collection will want to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, but that can only be achieved if we document and assess our earlier procedures.

Finally, as the papers in this volume will show, while museums have no control over external events like earthquakes and armed conflicts, they make choices – both consciously and unconsciously – about how to respond during those events. Today, museums around the globe face political unrest, the effects of war and climate change, as well as increased expectations for institutional transparency and inclusion. In choosing what to install in our galleries, how to craft accessible labels and wall texts, and how to serve the needs of our various audiences, it behooves museums to be mindful of both identity and legacy. How did we become the institution we are today – and how do we become the institution we want to be? Whose voices shape the stories we tell? Can museums truly be “neutral”? These studies that have emerged from the DAIM project remind us that just as museums determine the content of our collections and gallery installations, so too do the choices we make determine our identities and legacies for future museum visitors.



Annalisa Laganà

*Photographic Documentation of the Displays  
of the Galleria Nazionale in Parma (1912-1967):  
The Case Study of the Sala Ovale\**

1. *Photographic Documentation of Italian Museum Installations in the 20<sup>th</sup>  
Century: Introduction to the Typology and its Uses*

Invented in the second quarter of the century, photography became a powerful tool for mapping and cataloging public artistic heritage during the second half of the 19th century. In post-unification Italy, the need to identify and classify artifacts distributed throughout museums and dioceses across the country was widely supported by photographic reproductions of the works of art they housed. The photographs employed for this purpose proved to be useful tools for consolidating the research methods<sup>1</sup>. Photography thus took on two parallel and complementary tasks: on the one hand, it facilitated the inventory, cataloging, secularization, and protection of the newly formed public heritage<sup>2</sup>; on the other hand, by serving both as a current document and a historical source, it began to help comparative studies and deductions concerning the style and materiality of artifacts acquired by civic museums, thus supporting a philological method, the foundations of which were still being defined at the time<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> On the opposition to the use of photographic reproductions of works of art by state law, intellectuals, and museum officials, see at least Valtorta, “Note su fotografia,” 38-39; Roubert, “Tra orgoglio e pregiudizi”.

<sup>2</sup> In this regard, see at least Miraglia, “Morelli e la fotografia”; Fumagalli, “Le annotazioni di Morelli”.

<sup>3</sup> A significant contribution to the analysis of the uses of documentary photography in academic art research has been made by the group of researchers working for several years on the heri-

At the end of the century, once the tradition of documentary photography had been established mainly through private initiative, the foundation of the Gabinetto Fotografico del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione – launched under the responsibility of Giovanni Gargioli (1838-1913) – confirmed public involvement in photographic campaigns aimed at increasing knowledge of the country's heritage<sup>4</sup>. Photographs of works of art, artifacts and monuments thus began to be more widely published in specialized books and periodicals and preserved in documentary collections of national institutions, superintendency offices, state archives and museums.

What considerations can lead to an understanding of a unique documentary genre such as the visual documentation of Italian museum displays? If we limit ourselves to the specific classification and properties of photographic materials – thus excluding the many graphic and pictorial visual sources that circulated well before the diffusion of the photographic image – we can understand how these sources (excluding those taken for journalistic purposes, which nonetheless warrant in-depth analysis), were mainly produced to show how public heritage was managed and promoted in the turbulent first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Unlike images intended for *reportage* or local promotion in mainstream magazines, the photographs produced, published, and preserved by the Ministry are presented as documentary images. They display, and re-display, artifacts in the spaces of Italian museums according to museographic criteria that have evolved in alignment with theoretical shifts in art history.

The documentation preserved in the institutional archives on which this research is based, along with the material published in the Ministry's official journal, *Bollettino d'Arte*, share several common elements: wide, usually centered shots; a neutral style; and the absolute absence of visitors<sup>5</sup>. These traits reveal the true purpose of these sources: to document the practical and theoretical efforts

tage of the “Adolfo Venturi” Historical Photographic Archive of Sapienza Università di Roma. See Schiaffini, “Adolfo Venturi e la fotografia”; Ferrario, “Adolfo Venturi e la fotografia di riproduzione d'arte”; Ferrario and Leo, *Adolfo Venturi*. In addition to Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte*, 149-150, footnote 44, see also the well-known text by Venturi, “Per la storia dell'arte italiana” and the detailed analysis of Conti, “La documentazione dell'arte”, dedicated to rendering the formal and material qualities of works of art reproduced in photographs by Alinari.

<sup>4</sup> On this subject, Marsicola, *Il viaggio in Italia di Giovanni Gargioli* is significant.

<sup>5</sup> The *Bollettino d'Arte* was founded in 1907 as the official publication of the Ministry of Public Education. From 1929 to 1944, the ministry changed its name to the Ministry of National Education, and, from 1938 to 1943 the journal was renamed *Le Arti*.

made to preserve public heritage and make it more accessible. Moreover, as highlighted in earlier studies, neither reproductions of artworks nor catalog entries can provide today's historians with a knowledge of the history of collecting, museology, and museography comparable to that gleaned from visual illustrations of museum displays. Indeed, a systematic analysis of visual sources can support extensive research into how museums, museography, and collection history intertwine with political and cultural history<sup>6</sup>.

The visual history of the Galleria Nazionale in Parma is extensively documented through photographs taken by Ministry officials to record the reorganization of its exhibition spaces. The Gallery, severely damaged during the Second World War and subsequently rebuilt, emerges from these sources as a dual entity: while it was belated in dismantling Corrado Ricci's 19<sup>th</sup>-century arrangement, it swiftly adopted modern museographic standards by the late 1940s under Armando Ottaviano Quintavalle, a process that culminated in the 1960s during Augusta Ghidiglia's tenure.

This essay, therefore, proposes to consider the case of the Galleria Nazionale in Parma – specifically its prominent *Sala Ovale* – as a representative example of a trend that unfolded uniformly throughout Italy during the period encompassing the two world wars. In other words, the history of the Galleria Nazionale of Parma is a summary of the museographic experience of the entire country; in particular, it serves to observe the parameters of enhancement and interpretation adopted to present the early modern masterpieces housed in this museum. To this end, the historical displays in the *Sala Ovale* can be taken as a case in point, not only because it is a space with a strongly defined identity, but also because the presence of the *Colossi del Palatino* has imposed a constant benchmark against which to assess the selection of paintings and textiles displayed on the walls. For this reason, this essay will focus solely on visual sources documenting the layout of the *Sala Ovale* between 1912 and 1967.

## 2. *The Case of the Galleria Nazionale in Parma: Back and Forth*

This research takes as its starting point an article published in the summer 1948 issue of *Bollettino d'Arte* by Armando Ottaviano Quintavalle, superintendent since 1939. In that year, a major reorganization of the gallery took place

<sup>6</sup> Costa, "Les objets et les lieux de l'art," 20-22. The context provided in Costa, "Il display" and Costa, "La formazione di un pubblico consapevole" is also useful.

following the reconstruction of the Palazzo della Pilotta after the damage caused by the bombing raids of 13 May 1944<sup>7</sup>. At the end of the war, the Palazzo della Pilotta, which had always been considered a monument to the modern history of the Duchy, appeared mutilated; it lacked the 16<sup>th</sup>-century *Corridore* built by Ottavio Farnese, which housed – as it does now – the Palatine Library, the Gallery, and the stalls and the wooden-trussed roof of the theatre. Within three years of the armistice, the strenuous efforts of Parma’s Civil Engineering Department, assisted by the Ministry of Education, restored the museum to its original condition. While work on the other parts of the southern section continued until the early 1960s, the spaces of the Galleria Nazionale were able to welcome the public again in 1948, with a new structural layout and museum organization<sup>8</sup>.

The need to rebuild the destroyed museum rooms, albeit in the same pre-war configuration, encouraged superintendent Quintavalle to radically rethink the exhibition display. This approach aligned with the latest scholarship on Renaissance and Baroque painting in the Parma area, as well as emerging trends in international museography. In his report published in the *Bollettino d’Arte*, the author documented this new museum project. In describing the work involved in rearranging the collection, which returned unscathed to its former home, Armando Ottaviano Quintavalle emphasized the innovative changes made to the museography<sup>9</sup>.

[The gallery wing] has been completely rebuilt with meticulous respect for the original design, but using modern criteria which, without altering the architectural lines, have totally renovated and improved the halls with warm-toned marble interior cladding,

<sup>7</sup> Quintavalle, “Ricostruzione e riapertura”.

<sup>8</sup> With regard to the construction and historical events of the Pilotta monumental complex and the museum spaces, the concise nature of this essay is compensated for by an extensive bibliography that can be consulted on the institution’s official website at the following address: [https://complesspilotta.it/bibliografia/#elementor-toc\\_\\_heading-anchor-16](https://complesspilotta.it/bibliografia/#elementor-toc__heading-anchor-16). On the history of the collections, see at least Fornari Schianchi, *La Galleria Nazionale di Parma*, 6-28; Fornari Schianchi, “La Galleria Nazionale fra passato e presente”; Fornari Schianchi, “Come si forma un museo”.

<sup>9</sup> A brief mention of the return of the collection to the Gallery after the conflict also appears in Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *La Galleria nazionale di Parma* (1956), 6. Specific reflections on initiatives to protect Parma’s heritage and its temporary location in the Torrechiara Castle are offered by Salvatori, “Il Soprintendente Armando Ottaviano Quintavalle”; Spattini and Veratelli, “Armando Ottaviano Quintavalle”; Marangon, “«Difeso... con ogni mezzo sul suolo patrio»”.

fine mosaic floors, wooden parquet, and statue bases in Carrara and wine-red Lèvanto marble, air conditioning to protect the paintings from the no less serious danger of seasonal temperature variations, the painting of the walls in colours that harmonize both with the environment and the paintings, the lighting of the rooms with skylights and thermolux windows to provide diffused light and intercept the heat rays that are so damaging to the paint<sup>10</sup>.

These few words reveal the effort made by the Superintendency and the Ministry to transition the Gallery from Corrado Ricci's 19<sup>th</sup> century layout to the most advanced museographic standards<sup>11</sup>. Although Quintavalle begins his report by focusing on the museum's renewed capacity to attract visitors and showcase its heritage, the bulk of the article is devoted to a detailed description of the spatial layout, highlighting the historical and artistic value of the presentation, and how, through the rethinking of the itinerary, the curator sought to imbue the display with the task of providing a philological representation of local and national art history. In fact, the process of restoring the heritage to the city was not merely a matter of structural renovation; it was, primarily, a meticulous effort to redefine the presentation of the works of art. This new narrative was designed to facilitate a deeper appreciation of their value, artistic significance, and connection to the cultural history of the region.

The article effectively summarizes the catalog of the *Mostra parmense di dipinti noti ed ignoti dal XIV al XVIII secolo* (Exhibition of known and unknown paintings from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century), held from June to December of that year. The exhibition was both the result of studies and restoration work on the regional heritage, and a new museological proposal for the museum, in dialogue

<sup>10</sup> Quintavalle, "Ricostruzione e riapertura," 266: "[L]a della Galleria] è completamente riedificata con scrupoloso rispetto dello schema originario, ma con criteri moderni che, senza alterarne le linee architettoniche, hanno totalmente rinnovati e migliorati i saloni nei rivestimenti interni in marmo di tono caldo, nei pavimenti in mosaici pregiati, nei *parquets* di legno, nelle basi delle statue in marmo di Carrara e di Lèvanto vinoso, nel condizionamento dell'aria per evitare ai quadri l'altro non meno grave pericolo delle differenze stagionali di temperatura, nel tinteggio delle pareti intonato all'ambiente ed ai dipinti, nell'illuminazione delle sale con lucernari e finestre a termolux per la luce diffusa e per intercettare i raggi termici così dannosi al colore".

<sup>11</sup> Ricci, *La Galleria di Parma*. For subsequent changes, refer to Sorrentino, *La Regia Galleria di Parma*; Quintavalle, *La Regia Galleria di Parma*; Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *La Galleria Nazionale di Parma* (1966).

with the coeval studies by Roberto Longhi on the schools of painting of Emilia Romagna.

In 1934, Longhi published the first edition of his renowned *Officina ferrarese* which, drawing inspiration from *L'Esposizione della Pittura ferrarese del Rinascimento* (Exhibition of Renaissance Painting in Ferrara) held at Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara in 1933, aimed to trace the history of the collecting and the dispersal of Ferrara's ducal heritage. These insights were instrumental in defining the historical context of the patronage and initial destination. Such findings, which shed light on the history of collecting while reconstructing the lesser-known history of regional art, would be further explored in subsequent publications in 1940 and 1956. Concurrently, Longhi was studying the painting school of Parma, particularly Correggio, publishing an essay on the Camera di San Paolo in 1956<sup>12</sup>. The results of these pioneering studies on regional art profoundly influenced the museum's displays in subsequent years. This led to a reconfiguration of the works on the walls and a revised system of references and connections, structured around new attributions and historiographical discoveries. Indeed, since Quintavalle's tenure, the objective has been to highlight the stylistic and thematic relationships between the works on display.

Given this parallel history of studies, and in accordance with Quintavalle's intentions, we can observe how the evolution in the presentation of the collection and the interaction between objects emerged over time. This demonstrates how the 1948 exhibition, marking a significant break with pre-war parameters, moved towards a contemporary turning point: the museum as a cultural system rather than the mere inventory of a heterogeneous collection. It became a place where each work occupied an individual space and was presented to visitors with a specific rhythm in the display, and within a consciously chosen framework.

A pertinent example is the placing of the *Colossi del Palatino*, the Flavian sculptures found in Rome in 1724 representing Dionysus and Heracles. These stood in the *Sala Ovale* of the Ducal Gallery, a space built for this specific purpose during the directorship of Paolo Toschi, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>12</sup> Quintavalle, *Mostra parmense di dipinti noti*; Barbantini, *Catalogo della esposizione*. See at least Longhi, *Officina ferrarese*; Longhi, "Ampliamenti nell'Officina ferrarese" and, even if subsequent to the Quintavalle exhibition, Longhi, *Il Correggio*, and Longhi, *Officina Ferrarese (1934-1955)*. It is worth noting that a revised edition of Longhi, *Il Correggio* would be published in 1972, edited by Augusta Ghidiglia Quintavalle, who was also director of the Galleria Nazionale of Parma in the 1960s. See Longhi, *Il Correggio* (1972).

at the behest of Maria Luigia of Austria<sup>13</sup>. Over time, this room has served as a space where early modern artworks dialogue with the classical language of antiquity of the *Colossi*, according to widely diversified museological and museographic parameters. Its displays, therefore, represent, as a kind of synecdoche, the changes in the museum's overall organization through time.

### 3. *Evolution of the Sala Ovale Display through Photographic Evidence*

Photographs taken by Giovanni Gargioli in 1912 for the archives of the Gabinetto Fotografico Nazionale confirm the placement of Dionysus and Hercules in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century arrangement conceived by Corrado Ricci, which remained in place for at least three decades (figs. 1-2)<sup>14</sup>. In the gallery catalog, rearranged in 1893 shortly after he took up the role of director, and some forty years after the inauguration of the layout designed by Michele Lopez, Ricci described the display as the first in the collection's exhibition history to be based on rational criteria<sup>15</sup>. While it is not possible to verify this statement against 19<sup>th</sup> century sources, as no museum catalogs from Lopez's directorship are known to exist, it is reasonable to assume that Ricci's arrangement was the first to be conceived in modern terms. This period marked a significant development in the field of art history, and Ricci's expertise was firmly established through his work

<sup>13</sup> The foundation of the *Sala Ovale* and the positioning of the *Colossi del Palatino* are widely referred to in sources from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. See, for example, Ricci, *La R. Galleria di Parma*, III and XL; Testi, *La R. Pinacoteca di Parma*, 5-6; Sorrentino, *La Regia Galleria di Parma*, 3; Fornari Schianchi, *La Galleria Nazionale di Parma*, 13; Fornari Schianchi, "La Galleria Nazionale fra passato e presente," 164, and the catalog entries referring to the two sculptures available on the museum's official website at the following links: Heracles, <https://complessopilotta.it/opera/scultura-colossale-raffigurante-eracle/>; Dyonisus, <https://complessopilotta.it/opera/scultura-colossale-raffigurante-dioniso-con-satiro/>. For further information on the history of the collection and conservation of the two sculptures, please refer to Marini Calvani, "I Colossi del Palatino".

<sup>14</sup> The display and the reasons behind its revision are described in detail in Ricci, *La R. Galleria di Parma*, X-XVI. The large text introducing the catalog of works had already been published in almost the same form in [Ricci], "La R. Galleria di Parma" (1893-1894).

<sup>15</sup> Michele Lopez (1795-1879) was at the time vice-president of the Academy of Fine Arts, to which the Gallery was attached. Ricci, *La R. Galleria di Parma*. For a reconstruction of Corrado Ricci's career, see at least the overview by Bertoni, "Ricci, Corrado". For further information on Lopez's display, Fornari Schianchi, "La Galleria Nazionale fra passato e presente," 164, suggests consulting Martini, *La Pubblica Pinacoteca di Parma* and Pigorini, *Catalogo della Regia Pinacoteca*.

as superintendent in Modena and Ravenna, for which he remains a prominent figure in the specialized literature<sup>16</sup>.

More specifically, Ricci claimed to be the first to propose a layout that distinguished the exhibition areas by painting schools, a move consistent with developments in art history generally in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The room configurations did not neglect historical and geographical classifications but also took into account the similarity of style and size, according to which the works were grouped to maintain a purely aesthetic balance that reflected the taste of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century curators. As is clear from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century images, although it was not always easy to distinguish the spaces these sections occupied in the exhibition, Ricci aimed for an ordered display inspired by an evolutionary conception of art history, an approach previously obscured by the mixing of genres, periods, and provenances<sup>17</sup>.

In Room III, which corresponded to the *Sala Ovale* in that catalog, Ricci had brought together Lombard, Tuscan, and Venetian art. In the volume, he explained that only the latter group allowed for “a certain chronological gradation”, that is, the expression of a history, of an evolution over time in the painting practice of that geographical area<sup>18</sup>. Paintings from a variety of different sources, which were fewer in number in the museum’s collection, were then added to these works to form a repertoire diverse in style and provenance but nevertheless homogeneous in being generically ‘extra-Emilian’<sup>19</sup>.

Behind the statue of Dionysus, it is possible to recognize a 19<sup>th</sup> century *Madonna of Mercy* in late-Gothic style<sup>20</sup> mounted on the door leading to the room that used to display paintings by Parmigianino and Correggio. On the opposite side, there is a *Pastoral Scene*, tentatively attributed to the Baroque artist Pier Le-

<sup>16</sup> See at least the essays gathered in Emiliani and Domini, *Corrado Ricci storico dell’arte tra esperienza e progetto*.

<sup>17</sup> Ricci, *La R. Galleria di Parma*, XV-XVI. Donata Levi emphasizes how Ricci’s museographic work at the Galleria Nazionale in Parma was guided, at least in part, by international connoisseurship, which required collections to be arranged according to a rational historical-geographical approach. As evidenced by the sources, the most significant departure from the previous arrangement was, therefore, the display by school. See Levi, “Appunti su Corrado Ricci e la sua attività museografica”.

<sup>18</sup> Ricci, *La R. Galleria di Parma*, XXXVII.

<sup>19</sup> Ricci, XXXVII.

<sup>20</sup> Anonymous, *Madonna della Misericordia*, 19<sup>th</sup> century, detached fresco, 210×127 cm, Parma, Galleria Nazionale, inv. GN 450; see De Marchi, “Madonna della Misericordia”.

one Ghezzi<sup>21</sup>; then a small *Mary Magdalene*, once believed to be the work of Luca Mombelli, a pupil of Moretto da Brescia, but now attributed to an anonymous artist from Emilia working in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>22</sup>. Immediately beneath it is a *Madonna* of the same size, attributed since then to an anonymous Lombard artist whose dating remains uncertain<sup>23</sup>.

Behind the Hercules, on the other hand, is a copy of Titian's *Portrait of Clarice Strozzi*, painted in 1706 and initially attributed to the Neapolitan artist Antonio Lesma<sup>24</sup>; a *Purgatory* attributed by Corrado Ricci to Tintoretto, as stated on the label on the frame, but now confirmed as the work of Pietro Sorri<sup>25</sup>; *Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well*, in one of Sebastiano Ricci's many versions<sup>26</sup>; and two paintings by Jacopo Bassano depicting episodes from Genesis and the Gospels.

As can be gleaned from the bibliography collected in the corresponding entries of the museum's scholarly catalog, only a very limited number of these works had already been studied by Corrado Ricci before. Yet, they appeared in a crucial section of the museum itinerary. This speaks volumes about the aims of the display proposed by Ricci, who wanted to follow the developments of regional art history while simultaneously encouraging further research.

After World War I, the display criteria remained unchanged. A photograph published in 1926 in the museum's general catalog clearly shows how the 19<sup>th</sup> century choices had been maintained almost intact, apart from the new documented acquisitions (fig. 3)<sup>27</sup>. The difference in the position of the camera for this later source, combined with the image quality, does not allow for an in-depth comparison between the two layouts of the same room; however, it is clear that

<sup>21</sup> Pier Leone Ghezzi (?), *Scena campestre*, 17th -18th century, oil on canvas, 89×121 cm, Parma, Galleria Nazionale, inv. GN 217; see Muzzi, "Scena campestre".

<sup>22</sup> Emilian anonymous, *Santa Maria Maddalena*, late 16th century, oil on canvas, 46,5×33 cm, Parma, Galleria Nazionale, inv. GN 837; see Quagliotti, "Maddalena".

<sup>23</sup> Pronti, "Madonna col Bambino". For further information on the works housed in Room III during this period, please refer to Ricci, *La R. Galleria di Parma*, 31-59.

<sup>24</sup> Anonymous, copy of Titian's, *Ritratto di Clarice Strozzi* (1542), 1706, oil on canvas, 120×100 cm, Parma, Galleria Nazionale, inv. GN 488; see Viola, "Ritratto di Clarice Strozzi".

<sup>25</sup> Pietro Sorri, *Purgatorio*, 1600-1610, oil on canvas, 137×100 cm, Parma, Galleria Nazionale, inv. GN 226; see Quagliotti, "Purgatorio".

<sup>26</sup> Sebastiano Ricci, *Rebecca ed Eliezer al pozzo*, 1720 ca., oil on canvas, 92×117 cm, Parma, Galleria Nazionale, inv. 1076; see Fornari Schianchi, "Rebecca ed Eliezer al pozzo".

<sup>27</sup> Ricci, *La Galleria di Parma*, VII.

the scheme of overlapping layers and the combination of different artistic genres remained valid parameters for Corrado Ricci and his fellow conservators in Parma. Indeed, it is worth noting that in the gallery guide published five years later, in 1931, Antonino Sorrentino stated: “Under the current management, five new large and bright rooms have been added, and the layout by C. Ricci has been restored in its broad outlines”<sup>28</sup>.

It may be precisely the prolonged survival in Parma of an already superseded display model that makes this case especially significant. By the late 1930s, this approach had already been replaced in many museums in accordance with new criteria. This shift was clearly prompted by historical and theoretical reasons that can be summarized in the exceptional developments of museography at the time. As is well known, the need to reorganize cultural heritage following the damage of World War I prompted experimentation with new exhibition solutions throughout Europe. It was a matter of reconstructing the image, vocation, and internal structure of museums; of imagining a postwar museological project based on the history of the collection, while seizing the unprecedented opportunity to recompose entire historical and artistic collections and itineraries in new configurations.

In the 1930s, the results of extensive international coordination work begun in 1926 by the *Office International des Musées*, established by Henri Focillon within the League of Nations, began to take shape<sup>29</sup>. When the First International Conference on Museography opened in Madrid in 1934, officials and professionals from across European museums had already been debating for a long time not only the concept and social function of museums, but also their architectural form and the display of collections. This issue was approached from many viewpoints, including the analysis of materials, the design of lighting and ventilation systems, and the development of new educational proposals<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Sorrentino, *La Regia Galleria di Parma*, 4.

<sup>29</sup> The foundation of the association and the journal is detailed by Ducci, “Mouseion», una rivista”. For more information on the aims of the journal, see also Dragoni, “Accessible à tous”.

<sup>30</sup> For further insights into the contents of the Madrid conference and subsequent developments in the field, please refer to the comprehensive volume edited by Dellapiana et al., *Museographie*. Extensive and in-depth investigations into the functioning of museums and the work of intellectuals and officials in the 1930s are presented in Catalano, *Snodi di critica*, and in Cecchini and Dragoni, “Musei e mostre tra le due guerre”.

As stated in the introduction to the proceedings drafted by the editorial committee, the aim of the meeting was not to codify a general doctrine, but rather to assess the current state-of-the-art, to systematize a series of specific experiences demonstrating the evolution of exhibition practices over the previous twenty years, and to provide an initial methodological definition and operational framework. In other words, the goal was to formally establish museography as an interdisciplinary branch of heritage studies, without, however, conceiving it as a stable and general doctrine, but rather as a process of collaboration and comparison<sup>31</sup>.

Quintavalle's bibliography on the Parma Museum reveals his efforts to embrace these international advances<sup>32</sup>. The resulting transformation is evident in the photographic sources published in the summer 1948 issue of *Bollettino d'Arte*: the two *Colossi* are no longer surrounded by a disparate variety of genres and chronologies. Instead, they are accompanied only by Medici tapestries from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries – acting almost as decorative elements in this setting – mounted on curved frames and clearly selected for the elliptical room due to the difficulty of displaying the rigid volumes of paintings on canvas and panel (fig. 4)<sup>33</sup>.

Although Quintavalle's motivation appears to be primarily driven by logistical requirements, it is impossible not to notice that, this time, the choice fell on a specific type of artifact, consistent in terms of material, execution, style, and iconography. In other words, there was a calculated reduction in the somewhat disordered variety that characterized the previous display. In addition to ensuring consistency in form and content within a space that is clearly individuated, intentionally separated from the rest of the architecture to serve as a gallery, the new layout of the exhibition space succeeded in giving importance to the ancient sculptures without detracting from the historical and artistic quality of the textiles, which, with their format, balanced the overall proportions of the room and established a harmonious dialogue with the statues, further enhanced by the classical references in their iconography<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> *Muséographie. Architecture et aménagement*, 9-11.

<sup>32</sup> Quintavalle, *La Regia Galleria di Parma*; Quintavalle, "Ricostruzione e riapertura," 266, fig. 1, 273.

<sup>33</sup> Quintavalle, *La Regia Galleria di Parma*, 7; Quintavalle, "Ricostruzione e riapertura," 273.

<sup>34</sup> In relation to the tapestries see Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *La Galleria nazionale di Parma*, 23 and Fornari Schianchi, *La Galleria Nazionale di Parma*, 22, fig. 17.

#### 4. *The Modernisation of the Sala Ovale's Layout in the 1960s*

When the Pinacoteca's display was revised in 1967 by superintendent Augusta Ghidiglia, in collaboration with the young architect Guido Canali, as part of a wider project to renovate the Palazzo della Pilotta, the process of emptying the elliptical room was taken even further<sup>35</sup>. As seen in a coeval photograph taken by Luigi Vaghi and preserved in the archive records ("Archivio MPI") in the Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione (fig. 5), behind the *Colossi* there was now an empty space, balanced on one side by two large Mannerist altarpieces by Giorgio Gandini del Grano and Michelangelo Anselmi<sup>36</sup>; and on the other by smaller symmetrical canvases with sacred or mythological themes, created by Gerolamo Bedoli, Antonio Spiciotti, Pomponio Allegri, Gerolamo Muziano, and Francesco Maria Rondani, arranged to follow the flow of visitors toward the exit<sup>37</sup>.

Unlike Ricci's approach, the presence of these works in such a prominent museum space was undoubtedly linked to Augusta Ghidiglia's extensive studies on those authors and works. Her connoisseurship was already well established at the time through monographs, essays on conservation, and exhibition catalogs, which documented and disseminated her intense activity as a superintendent and scholar<sup>38</sup>. This direct connection between the form of the museum and the scholarly intention behind it is indicative of a new relationship between museums and the discipline, between art history and institutions.

Even without considering subsequent changes – which fall beyond the scope of this study – the solution adopted in the 1960s represents the culmination of a long process of institutionalizing museography. This process first gained concrete

<sup>35</sup> For further coverage of the long and controversial construction project launched in the 1960s, see Calvani, "La grande Galleria di Parma", and Canali, "Ampliamento della Galleria Nazionale".

<sup>36</sup> Giorgio Gandini del Grano, *Sacra Famiglia coi santi Michele arcangelo, Bernardo da Chiaravalle e angeli*, 1534-1535, oil on canvas, 251×151 cm, Parma, Galleria Nazionale, inv. G39; Michelangelo Anselmi, *Madonna con Bambino e santa Barbara*, 1530 ca., oil on canvas, 211,8×137,8 cm, Parma, Galleria Nazionale, inv. GN 72. See Muzzi, "Sacra Famiglia coi santi", and Muzzi, "Sacra famiglia con san Michele".

<sup>37</sup> See Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *La Galleria Nazionale di Parma* (1966) and Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *La Galleria Nazionale di Parma* (1971), 20-21.

<sup>38</sup> See at least Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *Ritrovamenti e restauri*, Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *Michelangelo Anselmi*, and Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *Arte in Emilia. Seconda*, Ghidiglia Quintavalle, *Arte in Emilia*, Ghidiglia Quintavalle, "Il 'Cenacolo' e la 'Prospettiva'".

recognition in the 1920s and 1930s and, at least in Italy, solidified with clear results during the postwar reconstruction period. From that point onward, the field would move with increasing confidence towards solutions similarly aimed at simplifying the visitor experience, making it more rhythmic and orderly, and conceiving the museum visit as an opportunity for the public to acquire theoretical knowledge. This is evident in the clear demarcation of the display space, the emphasis on pauses, and the differentiation of the spatial context in which the 'museumised' work is placed, all of which were central to Augusta Ghidiglia's proposal. Such aims can only be achieved through an exhibition design inspired by criteria of differentiation rather than accumulation.

Today, the *Sala Ovale* is entirely dedicated to the two classical sculptures which dominate the exhibition space. Their imposing three-dimensionality fills the architecture, which is now sufficient on its own to establish a formal dialogue with the works (fig. 6).



Figure 1. Giovanni Gargioli, *Parma – Pinacoteca oggi Galleria Nazionale del Complesso Monumentale della Pilotta* (Installation view of the Statue of Young Bacchus with a Faun); gelatin silver print, 1912. Galleria Nazionale, Parma. [Source: ICCD, inv. C006555, <https://fotografia.cultura.gov.it/iccd/item/C006555>; courtesy of Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione – MiC]



Figure 2. Giovanni Gargioli, *Parma – Pinacoteca oggi Galleria Nazionale del Complesso Monumentale della Pilotta* (Installation view of the Statue of Hercules); gelatin silver print, 1912. Galleria Nazionale, Parma. [Source: ICCD, inv. C006556, <https://fotografia.cultura.gov.it/iccd/item/C006556>; courtesy of Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione – MiC]



Figure 3. Alinari, *Parma – Pinacoteca. Veduta della Galleria*, installation by Corrado Ricci, before 1926. Galleria Nazionale, Parma. [Source: Archivio Fotografico del Complesso Monumentale della Pilotta; courtesy of MiC – Complesso monumentale della Pilotta]



Figure 4. Libero Tosi, *Parma – La Sala Ovale con Ercole e Bacco e gli arazzi medicei*; gelatin silver print, 1948. Galleria Nazionale, Parma. [Source: ICCD, inv. MPI6113970; courtesy of Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione – MiC]



Figure 5. Luigi Vaghi, *Parma – Galleria Nazionale, X Settimana dei Musei 1967, Sala V*; gelatin silver print, 1967. Galleria Nazionale, Parma. [Source: ICCD, inv. MPI6100446, <https://fotografia.cultura.gov.it/iccd/item/MPI6100446>; courtesy of Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione – MiC]



Figure 6. Giovanni Hänninen, *Parma – Galleria Nazionale, Sala Ovale con i Colossi del Palatino*, 2018. Galleria Nazionale, Parma. [Source: Archivio Fotografico del Complesso Monumentale della Pilotta; ©Giovanni Hänninen, courtesy of MiC – Complesso monumentale della Pilotta]

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*Displaying Art: Exhibition Choices of Italian Museums Through Time* brings together a series of methodologically oriented studies that examine the history of Italian museum displays through the critical use of visual documentation. Developed within the PRIN 2022 project *The Forms of the Museum: Pilot-Project for a Digital Atlas of Italian Museums*, funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research (MUR) and the European Union, the volume explores the epistemic potential of a large, structured corpus of images for reconstructing and interpreting exhibition practices across time.

Through case studies on the Uffizi, Brera, Parma, L'Aquila, and the American reception of Italian museums, the essays treat photographs, illustrated periodicals, postcards, guides, films, and other visual materials as primary documents rather than mere illustrations. In doing so, they show how museum displays were not only arranged and transformed, but also circulated, interpreted, and made meaningful for different publics, highlighting the role of images in shaping institutional narratives, public reception, and cultural value.

At the center of the volume is the Digital Atlas of Italian Museums (DAIM), conceived not simply as a repository, but as a research tool that enables comparison, relational analysis, and new interpretative perspectives. The book offers an original contribution to museum history while demonstrating the broader interdisciplinary value of visual sources for the study of cultural politics, public memory, and the social life of images.

