



FRANCESCA  
& MASSIMO  
Valsecchi  
COLLECTION

**Palazzo Butera**  
**The Francesca and Massimo Valsecchi collection**  
**Guidebook**  
**2023**







The purpose of this guide is to provide you with our basic description of what you will see as you walk through the spaces of Palazzo Butera.

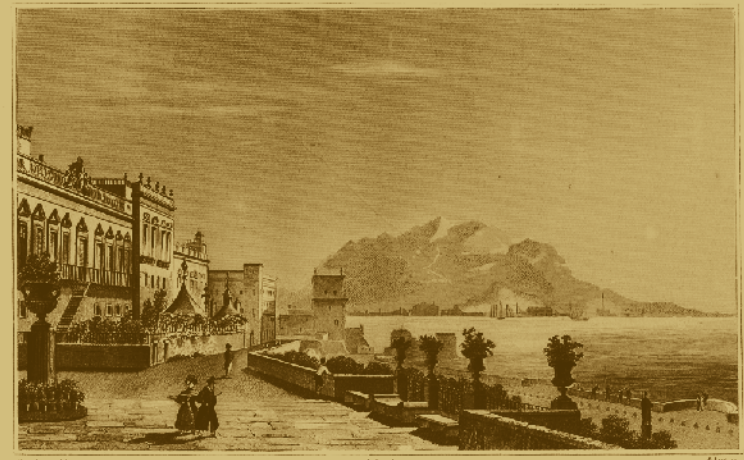
All the works exhibited are owned by Francesca Frua De Angeli and Massimo Valsecchi and most arrived in Palermo for the first time once the restoration of the building was complete. You will notice that there are no exhibit labels in the museum. This is because we invite you to engage with the web of associations on show – combining salons, frescoes, pictures, displays and objects.

We invite you not to give in to the temptation to search out the most famous works but ask you to enjoy, above all, the fruits of your own intuitive gaze.

*Comments by Giovanni Cappelletti, Palazzo Butera's architect and specialist in museum design, are in italics.*



## Chronology



**1692-1701:** Girolamo Branciforti, Duke of Martini, buys a row of tenements to build a Casino by the sea and entrusts the building project to Giacomo Amato.

**1735:** As the leading nobleman in the Kingdom of the two Sicilies, Ercole Michele Branciforti and Gravina, Prince of Butera, is now also owner of Palazzo Butera. At the time of Charles of Bourbon's coronation, the palace is already one of Palermo's most important.

**1759:** A fire breaks out at Palazzo Butera: « The main section of the house was consumed by fire, lasting nine hours, and all the furnishings and precious furniture of that house went up in flames » wrote the Marquis of Villabianca, in his *Palermo diaries* of 1759.

**1760:** Ercole Michele buys the next door palace from the Moncada. Thereafter Palazzo Butera takes on today's dimensions including the two courtyards. Between 1762 and 1764 Giocchino Martorana and Gaspare Fumagalli paint their frescoes.

**1765-1766:** Salvatore Branciforti inherits the prince of Butera title. Between 1765 and 1766 new teams of artists decorate the interiors of Palazzo Butera, under the supervision of the architect Paolo Vivaldi. The team includes the woodcarver Girolamo Carretti, the painters Gaspare Vizzini and Gaspare Cavarretta, and the plasterer Francesco Alaimo. The prince moves to Naples to pursue his career at Court. He returns to Palermo thirty-three years later, shortly before his death.

**1799:** The new prince of Butera, Ercole Michele Branciforti and Pignatelli, gives Palazzo Branciforti (now the *Fondazione Sicilia*) to the charity *Monte di Pietà* and buys Palazzo Benso located next to Palazzo Butera – now housing the Regional Administrative Court.

**1812:** Ercole acquires Palazzo Trinacria and Palazzo Piraino. The latter is now also owned by the Valsecchis and will become Palazzo Butera's Study Centre.

**1814:** On the death of Ercole Michele, the Branciforti family dies out. His granddaughter

Stefania Branciforti marries Giuseppe Lanza di Trabia, and the palace is passed to them.

**1885-1947:** These years see parts of the palaces rented out. But with the marriage of Giulia Florio to Pietro Lanza di Trabia, the family returns to live there, for about another sixty years.

About **1950:** Palazzo Butera houses the Regional Department of Local Government.

**1968-1982:** the secondary school "Marco Polo" is based at Palazzo Butera.

**2016:** Palazzo Butera is purchased by Francesca and Massimo Valsecchi and the restoration begins.

**2018:** Palazzo Butera opens to the public as a building site.

**2020:** The restoration is completed. The majority of the Francesca and Massimo Valsecchi collection, after a long-term loan at the Fitzwilliam Museum of Cambridge and at the Ashmolean Museum di Oxford, arrives in Palermo.







## Ground Floor



In the Ticket Hall you can see works by Berty Skuber, David Tremlett and Eugenio Ferretti. The Bookshop that once housed the palace archive is where you can now purchase our publications. The original colours of the library shelves, Pompeian red and “coffee”, were discovered under a layer of white paint during the recent restoration. In 1795 the architect Pietro Trombetta reconfigured this room in the neoclassical style. Many archive documents were found in the cavities and although most of these have been rescued not all were recoverable. In a homage to forgotten memories, you can see them still stacked behind a glass vitrine.

## The Ticket Hall and Bookshop

**The iron gate** separating the main entrance from the courtyard is composed of iron panels that are cut using a high pressure water jet. Its design carries Palazzo Butera's logo as conceived by Italo Lupi. The surface colour is created by allowing the iron to oxidise. Once the desired tone is reached the process of oxidation is stopped by applying a layer of wax. The result is a textured, organic surface, quite different from that which would have been achieved with a simple varnish.







## Ground Floor

## The Palm Courtyard



In the first courtyard, an art installation by **Anne and Patrick Poirier** makes use of fragments found in the courtyards and elsewhere on the ground floor. These include parts of an architectural cornice, and a fountainhead with dolphins. These pieces are arranged to create new relationships with each other and their surroundings. The courtyards function in a similar way to piazzas. As Baldassare Castiglione observed at the Duke of Urbino's palace, Palazzo Butera seems « not to be a palace, but a city in the form of a palace ».

*The massive iron and glass doors take their design from a paneled motif found on the original doors. I used this pattern over the entire surface and achieved the structure using flat iron filaments. I then in-filled the spaces with reed glass. Thus the doors become a membrane through which light filters into the galleries from the outside, but the courtyard remains obscured. In the evening the opposite happens with the doors becoming like magic lanterns, suffusing the outside courtyard with light.*





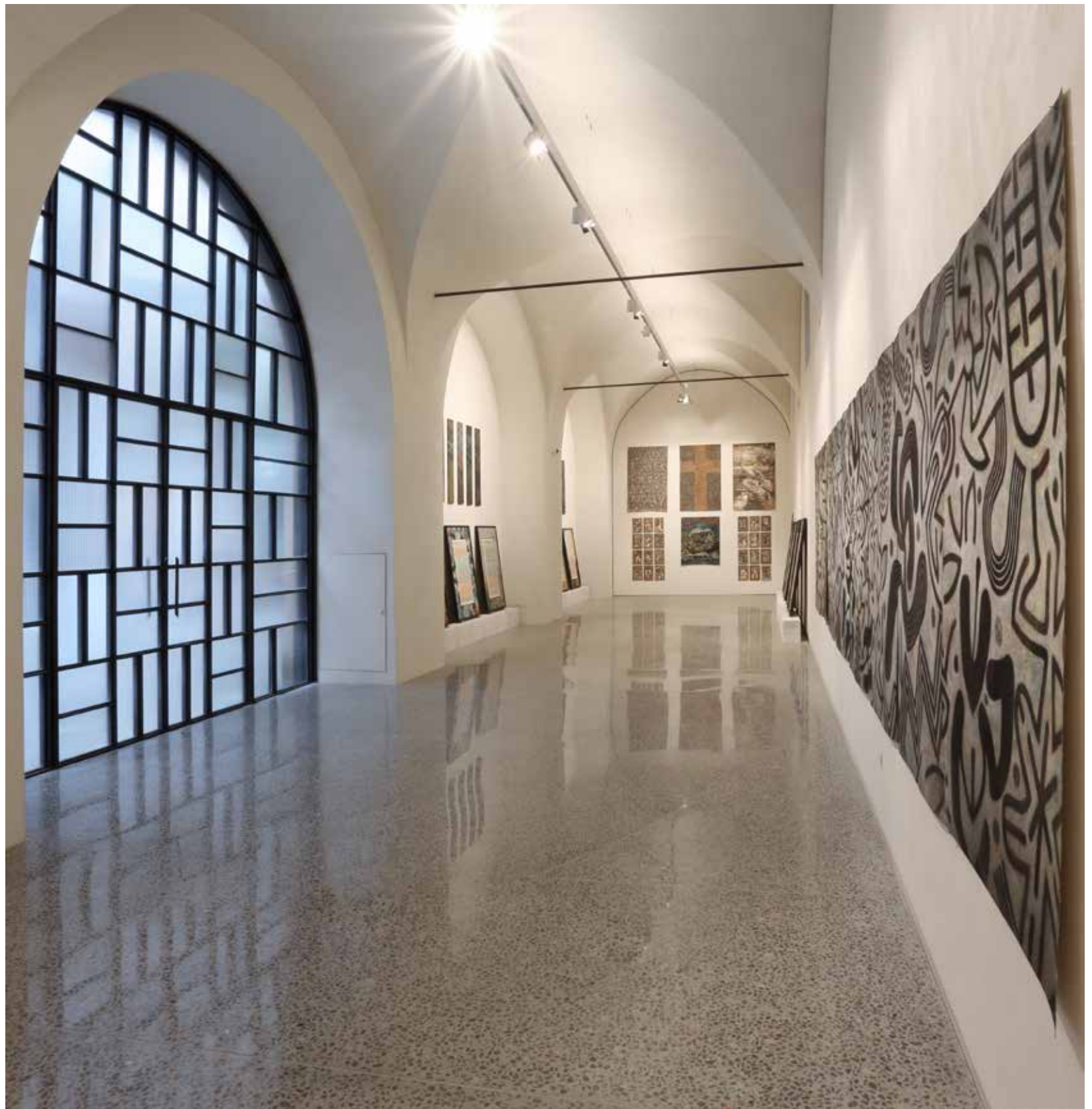
## Ground Floor



### Room 1

*The new floors in all the galleries are composed of polished calcestruzzo, which is a compound of cement, gravel and sand. These heterogeneous materials react differently when polished, such that the gravel gleams like a mirror whilst the concrete remains dull. This difference causes the floor to flicker with countless small reflections embedded in the opaque concrete surface.*

*The floor has been divided into sections using iron or aluminium filaments that prevent the smooth surface from cracking. The floor is detached from the walls of the rooms by a few centimeters, giving the impression of an autonomous volume. This serves a dual purpose of highlighting the new architectural intervention and giving the exhibited works the illusion of being placed upon a raised dais. The rooms are kept warm with underfloor heating.*



## Ground Floor



### Room 1

The first of thirty rooms in the exhibition itinerary of Palazzo Butera is a homage to **Tom Phillips**, an English artist who died on November 28, 2022 at the age of eighty-five. The works in this room summarise the breadth of his work: *Rima's wall* (1991), the *Terminal greys* (started in 1970), the *Curriculum Vitae* (1986-1992). We have given *Rima's Wall* central importance as it is one of Phillips' masterpieces. Descriptive of a passage from HWK Collam's *Unhaunted Comma*, the heroine Rima discovers savage wall drawings in an ancient cave – « All light shone on the wall in slow sequence... a seamless parade of urgent dancing steps... scattered curves and dots... driving the rythmn on ». *Curriculum Vitae* is made up of twenty panels created over seven years. Phillips was at the peak of his career working in television, writing music, curating important exhibitions, including an important retrospective of his work at the Royal Academy. It is a dynamic encyclopedia of painting and collage, of literary heroes and musical genius, of childhood impressions and personal encounters. Above the *Curriculum Vitae* are hung the *Terminal Greys*. On Saturdays Tom would finish off paint tubes to create these colour swatches as records of what he had used. The three crosses (1996-1997) and the drawings on the end walls, including the large 1492 *Memento Mori* (1992), are meditations on the Sacred and the Profane.







## Ground Floor



The contemporary art works on display here, have often been created specifically for exhibitions curated by Massimo Valsecchi in his gallery in Milan. Opened in 1972, it was always imagined as an experimental space.

Since their debut at Villa Medici in Rome at the beginning of the 1970s, the Poirier have appropriated those aspects of reality that captured their heart and vision – antique sculpture, plants, ancient inscriptions – using model casts and building up collections of herbariums. This process is evident in their work to the right of the entrance.

## Room 2

The rest of the room is entirely dedicated to two artists: **Eugenio Ferretti** and David Tremlett. The two series of Ferretti works are the grey *Atrofie* (1988-1989) and the black *Notturmi* (1989-1990). These form part of an imaginative vision using the medium of paint. They explore the invisible that exists in both man and nature.

**Tremlett's** four pastel works, first exhibited at the Centre Georges Pompidou in 1985, rework experiences, colors, motifs and shapes absorbed during trips to Africa, Mexico and India. You will see other works in this series throughout the palace.





*A new staircase wraps itself around the only pillar that holds up the vaulted ceiling, its design is inspired by the material with which it is made, iron, and seeks to exploit its full potential. It is an airy structure, bolted on in only two places and carrying treads of up-lit glass. At the top, a narrow walkway is cast across the void until it reaches the opposing wall. A continuous ribbon of light forms, unfolding, and passing through a slim mezzanine gallery with its own up-lit floor. The walkway continues on and finishes suspended mid-air and looking out over the old coach house. The design is intended as an Architectural Promenade providing an alternative perspective on the shape of the exhibition rooms and the works presented in them.*

On show here are photographs of **Thomas Joshua Cooper** resulting from his fifteen-year research (1970-1985) into the sacred sites of Native American, Celtic, Aboriginal and other ancestral religious communities: « These images have to do with myths and rituals – the stories – of the world and those who live there ».





## Ground Floor



Back on the ground floor, all the chalk drawings in this room are by **Elisabeth Scherffig**, a German artist who transforms hidden details found in scrap metal, construction sites or reflections of light seen through glass. In executing her works, there is an unpredictability as to how they might turn out. They are not precise copies of enlarged photographs, but are drawn freehand, with only a simple grid on paper as a guide.

## Room 3

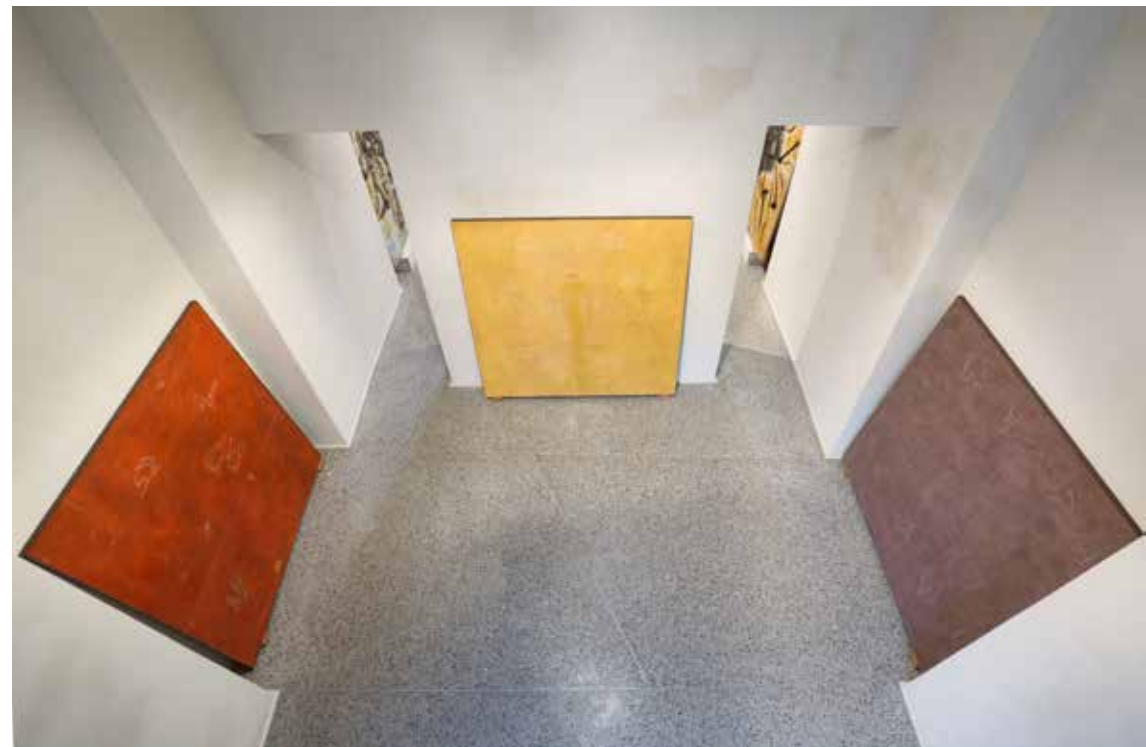


## Ground Floor

To your left you will see **Ferretti's** drawing exploring the nature of books – a subject that has intrigued the artist since the 1980's. By observing the world about us, we can capture something irrepressible in books. Here Ferretti uses small coloured images superimposed over each other so that they appear disordered and though crossed-out, their apparent chaotic force cannot altogether be contained.

## Room 4

The three *Retroversioni* of the same artist continue his theme of using monochromatic sheets, layered on top of each other until they achieve a translucent tone. In these expanded spaces, slender lines and geometries come to life, creating reflections and combinations of potentially infinite forms.







Through the openings to your right, you will find works by **Claudio Costa**, an artist for whom the point of encounter between cultures was a rich resource and constant inspiration.

Here you will find two sculptures and four large canvases that were exhibited in a show called *Europa Africa versus*, at the Massimo Valsecchi Gallery in Milan in 1995. The period between 1990 and 1993, Africa was for the artist a well-spring of life experience and learning. He traveled the length and breadth of the continent over several decades and at only 52, his untimely death coincided with this 1995 exhibition. Costa

saw Africa as a neglected repository of materials he could extract and rearrange in continuous experimental forms. The Continent thus released for him an energy that also included forces like alchemy and shamanism, forces the artist explored in other ways during his life.

Throughout Costa's work – as in *Two Heroes* seen against the wall by which you entered – you are invited to learn from other cultures, from peasants, from the mentally ill and from non-Westerners. You are invited, in other words, to learn from those who are often seen as subservient to the West's relentless hunt for technological progress.





**The Old Coach House** is the grandest space on the ground floor: in 18th century Palermitan palaces, great importance was attached to the spaces for carriages and prized horses. Keeping this in mind, we decided to remove everything that over time had been added and compromised the space's original character

and beauty. Walls had closed up the open areas that flowed between the original Billiemi stone columns; floors hid the original stone flags and altered the proportions and balance of the room. All these were removed and the ancient grandeur returned, and it is as if the room breathes once more.







On the first wall, the *Bordeaux Diary* by the **Poirier** (1973), is the result of a residential stay at the Centre des Arts Plastiques: the paper casts are lifted from the Bordeaux Cathedral and are accompanied by leaves collected daily and photographs printed on porcelain. Above the *Bordeaux Diary* are four paper casts of Medusa.

On the back wall, five paintings by **Phillips**. He creates synthetic images of skies and meadows in England, and expands the stylistic theme using allusions to photos or postcards in Berlin Wall. Here we are confronted by the irony of a divisive man-made wall that cannot divide earth or sky. On the left-hand side, *Skin Game* (1974) confronts apartheid in a similar manner.

Opposite the *Bordeaux Diary* are more works by **Costa**. In the cabinets are reproductions of artefacts along with photographs of indigenous peoples like the Maori and the Caragià. In the early 1970s he used art to criticize conventional attitudes of Western culture as expressed by museums. His anthropological research reinforced his theoretical and political ideas.

Displayed alongside and above is *Man, Nature and Culture*, another series by Costa made at a similar time, and includes real objects and notes on the cultures studied.

Two further drawings by **Tremlett** (*Old Crow Yukon I and Old Crow Yukon II*) are part of the same series in the Room 2 and described earlier.

## Ground Floor



## Room 6

A constant throughout the Poirier's oeuvre are the Greek Myths – the work visible on the left in the photo above belongs to the series of *Theogonies* (1988).

**Costa's** started his research at the end of the sixties studying craniology and with how matter is dissolved by acids: two works demonstrating how science can translate into striking artefacts are exhibited here. Costa's research on non-Western cultures leads him to take an interest in Papua New Guinea's Asaro mud men. This resulted in a 1984 work where photographic images are flanked by the artist's crafted objects. In the *Portrait of Artists as Old Men* (1979),

Costa assembles a collection of photographs behind stained glass. Geniuses such as Einstein are juxtaposed with simple farmers from different parts of the world. The latter toil in their daily labours alongside quotes from the Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead.

Further on, in an old ice room, is a work by Eugenio Ferretti (*Solitudo*); and then another drawing by Elisabeth Scherffig (*Steinmetzarbeiten*, 1985).

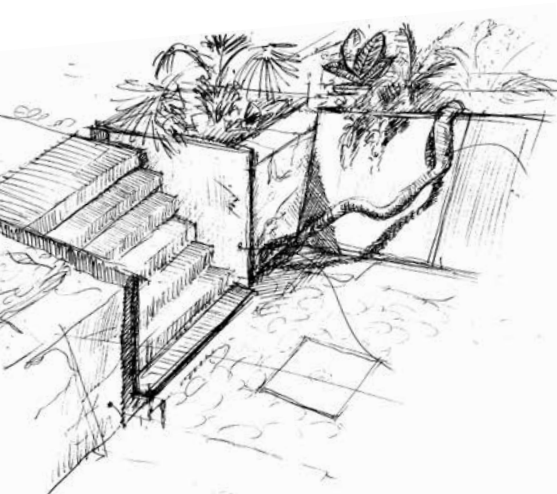
In a small space under an old staircase are another two works by the Poirier. Going back towards this Room's exit the three dark grey panels are by Ferretti.





*This room was the Palazzo's old boiler room. Removing its floor, the builders discovered an underground rainwater drain built in the 20th century and lined with 18th and 19th century majolica tiles. As they continued with the excavation, they realized that the drain had an inhabitant. In search of water, **the Jacaranda tree in the courtyard had sent a root off into the drain**, finding easy passage and a source of water. The root explores all the limits of the drain, and the combination creates a thing of beauty. A new floor was needed to highlight this intriguing find. Using the same design as before, I created an outline with iron filaments that includes a small lip welded to the base. This lip then holds the calcestruzzo flooring on one side and the reinforced glass on the other. The new floor, with its abstract geometry, reveals the extraordinary character of nature's intelligence, becoming, perhaps, its own work of art?*





## Ground Floor



## The Jacaranda Courtyard

*The new courtyard paving uses three different materials: antique Billiemi stone, cobbles and modern Billiemi blocks. The latter separates the cobbles from the old stone. We invented the linear look of the modern Billiemi blocks creating a new way to treat this traditional stone. We used this same treatment on the stones in the ticket office and at the entrance to the museum. The archive papers identify the Room 7 as the old stables of the palace. These same documents also spoke of the existence of two ramps that led down from the courtyard*

*to the lower ground room. None of this was visible before the restoration. Starting work inside the gallery, we soon extended out into the courtyard. The dig first revealed an ancient retaining wall and then the cobblestone ramps mentioned in the archive papers. We thought these finds should be preserved and so I designed steps made from sheets of iron that allow the ramps to be seen from above. Again using iron, I created a casing that delineates and contains the dig and bolts the steps to the floor. A walkway connects the staircase and the gal-*

*lery. Under this, where more of the ramp used to be, Anne and Patrick Poirier have placed more architectural fragments dug up during the excavation.*





At the bottom of the steps, on the left of the entrance is a work by the Poirier made for the first Istanbul Biennale (*Memoria Mundi*, 1989). At either end of the long gallery are drawings by Elisabeth Scherffig, which are remarkable from both far away and close up; at a distance, the three-dimensionality of the objects explored by the artist's chalk drawings become impressively clear. Looking along the long wall a series of photographs by the Englishman **Hamish Fulton**, who identifies himself as a 'walking artist'. The act of walking places a distance between him and his own culture, thus broadening his horizons. In the middle, **Michael Badura** reconstructs the different versions of three eyewitnesses to a bank robbery in 1970's Germany, using a series of three panels of photographs. Carrying on, *Navigazione in solitario* (1975) by **Gianfranco Baruchello**, a major Italian artist of the second half of the 20th century, who died in 2023. This series of paintings uses one of the first people to sail the Atlantic solo, to present a collection of quotes, landscapes and political opinions.

Opposite is *Stoned in Venice* (1962-1975) by **Erik Dietman**, a Swedish artist who builds a story with collages, drawings, newspaper articles and provocative and ironic statements. This story recounts his various Venetian experiences, from the Biennale to imaginary cats drowning in the canals.



## The cafeteria

# Le cattive



*Leaving Room 7 and climbing the stairs to your right, you reach Le Cattive, Palazzo Butera's cafeteria. The masonry restoration of the terrace above allowed us to insert the cafeteria in the rooms below it. Located between the Cattive promenade and the Jacaranda courtyard, the cafeteria is in a unique position because it connects Palazzo Butera with Palermo's seafront. The stairs from the cafeteria on to the Cattive, are designed to blend with the pre-existing flower beds and deal with the height differential between the cafeteria and the walkway. The cafeteria provides a place where you can eat or drink, away from the traffic rumbling below.*





## The Cative Promenade



The promenade owes its name to a legend that tells of how sailor's widows would be constrained to gather here, apart from others, due to their state of mourning. On these 16th century city walls, separated from the society of others, these women would fall into poverty and prostitute themselves. Hence the double meaning of the name *Cative*, as the women were both captive and sinful.

*From an urban plan perspective, Palazzo Butera has always stood impregnable between the city at its back and the coast at its front. The palace was like a wall separating much of the Kalsa district from the sea. Through the cafeteria there now exists a right of access previously denied, that also allows public entry to the Cative. Along this walk we have planted a garden with palm trees, scented shrubs and Bougainvillea.*

*These extend the shaded areas of the pergolas on the terrace above, transforming the promenade into a delightful green urban space.*







## First Floor



The staircase was designed at the beginning of the 18th century by Giacomo Amato. Made of red Ogiastro marble, it is very much built in the tradition of the time. In 1827, a young Viollet-le-duc, travelling to Palermo, made a sketch of these stairs. After the impressive decorative refurbishment of about 1763, the changes made by the Lanza family between 1880 and 1920

## Staircase

compromise the original fabric. As can be seen with the installation of a lift that connects the three principle floors. Possibly the most beautiful fresco in the palace is that at the top of the staircase. It consists of children blowing bubbles, the probable self-portrait of Martorana and girls admiring themselves in mirrors, all of which add to its charm.



E. Viollet-le-Duc, The staircase at Palazzo Butera, 1827

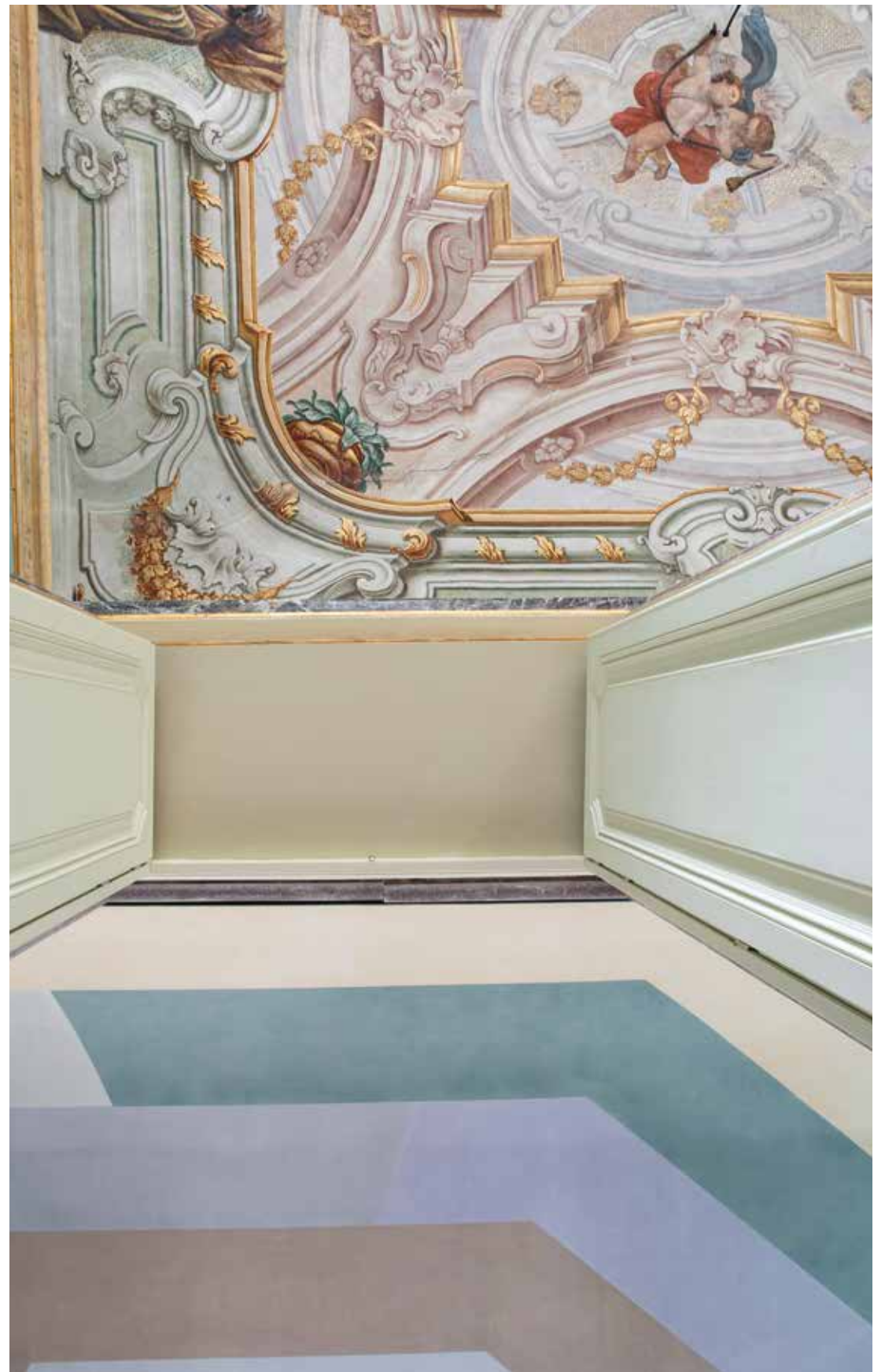


## First Floor



On the first floor you will initially enter an antechamber with a Tremlett pastel drawing (*Drawing 10 Kondoa*, 1983) and an Arthur Melville watercolour. Going on into the next room, the new ceiling contains a work by Tremlett that is a contemporary dialogue with the quadrature fresco ceiling in Green Room next door. This is the first ceiling of a number of his in the Palazzo.

The formal compositions of the ceiling frescoes at Palazzo Butera are by **Fumagalli** and the figures are by **Martorana**. The ceilings were probably painted between the end of 1761 and 1762. They show Martorana was still painting in the manner of his Roman period a few decades earlier.





**A new design for the suspended ceilings.** For these I took inspiration from the vaulted ceilings that characterize the State Rooms. I wanted to avoid creating a ceiling that was too banal or flat. First, I detached the edges of the ceiling from the walls; then I rounded the corners in order to accentuate its formal autonomy. In doing so, the suspended ceiling appears as if it is floating, or even filling out, like a sail. It is an architectural novelty that thanks to its geometry, creates the same airiness found in the historical ceilings, but in contemporary way. The floor is made up of old majolica tiles found during the restoration. These have been set out in a pattern with new terracotta tiles.





Giocondo Albertolli, Girandole, 1781



The first time you come across Rococo decoration in Palazzo Butera is here in the Green Room. Finished in 1766, the mirrors and over-doors are carved by **Carretti**. Inside the ovals are copies of paintings by Vizzini, whose originals can now be viewed up-close on the second floor. The decorative arts pieces belong to the Valsecchi Collection with as the two mirrors by Antonio Corradini, a mid-18th century Venetian sculptor, and appliques by **Giocondo Albertolli** for the Sala delle Cariatidi of Palazzo Reale, Milan, 1781. The chairs are by Augustus Welby Pugin, for the House of Lords, Westmin-

ster, London. On the table designed by **Philip Webb** for William Morris sits a Tiffany vase and a carving of John the Baptist's head. On the mantelpiece is a biscuit bust of Buffon, the French natural scientist (the marble original is in the Louvre). Late 19th century French vases by Daum and Gallé, are in the glass cabinets.

Through the door opposite the Library there is access to four rooms that are opened to the public from time to time. For further information, please ask a member of staff or refer to our website.

**Designs for the Display Stands.** *To ensure that the works by Corradini and Albertolli are not seen as part of the original décor of the palace, but are instead part of the Valsecchi collection, I displayed these on bespoke easels.*

*I took my inspiration for the base of these easels from Carlo Scarpa's wood and brass examples made for the Correr museum in Venice. I have used just one material, iron, to distinguish ours from those in Venice. And I have sought to create something very elemental and minimalist by using standard panels and rods joi-*

*ned by bespoke bolts. The display cabinets are in oak and are conceived as a composition in two parts; the casing that houses the objects in a minimalist wooden structure, with an under-lit glass plate upon which the objects sit. The slender legs that support the cabinets are at diagonals. The intended effect is to detach the cabinets from its base and lifts them upwards.*



## First Floor



Prince Ercole Michele Branciforti of Butera and Pignatelli (1752-1814), collector of oriental gems, created the lower part of this library in walnut. The upper part was installed in 1899, as confirmed by a date discovered when dismantling a shelf during the room's restoration. The Japanese paper casts in the wall cabinet were made by the Poirier in 2018 from Roman sarcophagi in Palermo's Archaeological Museum and sculptures from Villa Giulia.

Beneath Martorana's ceiling depicting the *Triumph of Flora*, three old master paintings are on show. The half part-skinned male corpse is by Giovanni Battista Crespi, otherwise known as **Il Cerano**. It dates back to about 1630, when the artist taught painting at Federico Borromeo's Ambrosiana Academy in Milan. The painting depicting a whimsical gladiatorial fight is by **Viviano Codazzi** and Domenico Gargiulo, called **Micco Spadaro**. It is the result of an encounter between a Bergamasque painter of ancient ruins and a Neapolitan figurative painter, in 1630's Rome.

## The Library

The last old master is by **Frans Floris** who as a young man met William Key whilst studying at the Lombard Academy in Liège. Part of their training included a trip to Rome. This work, inspired by their trip, is a self-portrait of the two, in dialogue with two Roman emperors who reigned in the early Christian era: Vitellius and Vespasianus. The five men, in conversation across the centuries, are discussing pieces of antiquity. In front of them is a box containing fragments of Roman sculptures, a Medici Venus, and a horse's head. If you look behind the work you will see a tumultuous battle, with allusions to Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* and also to frescoes by Primaticcio and Rosso Fiorentino at Fontainebleau.

On the mantelpiece is a work by Tetsumi Kudo, a white majolica flask manufactured in Caltagirone and a Chantilly porcelain.

*The work by Frans Floris needed to be placed so that both sides were clearly visible. The structure of the easel has been specifically designed to allow this. The picture is attached to the easel using the hinges that originally allowed the picture to be swung open so as to view the both sides.*











## First Floor



## The terrace

The terrace you now see was completed by the Branciforte family in 1812, after about fifty years of property expansion along the seafront. The Princes of Butera had acquired Palazzo Leonforte (1760), Palazzo Benso (1799), Palazzo Piraino and the Palazzo Trinacria (both in 1811). This terrace allowed them to connect their double height ball room at one end to their concert hall at the other..

*The terrace is unique given its size and is book-ended by two gazebos that mark its beginning and end, stretching more than 100 meters from Porta Felice to Palazzo Piraino. One thousand square meters (11.000 sq ft) of paving in green and white majolica had to be completely replaced, each tile handmade in Sicily by a specialist artisan workshop. The vaulted ceilings beneath it had to be rebuilt, and*

*between the two a waterproof membrane now protects the rooms below from water damage. I also added two iron pergolas that complete the view; solandra plants from the courtyards below are trained along these iron structures to create two large areas of shade and a lovely green space.*







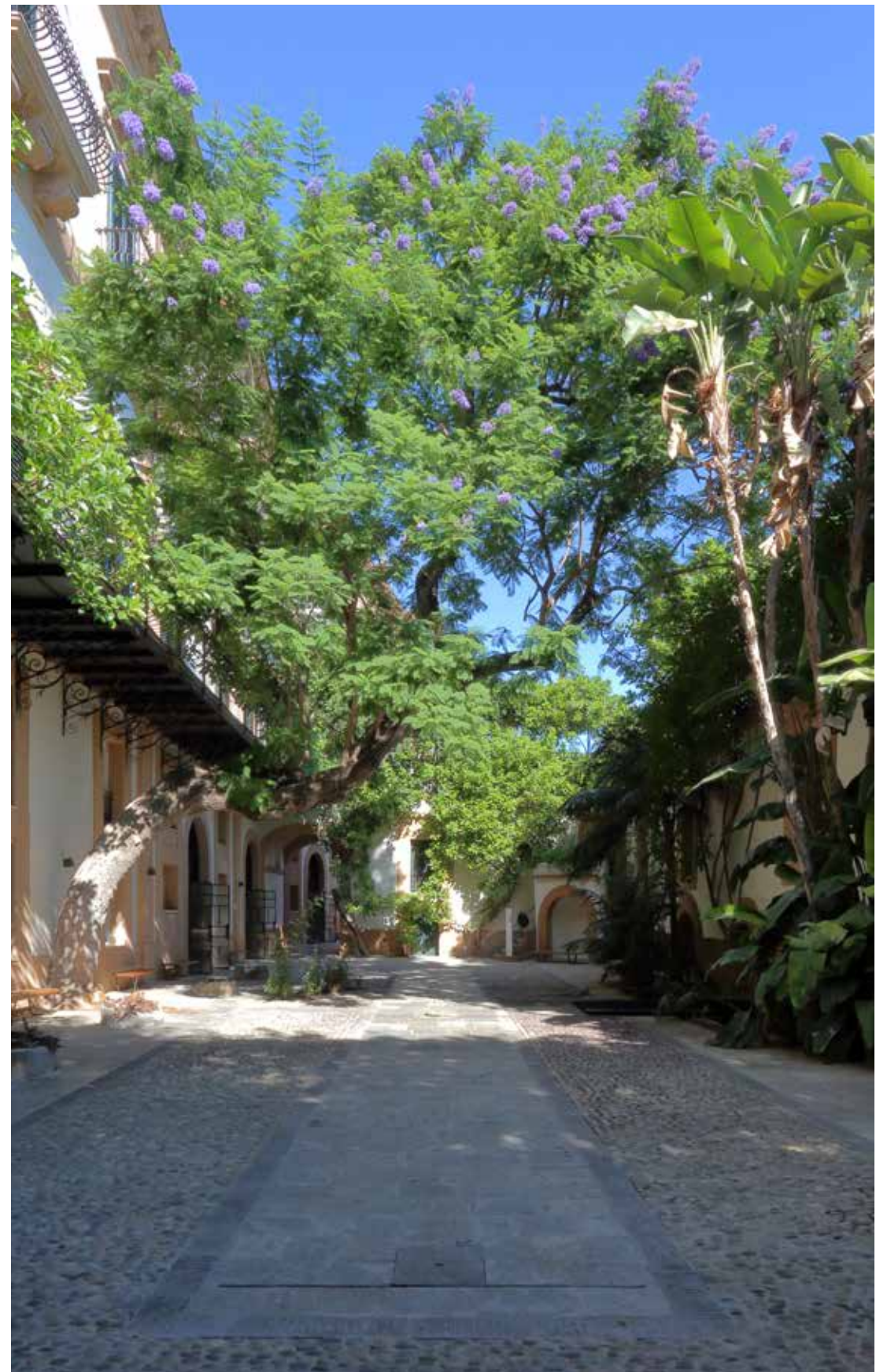
## The Plants



*There are many delightful plants and shrubs in the courtyards and on the terrace of Palazzo Butera. They are greatly admired and arouse much curiosity. In the following pages you will find answers to some of the most commonly asked questions and we will try to characterise some of the plants personalities. This outline serves to identify some of the plants present, focusing on the most unusual aspects of the plants. It is not a scientific review but tells how these beings lived and adapted during Palazzo Butera's restoration. During the restoration process we took great care to protect these beings whose existence contributes so much to the beauty of the Palazzo.*

## The Jacaranda

*The jacaranda tree in the second courtyard has such a presence that we named the courtyard after her. She has a bizarre form which is the result of circumstances that forced the plant to modify its otherwise vertical shape. During the 19th century a large cast iron veranda was attached to the building above the plant on the first floor. As the tree was planted against the outer wall of the building, it had to navigate around the terrace to reach the light. This deforming move generated the strange, memorable shape that now characterizes her. During the restoration the veranda was removed, and the plant was able to grow more naturally. You can see the new vertical branches growing from the horizontal trunk in a kind of celebration of its new found freedom. As further proof of vegetal intelligence, if you look carefully at the base of the trunk, you will notice a surface root that reaches out along the same axis as the trunk above, acting as a stabiliser to a modified shape that would otherwise have toppled the tree.*







## The Solandra

*Again in the Jacaranda courtyard, four specimens of Solandra are present. During the restoration, they were wrapped up to protect them from dust and damage. As soon as the work was completed, we freed the plants from their coverings and installed four iron pergolas on the terraces above, intending that they should grow up along them – this they did at great speed! In the space of only three years they have completely colonized the structures we put in place, giving welcome shade to visitors on the terrace.*





Strelitzia Nicolai, also called Bird of Paradise

## Working with Nature

*Before the restoration, a veranda overlooked the Jacaranda courtyard, supported by columns. These were removed leaving behind only the plinths. In the photo on the right you will see one of these adorned with an organic decoration. This creative activity arose quite naturally using loose foliage and seeds fallen from the Palazzo's plants. Every day they provide an inexhaustible trove of ephemeral compositions much appreciated by visitors. The many photos posted online are evidence of this and, in turn, of the generative creativity of art. It is often asked who the author of these creations is? Who is it who every day painstakingly gathers nature's abundant left-overs and arranges them into an improvised and original daily display?*







## Second Floor

## Room 1



On reaching the second floor, you come into a large entrance hall. Before the restoration, this hall was split into four rooms running off a single corridor. Clearing out these rooms and accompanying lowered ceilings, revealed a large fresco with the entire central section ripped out. It is sure that it depicted an angel holding a coat of arms. Elsewhere in this hall, the restoration brought to light other paintings by Fumagalli, a late seventeenth century wall frieze and four monochrome over-doors painted using ashes, by Benedetto Bonomo in 1784. The hall contains various decorative fragments from different eras that tells the story of the building's history. On the right of the entrance to the hall is a late eighteenth century lantern most likely made for a gazebo on the terrace.

**The Princes' Estates.** Also on show here are ten paintings depicting the ten cities that formed the Princes of Butera's Sicilian properties. Originally they were above the doors and windows of the first floor entrance hall. These estates were in the best arable areas and can largely be found between Caltanissetta, Gela and Catania. They were inherited through the Barresi and Santapau dynasties.

The estate of *Mazzarino* was held the longest, from the fourteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Prince of *Pietraperzia's* title had long belonged to the Barresi family and was inherited by Fabrizio Branciforti and Barresi in 1591. *Niscemi* is a city founded by Giuseppe Branciforti and Branciforti in 1640, and has a



gridded layout similar to many town centres. The town was founded in the seventeenth century to better exploit the agricultural resources of the interior of Sicily. The painting representing *Scordia* was totally repainted at the beginning of the twentieth century. *Santa Lucia* is the only dated painting, 1762. Beyond the churches, houses and city limits, you can see Etna in the background, billowing smoke from her crater.

*Barrafranca* rises on a rocky slope and is of Roman origin. Because of her favourable position midway down a valley, she had a market town dating back to antiquity. *Occhiola* was destroyed by an earthquake that struck the Val di Noto on January 11, 1693. Prince Carlo

Maria Carafa and Branciforti, a highly cultured and enlightened ruler, planned an ideal city in hexagonal form which was inspired by the Renaissance town of Palmanova. The new city was built a kilometer away under the name of *Grammichele*. *Butera* is perched on a hill, the bulk of the now ruined castle dominating the town.

The county of *Raccuia*, in the heart of the Nebrodi mountains, was purchased in 1551 by Niccolò Branciforti and Moncada. In the middle of the sixteenth century, *Militello* was home to the splendid court of Francesco Branciforti and Barresi, with his wife Joan, from the Augsburg family. The city was severely damaged by the earthquake of 1693 and later rebuilt in the high Baroque style.





**Palace Life.** Gaspare Vizzini's paintings of around 1780, portray daily life in Palazzo Butera – no doubt similar to any noble goings-on of the time. We follow a day in the life of a lady: from her toilette to a dance lesson, from a courtship to posing for a portrait. Other paintings illustrate a game of billiards, a tavern, and an idealized

country dance. There are also more mysterious pictures; a cloaked squire talking by the quayside to what might be fishmongers, and three men contemplating a moonlit sea, bringing to mind Goethe's enchanting 1787 descriptions of Palermo in his *Travels in Italy*.







*...An entire forest of trees  
was used to build the floors  
upon which we walk...*



## Second Floor



## Room 2



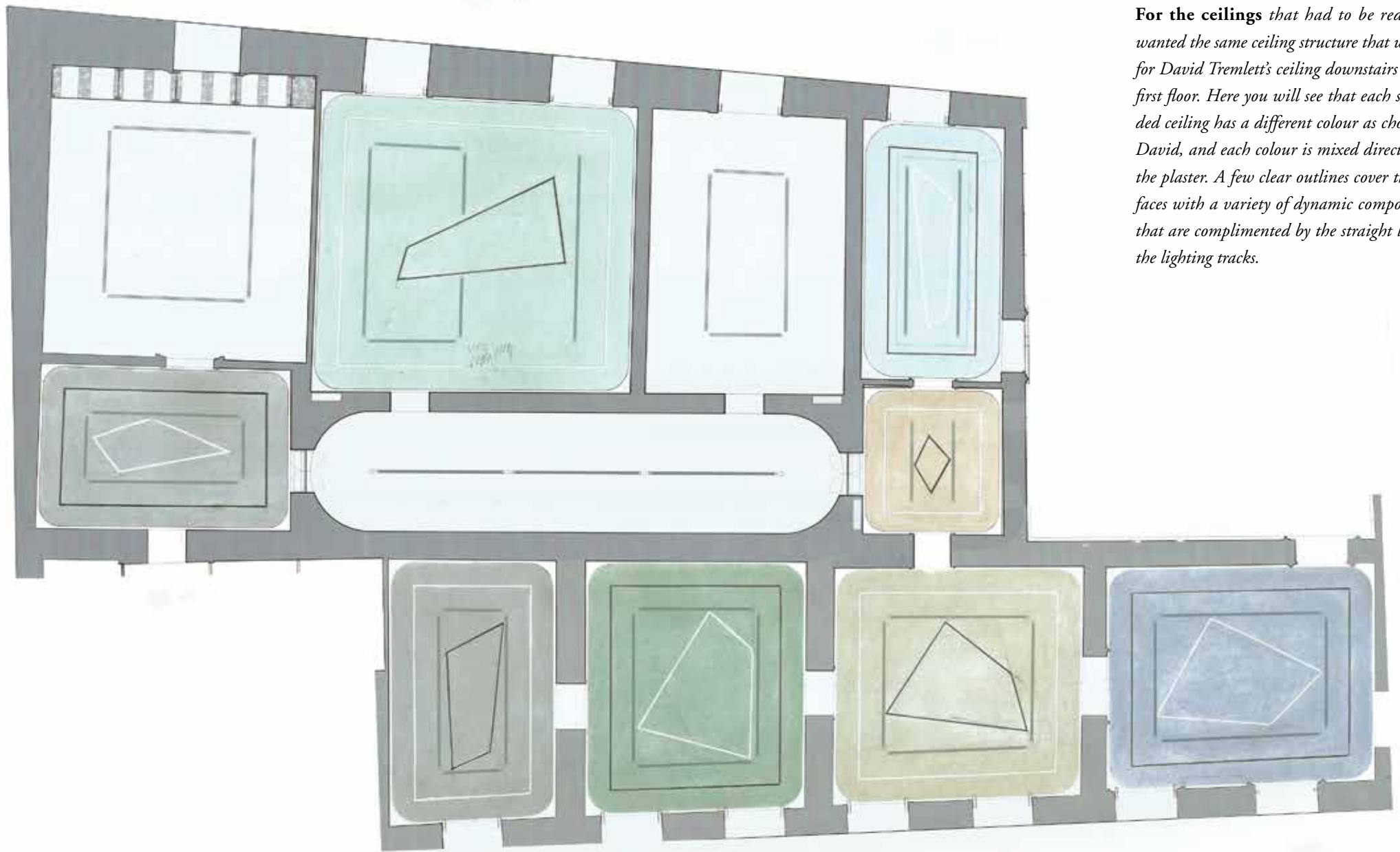
On the left are six Neo-Gothic plaques (1) that are followed by a group of works by architect George Edmund Street. These describe the ark of his career, starting with a drawing for a church (7), an auditor's chair (2) circa 1870 and a cast iron coat-stand (4) designed for the Royal Courts of Justice in London. Street designed the table (3) for Cuddesdon College, Oxford around 1854. The vase with the lizards (5) was made at the Zsolnay factory in Budapest during its most experimental phase at beginning of the 20th century. Edward Burne-Jones draws *Philomela* (6) between 1863–1864, a heroine from Geoffrey Chaucer's poem *The Legend of Good Women*. Commissioned by John Ruskin for a series of tapestries; he had intended they be made by William Morris, but the commission was never realised.

On the next wall, G.E. Street (7) reveals his interest in Venetian Gothic architecture in 1868.

To the right of the entrance is a simple and austere sideboard by Augustus Pugin (8) (1835-1840) that inspired English architects for the next forty years. On its top is a copper tray (9), a lamp (10) by William Arthur Benson circa 1890 and a ceramic pitcher (11) by Christopher Dresser. The 12 ring-shaped bronze ingot is African. Tom Phillips' oeuvre appears again (13) (16) (20). On the plinth is an oak chair (19) made for the Granville Hotel by Edward Pugin, son of Augustus, in 1870, while the corner cabinet (18) (circa 1860) is by Bruce Talbot. In Edward Lear's watercolour *Panorama of Turin* (17), the city is immersed in a blue light with the Alps soaring above it.







**For the ceilings** that had to be redone, I wanted the same ceiling structure that we used for David Tremlett's ceiling downstairs on the first floor. Here you will see that each suspended ceiling has a different colour as chosen by David, and each colour is mixed directly into the plaster. A few clear outlines cover the surfaces with a variety of dynamic compositions that are complimented by the straight lines of the lighting tracks.



## Second Floor



Christopher Dresser, Candlestick, 1883



In the left hand cabinet, **1** a metal cup, **2** a silver trophy (1911), **3** a silver chalice (1903) and **4** a silver box, are all by Charles Ashbee; they may have been designed for a tennis tournament or for personal use, but the emphasis is always on everyday objects being beautifully crafted and aesthetically pleasing. The same goes for the other early 20th century English silverware: by Gilbert Marks (**5**), Kate Harris (**6**), by Omar Ramsden for the Guild of Handicrafts (**7**) and Aldwyn Carr (**8**). The pitcher with a serpent handle (**9**) is by Edward and John Barnard done in 1864. The glasses (**10**) and the vase on the mantelpiece (**3**), by Hoffmann, are amongst the best examples of Austrian glass.

The fireplace (**1**) (1899) and chairs (**2**) (1902) by Charles Voysey display an almost pared down Puritanism. The first was designed by the architect for his home in Chorleywood, named The Orchard and is historically important because of the formal definition of each detail. Above the fireplace the painting (**4**) is of a smiling female is by Koloman Moser, from the early 20th century.

## Room 3

The «Thebes» stool (**5**), produced by Liberty & Co. in 1884, is copied from an Egyptian original in the British Museum. On the wall above, **6** is an oil painting by Maxwell Armfield from 1928. Edward W. Godwin designed the elegant central table (**7**) in 1876 taking his inspiration from Japanese visual idioms. However Christopher Dresser was the only British designer to have actually travelled to Japan in 1877 – his experimental genius is reflected in the objects in the second cabinet and in the vase (**8**) on Godwin's table. Ernest Gimson, an architect who popularized the stone villages of the Cotswolds, designed the wardrobe (**9**) that is radically devoid of any decoration. There are objects from non-European cultures – two zulu vases (**10**) and an Aboriginal ceremonial shield (**11**) on top of the wardrobe. These leave their mark on artists like David Tremlett with his pastel on the wall above (**12**). In his African Masks (**13**) and his «Synthetic Landscapes» (**14**), Tom Phillips uses taxonomic templates to highlight the significance of differences. **15** are by Massimo Antonaci and **16** is a photo by Andrea Cometta.





## Second Floor



## Room 4

Charles Voysey, Aluminium Clock, 1896



The armchair (1) is designed by E. W. Godwin for Dromore Castle in circa 1869. Its extraordinarily imaginative power makes it almost sculptural, particularly when accentuated by the characterful eagle heads. Between the two windows Gilbert & George's ironic *The Queen Elisabeth and the Parrots* postcard work (2), a critique of our attitudes towards royalty. It is also a good example of how every day images can be used in the service of art. Italian orientalist Alberto Pasini painted the *Sottana Gate at Bordighera* (3); next, two small works by John Brett (*Bude, Cornwall* (4) in 1873), and an *Italian landscape* (5) by George Howard, Earl of Carlisle. A watercolour by Stanley Spencer (6) and a work by Ray Johnson (7) lead on to the cabinet with more cutting-edge Dresser designs. Mostly done around 1860, a soup bowl, an egg warmer, a jug and some cutlery. Dresser was able to work within the constraints of an item's functionality but also design objects with unique beauty that heralded the future. The three small paintings (8), to be dated around 1890, beyond the cabinet are by Edward Fahey. The *View of St. Mark* (9) is by Mortimer Menpes, an Australian painter who moved to London to study under James Whistler. A quarrel between the two made the young Menpes go travelling. Sotto, una tavola apparecchiata del 1972 di Daniel Spoerri (10). Thomas Colcutt's sideboard (11) may have been for the Philadelphia's Centennial Exhibition of 1877; the turquoise tea set on display is by Lachenal (1910).



On the right of the Colcutt, a work by Walter Crane (12) with a beautiful view of Capri. Beneath it is a work by Robert Filliou (13), a member of the Neo-Avant-Guarde Fluxus movement. The works on the other side of the cabinet are by Pablo Echaurren and Baruchello. The cabinet contains a clock by Voysey of 1896. Made in aluminium, which at the time was a

recently discovered material, it is likely to be one of only three made. The pen-holder (front left), was designed by Charles Ashbee for his own personal use. Finally on the wall is a circular, convex English mirror (14), a work by Alan Sonfist (15), a small oil by William Nicholson (*Cottage near Malaga*) (16) and a drawing by Tremlett (17).





## Second Floor



## Room 5

The main painting (1) is part of a larger work by Tom Phillips called the *Mappin Art Gallery*. Begun in the 1970s, it reconstructs a wall from the original Mappin Gallery in Sheffield, a museum destroyed during World War II. The artist's only guide was a picture on a postcard that survived the blast. Designed by Godwin, all the furniture in this room takes its inspiration from Japan. It is an extraordinary example of cultural assimilation. In the centre of the room is Godwin's original table designed for Ellen Terry, a famous actress who at 15 years his junior, was also his lover.

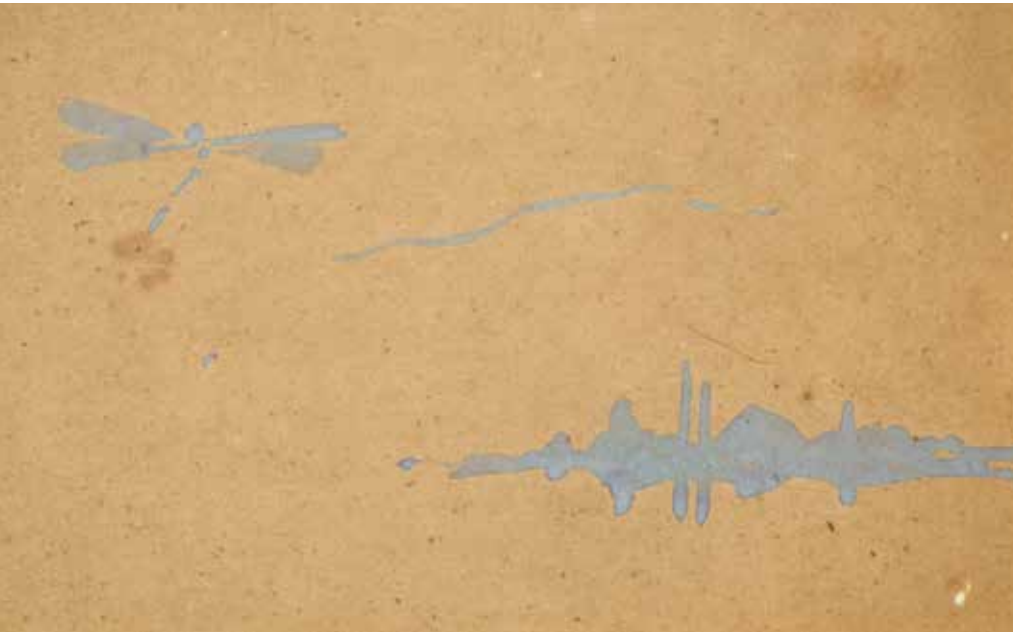
The corner cabinet with pink mirrors is again from Dromore Castle. Beside this are more drawing by Echaurren. The other larger corner cabinet was designed as part of a line of furniture. In typical inventiveness Godwin experiments with a series of voids and enclosed spaces. This is surrounded by collages by Antonello Ruggeri. The final piece of furniture contains decorative lacquered panels imported from Japan.

On either side of this are watercolours and oils by Menpes. These helped shape the English person's image of the Orient in the early 20th century, evidenced by their appearance in Menpes' travel memoirs. He depicts the chaotic life around Hindu temples dissolving into the quiet flow of the Ganges at Agra (2) and Benares (3). The drawings below are by William Blake Richmond (4) and Edward Alexander (5). Menpes' watercolours of Japan (6) (7) (9) are mostly studies in children's education; they control their emotions perfectly whilst still demonstrating excellent drawing skills from an early age. The beaches of Burma (8) are depicted by Robert Talbot Kelly, who also left us with written memoirs of his travels.

Edward W. Godwin, Sideboard, circa 1872







James Whistler, Chelsea Reach and the Dragonfly, 1878

A very large drawing by Elisabeth Scherffig (1) shows piles of scrap metal. This disregarded workaday material takes on monumental proportions in the hands of this German artist. To your right, a drawing (2) for a fabric design is by Charles Rennie Mackintosh. Continuing right, the top work is by Tom Phillips, *After Henry James* (3); in the middle, a watercolour by James Whistler (4), gifted by the artist to his favorite pupil, Walter Sickert, in 1884. You can see in this work that the Thames is reduced to a blue line and the Chelsea Reach buildings are a mere shimmer.

Below is another watercolor by Lear (5) done in 1866 of Gozo in Malta. Continuing round, the two views (6) of villages on Lake Lucerne are by Edward Lear. Another series of drawings by Lear (7) were used to illustrate poems by Alfred Tennyson. Tennyson was both Lear's friend and a hugely popular Victorian poet. Finally, Albert Moore's (8) drawing of a vase, hangs above Joseph Michael Gandy's (9) proposed coat of arms for the Baronetcy of Swinburne and dedicated to the painter Abraham Cooper.







*This gallery and the adjacent rooms did not exist before the restoration. They have been designed to host overseas loans and so must meet the standard regulatory requirements regarding light and temperature. Air circulation vents are inserted along the gap between the supporting*

*walls and the vaulted ceiling. This gives the vault a feeling of weightlessness, seemingly independent of the walls that support it. When you visit the attics above you will see the hidden construction that makes this possible.*



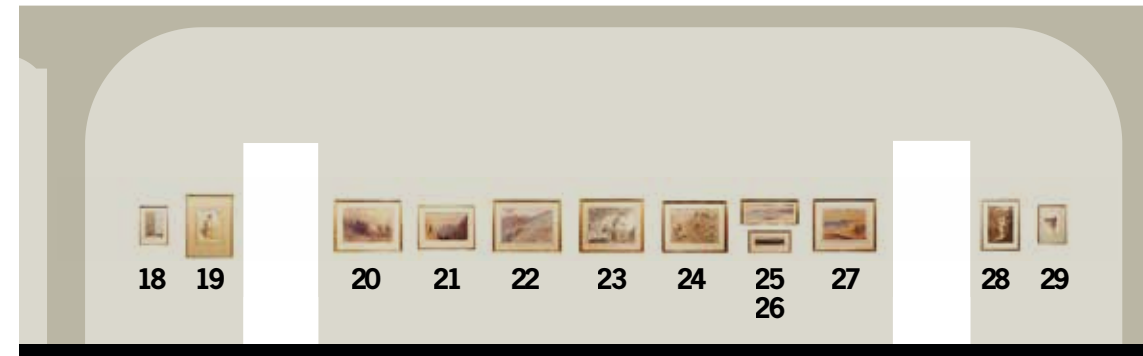
## Second Floor



From the beginning of the 19th century, English artists regarded Egypt as the new frontier of artistic exploration. David Roberts (9) (12) was amongst the first to travel there, reaching it via the Holy Land during the post-Napoleonic period. Both French and English artists gave western audiences their own different visions of this new world, of Egyptian temples or busy urban scenes in Cairo. In the eyes of the London public, John Frederick Lewis (7) (11) (15) was the orientalist artist par excellence, with his picturesque style presented in scenes of buildings or cityscapes. The Sphinx was inevitably an image that was painted many times by artists such as George Frederick Watts (3) (4) (16) or Arthur Melville (10); other artists like Hercules Brabazon Brabazon (1), are fascinated by streets dotted with minarets. Alfred East (5) and William Holman Hunt (14) are drawn to large squares dominated by mosques.

## Room 7

Many of Arthur Melville's watercolours (2) (6) (8) date back to his first trip to the East in 1881. When he returned to England, he also produced oriental scenes copied from popular photographs. His spontaneous style is almost irreverent, as he captures the sacred rituals of Eastern life with the force of journalistic reportage. On the opposite wall are examples of the late 18th century English vision of Italy. Francis Towne's watercolour is a fine example (23) as are the later works by David Roberts (18) and John Frederick Lewis (19). Most watercolours along this wall are by Edward Lear (20) (21) (22) (24) (25) (27) of Liguria, Corsica and the south of France. Notice Lear's descriptions of places and colours. Following these is a watercolour by John Ruskin (29). As the most influential academic in the field of Fine and Applied arts in England, his research and accompanying illustrations into gothic venetian architecture set new standards that are still influential today.



- 1 H. Brabazon Brabazon, *Cairo Market*
- 2 A. Melville, *Mosque Interior*
- 3 G. F. Watts, *The Sphinx*
- 4 G. F. Watts, *The Sphinx*
- 5 A. East, *Cairo*
- 6 A. Melville, *Feluccas on the Nile, Cairo*
- 7 **J. F. Lewis, *Khonsu Temple, Karnac***
- 8 A. Melville, *The Preparation for battle, Baghdad*
- 9 **D. Roberts, *The Hypostyle Room in the Temple of Isis in Philae***

- 10 A. Melville, *The Sphinx, with an Arab camp*
- 11 **J. F. Lewis, *The Great Doorway of Sultan Hassan Mosque in Cairo***
- 12 **D. Roberts, *Bab el Nazar, or Gate of Victory***
- 13 G. F. Watts, *A coastal landscape in either Egypt or the Middle East*
- 14 W. Holman Hunt, *Hagia Sofia in Istanbul*
- 15 **J. F. Lewis, *An African with a dead lion***
- 16 G. F. Watts, *The Sphinx*
- 17 G. Seymour, *A Nubian warrior*
- 18 D. Roberts, *The Tomb of the Stewarts, St. Peter's, Rome*

- 19 J. F. Lewis, *A Monk in Prayer, Naples*
- 20 E. Lear, *Bavella*
- 21 E. Lear, *Bavella*
- 22 E. Lear, *Turbia*
- 23 **F. Towne, *Near Tivoli***
- 24 E. Lear, *Ceriana*
- 25 E. Lear, *San Remo*
- 26 W. Leighton Leitch, *Roman Countryside*
- 27 E. Lear, *Celle*
- 28 F. L. T. Francia, *A waterfall*
- 29 **J. Ruskin, *St. John, Venice***





In this room, English painters are on the left wall and French painters on the right, offering two differing artistic readings of the Italian landscape. They also highlight the radical shift in vision between the end of the 18th and early 19th centuries. Chronologically from the left, Thomas Jones' first oil painting (8) done abroad, of Chambéry, Savoy, in 1770. Reality and illusion merge in paintings by Joseph Wright of Derby (9) (1779) and William Hodges (10) (c. 1780); Rome is considered to be the destination where artists achieve full artistic maturity: Charles Lock Eastlake (3), who became a renowned director of London's National Gallery, spent fourteen years there as a young man. Bavarian Carl Haag (1) (2) (16) uses evening light to create picturesque atmospheres on monumental archways. Two sketches by Lord Leighton (4) (5) immortalize Capri at day and at night; also by Lord Leighton, a small picture of *The Gate of Algiers* (12).

Finally, works by George F. Watts (11); Francis Danby (6) (7) (17); John Brett (14) (15) and William Blake Richmond (13). The classicist conventions of Italian landscape painting, by Nineteenth Century French artists, still clear in the works of Chauvin (18) (28), are loosened by later artists exploring the ruins of ancient Rome. Artistic observation and subject matter change because of this new style. Artists chose to paint a city gate, as with Remond (32), or a simple tree (34), or a garden with a statue (22). Granet studies the interior of the Colosseum (21) (31); Achille-Etna Michallon explores the effects of light from inside a cave (30) and of a waterfall (35). Celebrated places of myth and history continue to work their magic on Bidauld (29), on Boisselier (19) (23) (24) and on Sarazin de Belmont (26). The oil sketches on paper by Valenciennes (20), Picot (25), Coignet (27) and Giroux (33) are visual guides for use in larger works.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 C. Haag, <i>The Forum, Rome</i>                         | 18 P. A. Chauvin, <i>A garden in a monastery</i>             |
| 2 C. Haag, <i>Rome, Trajan's Arch</i>                     | 19 F. Boisselier, <i>View of Ariccia</i>                     |
| 3 C. L. Eastlake, <i>View in Rome</i>                     | 20 P. H. de Valenciennes, <i>A view of mountains</i>         |
| 4 F. Lord Leighton, <i>Capuchin Church, Capri</i>         | 21 F. M. Granet, <i>Interior of the Colosseum, Rome</i>      |
| 5 F. Lord Leighton, <i>Capri by night</i>                 | 22 J. V. Bertin, <i>Garden with statue</i>                   |
| 6 F. Danby, <i>A forest in Tasmania</i>                   | 23 G. Boisselier, <i>The Temple of Sybil, Tivoli</i>         |
| 7 F. Danby, <i>A view of the Alps in Switzerland</i>      | 24 G. Boisselier, <i>A Roadside Shrine near Subiaco</i>      |
| 8 T. Jones, <i>Near Chambéry, Savoy</i>                   | 25 F. E. Picot, <i>Roman ruins on the Italian coast</i>      |
| 9 J. Wright of Derby, <i>Neptune's Grotto at Tivoli</i>   | 26 L. J. Sarazin de Belmont, <i>Castel Sant'Angelo, Rome</i> |
| 10 W. Hodges, <i>A sea cave interior</i>                  | 27 J. Coignet, <i>Coastal view</i>                           |
| 11 F. Watts, <i>Landscape in the night</i>                | 28 P. A. Chauvin, <i>A pond with swans at Tivoli</i>         |
| 12 F. Lord Leighton, <i>Gateway, Algiers</i>              | 29 J. J. X. Bidauld, <i>Lake Nemi</i>                        |
| 13 W. Blake Richmond, <i>Sea Cliffs, Swanage</i>          | 30 A. E. Michallon, <i>A cavern</i>                          |
| 14 F. Lord Leighton, <i>The Rocks of the Siren, Capri</i> | 31 F. M. Granet, <i>Interior of the Colosseum, Rome</i>      |
| 15 J. Brett, <i>Lake Como</i>                             | 32 C. Remond, <i>A Roman archway</i>                         |
| 16 C. Haag, <i>In the Forum, Rome</i>                     | 33 A. Giroux, <i>Study near the Abruzzi, Italy</i>           |
| 17 F. Danby, <i>A rocky coastal bay</i>                   | 34 J. V. Bertin, <i>Study of a tree</i>                      |
|   | 35 A. E. Michallon, <i>Shepherd at foot of a waterfall</i>   |





Louis Comfort Tiffany, A silver bowl, 1890

Just as the works in Room 8 are artistic explorations from other cultures, here we have the same, but created in the 20th century. You can start with the glass and silver, designed at the beginning of the century by American Louis Comfort Tiffany. He was inspired by contemporary Egyptian archaeological finds and by ancient Central American culture. In the first vitrine, the bowl with snake-shaped handles echoes Aztec artefacts, while another glass vase has been named «Tel-El-Amarna» after the Egyptian archaeological site from which came the original.

The four works on display by Fulton (1) (2) (3) (5) include criss-crosses on the landscape of Mount Kosuga in Japan, Nepal, Everest and California. On the opposite wall is *Water Towers* (1963-80) (6) (7) by Bernd and Hilla Becher, amongst the first to rediscover a photographic fascination with the industrial architecture. These extraordinary examples of human creativity become like monuments of the modern era. Also in the room are two works by David Tremlett (8), a work by John Baldessari and a watercolour by Aymone Sambuy (4) (1981).



## Second Floor



## Room 10

In the right hand cabinet you can see 20th century Viennese vases by Amphora, with spiders, fish and ethereal female figures playing across their surfaces – *Jugendstil* on display in ceramic form. In the cabinet on the left, most of the vases are by Pilkington's Lancastrian, an English manufacturer that employed designers such as Walter Crane. The brass cup is by Josef Hoffmann, the small head on the left is Ife and on the other side, the balm box is Zulu.

The room is completed with a work by Warren Knight (1), *Twig* (2) by Gilbert & George (1980) and a view of Hamburg by Elisabeth Scherffig (3). Next to the entrance, another work by Bernd and Hilla Becher (4) and a photo by Andrea Cometta (5).

On your way to the Torino, opposite the lift, the mirror is by Anne and Patrick Poirier, designed specifically for Palazzo Butera, and is inspired by *Mnemosyne* by Warburg, who created a memory map, where ideas and figures pass through time.



William Mycock and Walter Crane, Vase 1906







Tetsumi Kudo, *Grefte-Symbiose*, 1973



Born into the post-atomic world, Japanese artist Tetsumi Kudo (1) creates a vision of human disintegration in an ecologically careless world. Nature has no place in this violent contraposition unless it is dying, hence the rotting body parts and limp organic material. In the centre of the room you will see *et consumimur igni* by Andrea Sottile (2). The whole work consists of 6300 wooden images made using the flame of a lighter. It took him over ten years to make it (1997-2007). Between the windows is another Tom Phillip from his final *Conjectured Pictures* series (3). To the right

of the window is a Gerhard Richter (4) that is part of the *Grau Bild* series first exhibited at the 1972 Biennale. These show erased images of illustrious men, mountains and jungles. The two *Fashion Plates* (5) (7) are by the English artist Richard Hamilton, the father of Pop Art. In between them is a photograph by Hamish Fulton (6), that calms Kudo's brutality. The other three works in the room (8) (9) (10) are by New York artist Terry Winters, who in the early 1980s painted large works depicting microscopic fossil remains and other organic matter.





**The glass slab** on the floor at the end of the room reveals a part of the structure of the palace. You can see that an entire forest of ancient trees was used to build the floor upon which you walk. I was interested in giving you an opportunity to see some of the hidden structures of the palace and to allow you to appreciate the superb construction skills necessary to build something like Palazzo Butera. In addition, you will notice how the apparently solid and monumental salons on the first floor are in fact very flimsy, rather like stage sets. Their walls and ceilings are not of stone, but of lathe and plaster. You are allowed backstage, and can appreciate the theatricality of the great salons of the palace.

**The attics** give you a rare look into the ingenious engineering required to create a building like Palazzo Butera. You can see the wooden backbones of the vaulted ceilings below, their articulated slats and the complexity of their construction. You can see the masonry of the actual building made up of large limestone blocks; you can see the strong wooden trusses and the traditional roofing system. For architects and histo-

rians, this technology is recognized as an important development in the history of construction. To give access to this part of the building I designed a walkway that is supported by an iron structure and fixed to the masonry. The vaults are left undisturbed by my suspended architectural form and the wooden slats mirror both the texture and patterns of this theatrical space. Any guests staying with us can access their rooms from here.

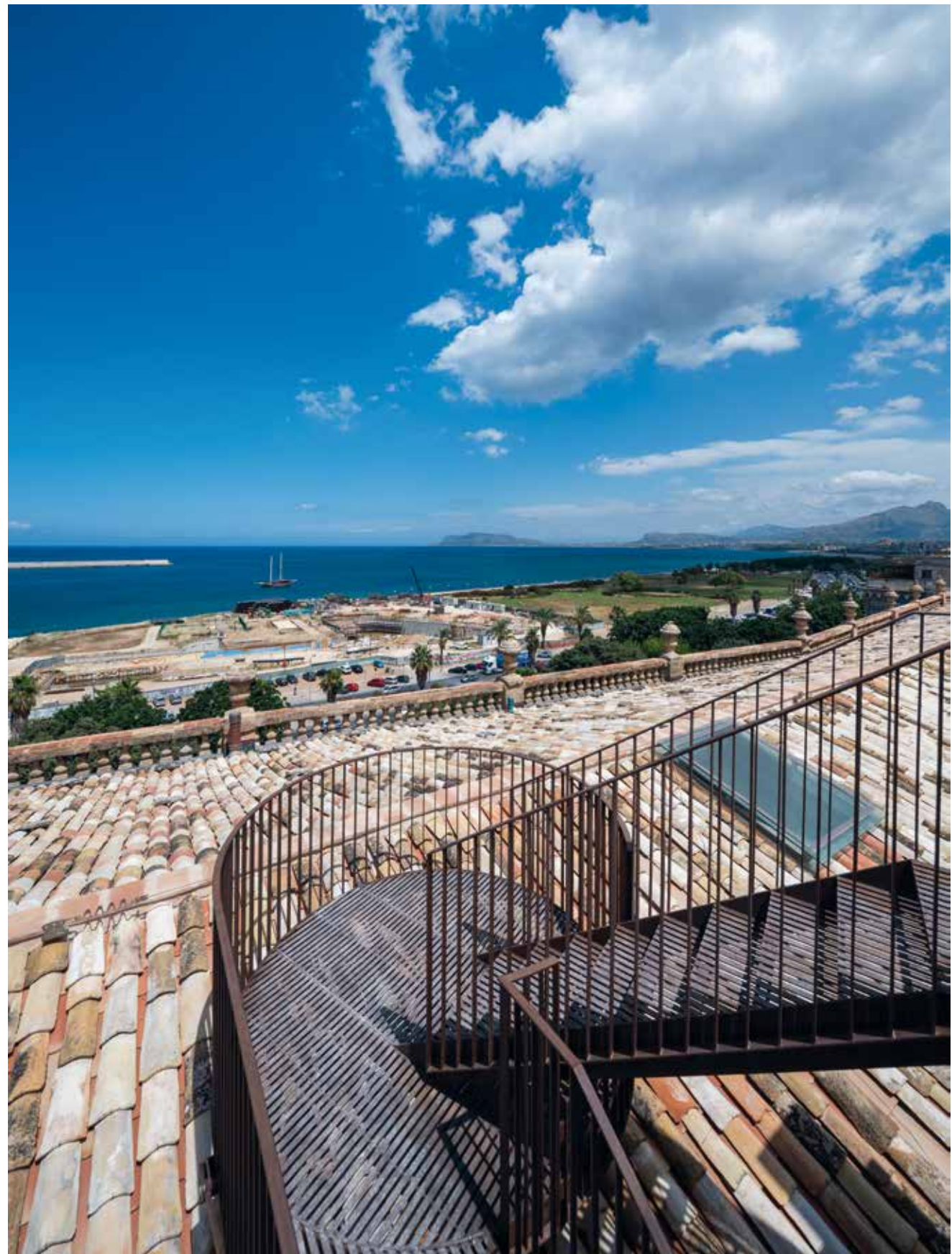








**The Torino Panorama.** *Much attention and focus went into the restoration of Palazzo Butera's rooves: all the trusses and antique roof tiles were saved and relocated onto a modern sub-structure. The main reason we included this lookout as part of the tour was to give you a sense of the Palazzo's huge size. An iron platform, suspended by tie rods, protrudes out over the roof. Climbing up from here takes you on to a small terrace covered in antique majolica salvaged during the restoration. This summit affords a magnificent panorama of the city, the sea, and the surrounding mountains.*





## Second Floor



## Room 12

Returning to the museum you enter a room at the head of the frescoed salons. The ceramic panel (1) with a vase of flowers is possibly a joint experiment by the young William Morris, William de Morgan and Edward Burne-Jones. Further on there are two highly impressionistic watercolours by Melville (2) (3), and more works by Lear (4), Roberts (5) and Armfield (6). The coffee table in the centre is made by «Morris & Co.», and is designed by George Jack (7). 8 is an Amphora vase.

By the window is the *Portrait of Charles Deschamps and his wife* by Lawrence Alma-Tadema (9), given as a gift to the painter's French patron. Beside it is a *View of Menton* (10) by Lear and a watercolour by Thomas Hartley Cromek (11), who specialized in panoramas of ancient Rome. The watercolour (12) with the *Java Dancers* (1888), also by Melville, portrays the first oriental ballet performance at the Royal Albert Hall. Melville considered this painting to be one of his most important works. The following two watercolours (13) (14) are also by Melville and are from an 1892 trip to Spain. Finally, a study of fish in an aquarium is by Burne-Jones.



Lawrence Alma-Tadema,  
Portrait of Charles Deschamps and his wife, 1873

**Colours for the walls.** *When we came to choosing the colours for the State Rooms, I suggested using Marmorino, a technique that mixes colour into the plaster, before it is applied to the wall. Embedding the colour in this way gives a deep, richly chromatic surface that changes according to the light and is reminiscent of the fabrics that once hung there. The choice of colours were inspired by those that appeared in the wainscoting and the vaulted ceilings during the restoration. We sought to give each room its own identity without compromising the whole sweep of the magnificent row of salons. Furthermore, this focus on 'colourful splendour' formed part of our general pursuit of resurrecting the palace's past glory. This was completely lost over time because of changes in taste and fashion. We now hope you will agree it has returned.*





## Second Floor



**A Mirror “Box”.** During the 1950s, this salon was divided into a corridor and some smaller rooms. To bring light into the corridor, a hole was punched through the vaulted ceiling up into the roof. This whole structure has now been removed, but we were still left with a disfiguring rectangular breach in the fresco. We did consider plastering it up, but I thought I would build a light-box inside the hole. Five of its sides would be made of mirrors, and the sixth, facing the floor, would be left open. The intended effect is that, as you move about the

room, the box is endlessly reflecting back mirrored images. At the same time as measuring up to the beautiful architectural motifs in the fresco it also creates a slightly disorientating effect. It plays with the limits of our perception and blurs the fragile boundaries between reality and representation. It also ensures that the history of the building is maintained.



## Room 13

Charles Locke Eastlake, Sideboard, 1867



The sideboard is by Charles Locke Eastlake (1), a very influential mid-19th century British architect-designer, second only to Ruskin. This piece was shown at Paris' International Exhibition of 1867. He too set the trend for Gothic taste in the decorative arts.

Burne-Jones's *The Blessed Damozel* (2) (1857) is an unfinished work inspired by Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem of the same name. In this story of two lovers, the girl dies and goes to heaven and watches her lover continue his earthly life. Behind, a work by Kudo. In this and the next salon, you will see two paintings of Palermo by Francesco Zerilli (3). Done at the beginning of the 19th century, the first is a view from Romagnolo with Monte Pellegrino in the background. In the next room is a more conventional frontal view of



Palermo from the sea. *Armed Faith* (4) by Gilbert and George is followed by *The Grand Mosque of Tangier* (5), a watercolour by Melville done in 1891. The armchair (6) is designed by Street for the Synod Hall of the Dublin Cathedral (1877-1878). The table in the centre of the room is by George Bullock (7), a British architect-designer who at the beginning of the 19th century became so well known that his workshop was visited by Royalty. The two gesso sculptures on this table are by Alfred Stephens.

Next to the Melville watercolour is a piece of furniture by Arthur Blomfield (8), on top of which are ceramics from various manufacturers; over the other side of the doorway is *Great Rolling – Southern India* by Tremlett (9). The stools are by Pelagio Pelagi for the Castle of Racconigi near Turin. The little Roman table is typical of what Grand Tour visitors would love to collect when travelling to Italy. The large piece of furniture (11) along the next wall is by Pugin, and the objects displayed on it are by Dresser between 1860 and 1870. Above the Pugin sits a 1980 work by Phillips (10) taking up the entire wall. Taken from the opening phrase of Dante's *Inferno*, the same words, «una selva oscura», are repeated and layered over each other. On the easel is *A View of Rome* (1779) (14) by Giovanni Battista Lusieri, regarded as the Canaletto of Southern Italy. The objects in the display cabinet again reflect those collected by Grand Tourists, like the small panel of a vase of flowers done in *pietra dura* by the Grand Ducal Manufactures in Florence, or the Venetian milk glass cups (circa 1725) or the Bacchus' head in *rosso antico* marble, sculpted in about 1780. Also worth noting are the two candlesticks made by the Tsar of Russia's Imperial Manufacturer in Tula, Russia. The «Titus» clock, is one of a series produced for great European rulers, by Matthew Boulton.







Benjamin Vuillamy, Wine cooler, 1803



Tetsumi Kudo, Votre portrait, 1970-1974

In the display case we have placed objects that each take their inspiration from the ancient world between the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries. On the sides, the Wedgwood vases (c. 1780) are faithful reproductions of the original Attic vases found in Pompeii and Herculaneum. These became famous because they once belonged to Sir William Hamilton, British Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies at the time of the Bourbons. The two basalt urns (1805) on the first row are signed by William Bullock, George's brother: he is much looser in his decorative motifs than Wedgwood. The wine cooler, produced by Davenport (c. 1815) takes its inspiration from Ancient Egypt and the Ancient Greece



The disturbing presence of Gilbert & George's *Depression* (1) (1980) is a sombre meditation on the fears of contemporary man, and is countered by Benjamin Vuillamy's wine cooler but re-grows with the decomposed portrait of Kudo on the right hand-side of the mantelpiece. On the left is *Navigazione in Solitario* by Baruchello. Inside the fireplace is a *jardiniere* (3) by Pugin designed for Minton and produced in the same year as the Great Exhibition of 1851. You can see in Melville's watercolour (2) (*Cottages on Mull*) how he applies to Scotland some of the impressions he absorbed during his travels East. Likewise Owen Jones has assimilated Arab idioms in his mirrored sideboard (3). Inside are displayed mid-18th century British tea services, and on it are two 20th century vases. You will also see the first of five *Treated skulls* (1996) by Tom Phillips. Using a variety of materials including collages made from the calling cards of prostitutes or the hair from his beard, he began adapting the Western *Memento Mori* traditions, mixing in influences from other cultures. The table in the centre is by George Bullock (4), while the *pietra dura* inlay box on top, is another work by the Florentine Grand Ducal Manufacturers.

The 18th century bench (5) below David Tremlett's large pastel (6) comes from Villa Chigi in Ariccia near Rome. The small bedside table (7) is by Thomas Chippendale for David Garrick.



The Victoria and Albert museum in London houses other pieces that once belonged to this famous British actor. Hung on the wall is a sketch by Corrado Giaquinto (8). He trained in Rome and spent the high point of his career in Madrid. This work comes from his Spanish period, and is a preparatory sketch for a tapestry depicting the story of Joseph. It was commissioned for the Royal Palace at Aranjuez, but was never completed. The large sideboard is by John Pollard Seddon (c. 1860) (9), another British designer-architect who worked hard on reworking the visual language of the mediaeval Gothic period. On the top shelf of the sideboard are three vases by, left to right, Galileo Chini, Cantagalli and Clément Massier.







The large Wedgwood vase in the centre of the room is made of black basalt. At the time this was a new technique in porcelain, giving the appearance of basalt but with a longer lasting shine. The vase sits on a painted wooden tripod (1) designed by James Wyatt for the Earls of Poulett of Hinton House.

It is made by his brother Edward and is inspired by a white marble Roman tripod in the Vatican Museum. Here the paintwork simulates a yellow marble top and base, with shiny faux-bronze on the tripod's legs and friezes. The two oil paintings on easels (2) are by a little-known painter from Belluno called Antonio de Bittio.



Josiah Wedgwood, Vase, circa 1780



He spent his whole life working for Frederick Hervey, the Earl-Bishop of Bristol. This cultured, much-travelled man commissioned these two vistas by de Bittio. These depict the famous natural phenomena Giants Causeway and Fingail's Cave, in Ireland and Scotland respectively, which were owned by him. The chairs either side of the fireplace are Anglo-Indian; the firedogs are by Richard Norman Shaw, a Victorian architect who drew on gothic idioms for fantastical inspiration. The small oil painting on the mantelpiece is by John Constable sitting in between another two Tom Phillips skulls. Above the fireplace is (3) *Mullah* by Gilbert & George (1980) also belonging to the *Modern Fears* series. These large works by the British duo are a constant theme in the narrative of the second floor. Fra' Galgario's youthful self-portrait (4) hangs

Agostino Fantastici, Stool, post 1825



above one of the two neo-Egyptian stools designed by Agostino Fantastici post 1825 (5), for Mario Bianchi Bandinelli's *Villino del Pavone* near Siena. They were in a room entirely decorated in this style, filled with busts, telamons and sphinxes. This achievement is unique in the story of Italy's decorative art.

Following on from *Madras Corner* (6) by David Tremllett are two chairs by Thomas Sheraton for Kenwood House, two works by Antonaci (7) and a portrait (8), possibly of Lady Ridley of Blagdon Hall. Painted by Thomas Lawrence at the height of his popularity and fame with the British aristocracy at the beginning of the 19th century. Between them sits an Anglo-Indian bookcase, commissioned by the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, Viceroy of India. The clock of Phaedra and Hippolytus is by Manfredini. During the Napoleonic era, Milan, like much of Europe, had fully embraced the Neoclassical style as expressed in plays, and paintings, objects and architecture. On the other side of the door, the wooden cabinet (9) and the chair (10) are designed by the Bavarian, Richard Riemerschmidt for the Dresden workshops in 1903. He was a leading designer of the modernist movement, equal in imagination and flare to anyone either in Paris

and or Vienna. A work by the Poirier hangs above the chair (11). Bullock's jug and basin (12) were made for Napoleon's apartment on St Helena. Because Bullock had included a laurel wreath, the symbol of empire, in the design, Lord Bathurst, who was charged with defending the Government's treatment of Napoleon, objected, and the set was never sent. The vase stand is by Thomas Chippendale the Younger

(13) and comes from Stourhead, Wiltshire, England. This was the first English home to be furnished in the neo-Egyptian style that was the craze in Europe in around 1810. Tom Phillips' *Self-Portrait* (14) (1989) is created with phrases reflecting upon truth to be found in painting. The bronze tripod (15) is designed by Thomas Hope (c. 1802), the most influential British architect of the early 1800s.





## Second Floor

## Room 16



Carlo Scarpa, "Geometric" vase in black glass, 1929

The ceiling frescoes of these next two rooms were destroyed in 1922 to make way for a flat. David Tremlett's 2020 wall drawings therefore had to fill a substantial void. His solution was to create soaring shapes that are made more airy by the use of warm crayon tones, and are drawn on the new suspended ceilings.

The objects in the first display case demonstrate Dresser's rapid stylistic evolution. His deep knowledge of botany inspires decorations of beetles and stylized flora on ceramic vases. These were designed for Minton between 1872 and 1873. The silver jug on the left dates back to 1879, produced for Elkington & Co.'s metal factory. By 1880, Dresser's genius for modern design finds full expression in his close working relationship with the manufacturers, Hukin and Heath. The soup bowl has since become an icon

of Dresser's visionary designs. On each side of the cabinet are works by Baruchello.

In the second display case you can see vases designed by Carlo Scarpa for the Maestri Vetrai di Murano, a factory of glassmakers in Murano, Venice (1925-1931). The manager was Giacomo Cappellin, a young man who disregarded production costs and who soon went bankrupt. To achieve these different effects of geometric shapes, strong colors, and golden mottles, both Cappellin and Scarpa took great risks with the technical challenges and unpredictable outcomes of their art.

The coffee table in the centre of the room is by Gimson (circa 1900); Gilbert & George's *Spit Heads* is one of the thirty *New Testamental Pictures* from 1997 and on the opposite wall is *Zero* by Ferretti and two drawings by Scherffig.

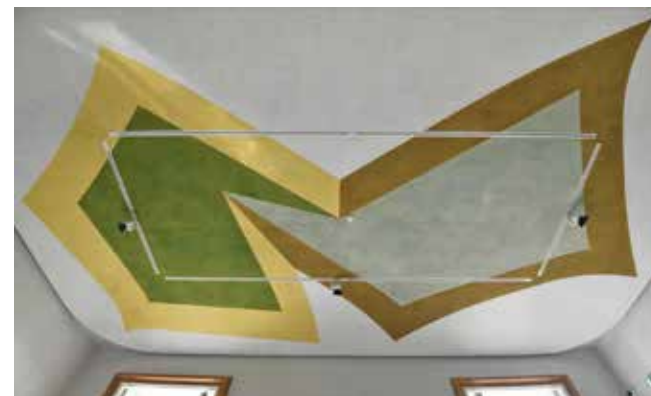




Karl Fabergé, Silver box, 1911

The first vases to see in the display case are by the Austrian manufactory Loetz (1880 circa). In their turn these creations inspired Tiffany's vases. There are also two paperweights by François-Emile Décorchemont at the front of the display. He used crystal instead of glass to make them and thus his animals have greater depth and becoming more life-like. The silver box is by the famous Russian goldsmith Karl Fabergé from 1911. The figures on it are inspired by Alexander Pushkin's 1832 poem *The Tale of the Tsar Sultan* and a painting of the same subject by Mikail Vrubel that is in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. The swan that is taking human form is a portrait of the tsar's daughter. On either side of the display case are paintings by Baruchello.

Pugin's table has medieval architecture to thank for its austere, structural form and holds the last two *Treated Skulls* by Phillips. *Gabbia* by Ferretti meaning «Cage», casts numerical sequences onto bas-relief. In Gilbert & George's *Hero* (1980), the violence of war is denounced by darkening the form of this World War I statue and making the soldier represented totally anonymous. The Dutch artist Ger van Elk reworks his enlarged photos with paint. This artwork is called *Russian Diplomacy* (1973), and represents the hypocrisy of an unresolvable situation.





## Second Floor

## Room 18



Amphora, Vase, circa 1900

In the last salon, again with frescoes by Martorana and Fumagalli, there are two monumental works from the 1980s. One is by Gilbert & George and the other by David Tremlett. The former is *Grounded* done in 1988. It is part of a series of works that explores the alienation created by man's compulsive exploitation of natural world. Tremlett's pastel on paper (*1.9.8.5.*) is an example of the huge works and wall drawings that he was creating from the mid-nineteen eighties. Sitting between the two contemporary works is a bishop's ceremonial seat from the late 17th century. This faldstool is made by those a sculptor close to Gian Lorenzo Bernini. The *Portrait of Victor Amadeus III of Savoy* (1774–1776) by Giovanni Battista Bernero

comes from one of the royal Savoy palaces. As was customary in Europe, this type of portrait would have belonged to a series of portraits created to celebrate a family's longevity. Another contemporary *Memento Mori* is *Skull* by Andy Warhol (1976), conceived after he suffered a near fatal attempt on his life in 1968. On top of the table by George Bullock, the vase is an Art Nouveau piece by Amphora, from Bohemia. The crystal plate is Russian. On the wall between the doorways is a work by Terry Winters called *Swamp Diagram* (1992). It is another experiment with paint, an attempt to dissect a less tangible reality. In this case, that of information technology, which represents a new frontier of inspiration for artists.



## Second Floor

## Room 19 and Exit Gallery



Tremlett's final contribution to Palazzo Butera offers an artist's solution to a space that was re-configured in 1922 when the frescoes were demolished. Now the museum's exit gallery, the English artist has drawn geometrical patterns on the ceiling and walls using pale colored crayon and graphite.

In the archways he has used black grease to

emphasize the interruption created by the new architectural forms of 1922. Also in this space is a work by Eugenio Ferretti (*Life*) conceived for Palazzo Butera. The same is also true of the three drawings and two linoleum works in the next room by Elisabeth Scherffig – these are portraits of the Ficus tree in Piazza Marina in Palermo.







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## Ground Floor



## Grocery Store

**MadoniEat.** *The MadoniEat Grocery, a bistro opens onto Via Butera, although still part of Palazzo Butera. Even this was result of restorative discoveries. As we worked we found that there had been a large arched doorway giving onto the street. The decision to reopen this doorway, in agreement with the Soprintendenza (the body overseeing the preservation of art and architecture in Italy), returned to the building's facade a symmetry that had been lost over time. The interior design of the store repeats the geometrical patterns I used for the large iron and glass doors in the courtyards, but is expressed with more levity and color. The ground floor uses tiles saved from the terraces, and the top floor is covered in sheets of yellow rubber.*





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### The collection of Francesca and Massimo Valsecchi

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In the guide also has some photos taken by Alberto Ferrero who died prematurely last year. In affectionate memory of him and regret at no longer having the benefit of his gifted vision. His images can be seen on pages: 31, 32-33, 36-37, 97, 126-127.

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