

“A Renaissance Rarity”

The history of the **MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR THE HISTORY OF ART** in Florence spans more than 100 years. At the end of May, one of its buildings – the completely renovated **CASA ZUCCARI** – was ceremoniously inaugurated. During the celebration, the long-standing director of the Institute, Max Seidel, was made an honorary citizen of the city of Florence in recognition of his outstanding achievements. What role does the Max Planck Institute for the History of Art play in the scientific landscape? And what is the art historical significance of the Casa Zuccari's restoration? Managing Director **GERHARD WOLF** spoke with **MAXPLANCKRESEARCH** about this and other topics of interest.

MAXPLANCKRESEARCH: Why did the Max Planck Society take over the Kunsthistorisches Institut three years ago?

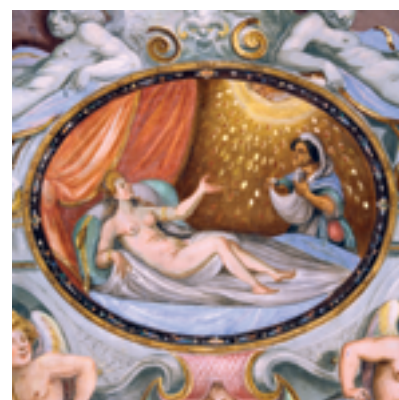
GERHARD WOLF: In financing the Bibliotheca Hertziana – the Roman research institute that, in a wonderful historical coincidence, resides in the Palazzo Zuccari – the Max Planck Society has been investing in Italy's art history for many decades. Taking over a second, well-established institute with a secular history reinforces not only art historical research within the Humanities Section, but also the Section itself. Being located in Florence is particularly attractive, as it is a city that is associated with famous names from the history of both art and science. These fields were by no means separate in the past: the exploration of optical phenomena as considered by Renaissance artists in creating perspective pictorial spaces, the development of cartographic depiction methods, the study of nature and the establishment of art collections and curiosity cabinets are just a few of the aspects in which artistic and scientific epistemological interest coincided and nourished one another. Florence and Bologna, among

other cities, not only have an extremely rich artistic heritage, they also lend themselves to the now highly topical art historical perspective of visual science. Therein lies great developmental potential for future research, and this is due in no small part to the opening up of intercultural research topics between Europe and the Mediterranean region from late antiquity to the early modern age, for which Florence is also an ideal location.

MPR: How will the newly restored Casa Zuccari be put to future use?

WOLF: We are striving for multifaceted uses. For structural reasons, we will not be able to stack books in the Casa Zuccari; instead, the rooms will be available for research projects and various other functions. Our photo lab and part of the administration will be accommodated here, as well. At the same time, the 500-year-old artist's house is a historical location that also serves to represent the Institute.

MPR: Will the building be open to the public in the future?



WOLF: The Casa Zuccari is not a museum, but part of a research institute. Therefore, there will be no regular opening hours. We are, however, planning small exhibitions that will be accessible to the public. And of course visitors who are interested in the building and its history will have the possibility to tour the building by appointment.

MPR: What type of problems arise when trying to make a 500-year-old palazzo functional after decades of decline?

WOLF: In this case, the past history itself is very complex: the original building was owned by Andrea del



Gerhard Wolf

Overall view of the ceiling fresco from the early 17th century on the 1st floor of the Casa Zuccari. The detail (left) shows Danae and their wet nurse.



In new splendor: The Casa Zuccari after the renovation. Above, the view from the street side; right, the view onto the loggia in the inner courtyard.

completed, the Casa Zuccari's original fresco program of the later 16th century can be reconsidered as an important monument in art history.

MPR: Did you encounter any surprises during the restoration work?

WOLF: In the basement, the restorers discovered partially buried rooms with wonderful barrel vaulting, which no one had previously known anything about.

MPR: There are many old palaces in Florence that are important in terms of art history, yet not accessible. What is special about the Casa Zuccari?

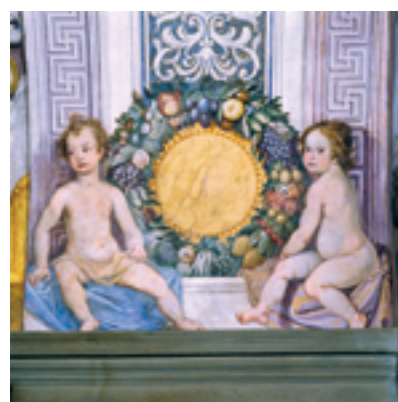
WOLF: The Casa Zuccari is not the palace of an aristocratic family, but an artist's house. That in itself is something exceptional, as artists' houses from the Renaissance are a rarity. Federico Zuccari was an individual who always combined privacy and prestige – both in Florence and in Rome. This was, quite plainly, about self-representation: in Florence, the artist portrayed himself and his family, which included both his wife and his students, in the frescoes. In a broader sense, it has to do with a definition of one's "own

house," the palazzo, which, in Florence, was an upper middle class or aristocratic matter. Zuccari had stone benches mounted on the exterior façade of his casa, as the Medici and Strozzi had done – an offer to the townsfolk to take a seat. At that time, the façade of the Casa Zuccari dominated a basically undeveloped area, so this was a self-important, prestigious gesture. And that's the exciting part: the man was an intellectual, an academic painter who lived in an era when being an artist was becoming more and more professionalized.

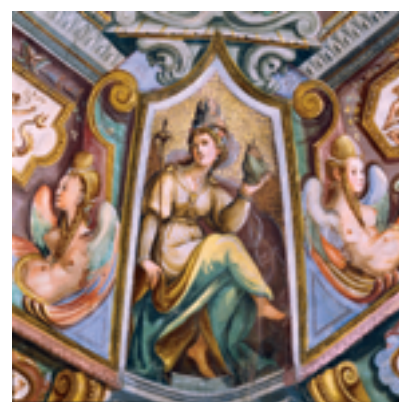
MPR: Zuccari immortalized himself in a sequence of wall paintings. What do the frescoes say about the artist?

WOLF: In Rome, it is an art-theoretical, allegorical pictorial program. The important frescoes in the Florentine Casa Zuccari reveal something very unusual: intimate scenes from the artist's life, as already mentioned. This depiction is integrated into a cycle of the seasons and an allegory of Time. In it, a large programmatic context is mounted – and viewers today can understand how the artist saw himself.

MPR: What makes Zuccari interesting for current-day art historians?



A detail (left) from the ceiling fresco *Allegory of Time and the Four Seasons* in the Sala Terrena, as well as a section of the ceiling fresco on the 1st floor of the Casa Zuccari.



Sarto, an early 16th-century artist. Federico Zuccari built on its foundation: a house on top of a house, so to speak. Later, primarily during the 19th century, the Casa Zuccari was renovated. These changes were maintained as far as possible. We didn't touch the historical division of space or the inner structure of the edifice.

MPR: But the building's installations had to be replaced.

WOLF: There was no modern technology, making it essential to first install the necessary wiring. In Italy there are, thankfully, outstanding restorers and specialists for modernization that retains the building's aesthetic character. The collaboration with the architects was also excellent.

MPR: What was the main focus of the work?

WOLF: In the Sala Terrena, the frescoes in the vaulting were cleaned and secured, and the wall ornamentation reconstructed. That was an important decision, as one of the walls showed remains of the original interior. On the other hand, the over-painted ceiling vaulting, primarily from the 19th century, had to be partially removed and partially left as it was where it served to fill bare patches. Now that the work has been

WOLF: I find three things fascinating: First, the international appeal of a renowned artist who worked and left his mark at various royal European courts, even if he cannot compare with Michelangelo's fame, against whom all artists of the time were measured. Second, his remarkable commitment in training young artists, for whom Zuccari rendered outstanding service. And third, his checkered relationships with sponsors and patrons. The artists needed their patrons to survive. Today, the situation is no different.

MPR: The refurbishment of the Casa Zuccari is itself a prime example of modern patronage. Without the Deutsche Bank, its acquisition would not have been possible.

WOLF: True, and we are very grateful for that. The Casa Zuccari was a gift from the Deutsche Bank. Art endowments from banks are a proud Florentine tradition – from the Medici through to the present day.

MPR: What do your Italian colleagues think about the fact that the Max Planck Society administers both Zuccari palaces?

WOLF: I believe that they are definitely pleased that both institutions, with the two most important art historical libraries in Italy, are in good hands. It should not be forgotten that they are very well networked locally, as well as throughout the country. Aside from the fact that Italian restorers were directly responsible for the work on the historical building, we also cooperate very closely with the Italian researchers who use our library. For them, the MPI for the History of Art is, moreover, not only or primarily a German library, but a place of international exchange.

MPR: What are the future plans for the Institute's famous library and the photo library? Are further

changes expected after the restoration?

WOLF: Part of the photo library and its digitalization department will move into the Casa Zuccari; this will ease the space situation somewhat. With reference to the very tight situation at the Institute, especially with the books and work places for junior researchers, it will not change anything. We have not only established a great tradition in art history here,

we are also running a modern research institute. Unfortunately, we are still lacking funding and personnel – essential prerequisites for a well-functioning scientific lab. In this respect, as a young Max Planck Institute, we still have some catching up to do; in terms of relieving the space problem, a new building under the garden would be the best solution. This is something that we will be striving for. INTERVIEW: CHRISTIAN MAYER



PATRONS WITH A MIND FOR ART

Founded in 1897, the Institute for the History of Art was housed, in its early years, in the private home of its honorary director Heinrich Brockhaus – today's Viale Spartaco Lavagnini. Over time, the research institute was expanded in several stages. Financed through private donations and government funding, the institute, which soon had an impressive book and photo collection at its disposal, moved into the Palazzo Guadagni in the quarter of Santo Spirito. Thanks to its outstanding reputation, it was also able to continue its work there after the Second World War. Initially supported by a board of trustees, the institute has been a governmental administrative body since 1970.

It was primarily patrons from trade and industry who sponsored the art historical undertaking in Florence: in 1964, the institute was able to relocate to the Palazzo Capponi-Incontri on Via Giuseppe Giusti, which was acquired by the Fritz-Thyssen Stiftung. In 1972, the Stiftung Volkswagenwerk bought the adjacent Casa Rosselli; finally, in 1987, Deutsche Bank AG acquired the Casa Zuccari and turned it over to the Institute for the History of Art. This occasion was marked by the presence of Richard von Weizsäcker, then Germany's Federal President.

However, the former residence of the artists Andrea del Sarto and, later, Federico Zuccari, diagonally opposite the two Institute buildings was in poor condition. A thorough structural inspection and fundamental renovation of the Renaissance building, the heart of which was almost 500 years old, was apparently as necessary as the restoration of the frescoes Zuccari painted in the Sala Terrena in 1579. Starting at the end of the 1980s, the Casa was restored in three phases, in collaboration with the Florentine office for the protection of historical monuments. The association of the friends of the institute also played a key role. Ultimately, the 2.3 million euros in building costs were shared by various German federal institutions, as well as Italian and German sponsors.

During the same period, a decisive institutional change was made: the assumption of the Institute's trusteeship by the Max Planck Society at the beginning of 2002. This was an important step in guaranteeing the future of the Institute that has at its disposal a specialized library with more than 215,000 volumes and a photo library with 600,000 images.

A film about the Casa Zuccari can be viewed on the Internet at www.filme.mpg.de.