

Francesco Negri Arnoldi

Creativity, Aesthetics and Private Historical Archives

See photograph n.1

COPY RIGHT 26 SEPTEMBER 2012.

**Legally deposited at the SIAE (Italian Society of Authors and Editors) for full copy rights protection,
N.p. 2012003616**

Creativity, Aesthetics and Private Historical Archives

Honorable Vicepresident Pittella, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Guests,

unfortunately, due to a serious health problem Professor Francesco Negri Arnoldi could not come in person, thus entrusting the reading of this speech to me, Aleksandra Gorb, his collaborator. Here are his words, presented to you through me.

See photograph n.2

I am honoured to have the opportunity to make a speech on this important occasion that focuses on a crucial aspect of the European Heritage that is too often unknown or not sufficiently appreciated by European Citizens: the treasures of knowledge offered by the Historical Archives stratified by European historical Families and by notable Individuals.

I am a Roman-born Italian Historian of Art -painting, sculpture, design and graphic arts-, and I had a long career in the Italian Ministry of Cultural Affairs, as Officer dedicated to the Safeguard of the Artistic Patrimony, as Representative of the National Committee for Arts and Heritage management, and then as a full professor in History of Art and Critics of Art in different Universities.

I admit, proudly, that I learnt more about the life, customs and aesthetic tastes of the Roman society of the beginning of the 19th century by reading the Document from my family's archive, dated 1802, at the time of the turbulent years of Napoleon's hegemony over most of Europe, that described the trousseau of my great-great grandmother Plautilla than from all the scientific literature available on these topics.

The Language used in this Document was also a source of reflection for me. In fact, Miss Plautilla Pesoli, of L'Ariccia, the historic site of the Castelli Romani in the heart of the Papal States (Latium) had been promised in marriage to Biagio Arnoldi, from Tenno in Val di Non, in the Trentino region, the Northern part of Italy for centuries in the political sphere of Austria and then under Habsburg control. In the late 18th century, Biagio Arnoldi had moved to Rome for work and there he met Miss Plautilla. In Italy at the time, marriages often joined individuals from States on the peninsula that had not yet become "Italian" in the strictest sense of the word and people spoke different official languages (in this case: German and Italian, the husband, and an Italian very close to Latin, the bride).

This Archival document was a synthesis of a cultural, political and aesthetic world. The world of Plautilla.

This observation may appear as a mere witty anecdote, but in fact it has inspired my professional life.

Consequently, one of the most important topics with which I was involved in my life and research is the Cultural-Artistic Policy: how to highlight the value of all the products of human creativity and make them known to people.

It is from this specific point of view -that I consider essential to construct a stronger Europe- that I will speak about Private Historical Archives viewed as exceptional shrines of knowledge for a series of Professionals, because they reconstruct, they follow throughout time human creativity and the evolution of aesthetical worldview. In addition, they highlight the tastes and activities of private Patrons, and their patronage in all of Arts and in Architecture.

See photograph n.3

Historical Archives are essential not only for Historians of Fine Arts, of Architecture, of Parks-gardens and Designed Landscapes, but above all for Restorers and Curators: Private Historical Archives give in the form of facts cultural information and all the technical details

indispensable, today, for carrying out consistent actions in the field of cultural and landscape restoration.

See photograph n.4 and n.5

Also, Private Archives help today's Scholars and Curators to establish the identities of Artists of the past and connect them to well-known masterpieces, not always signed; or they give precise identities and age of individuals represented in Chefs-d'oeuvres.

This is the case with the portrait of an Italian young man by the celebrated painter of the Italian renaissance Moretto da Brescia (about 1498-1554), conserved today at the National Gallery of Art, London: an Archival document of the 17th century, that is kept in the historical Archives of an ancient family of the city of Brescia, in Northern Italy, allows us to confirm without a shadow of doubt the name of this young man -Fortunato Martinengo Cesaresco- who was a classicist and an important figure of the intellectual life of that time which the painting expresses with remarkable effectiveness.

See photograph n.6

Then, there are exceptional Archives created thanks to the Artists themselves in their Ateliers and houses, like that of the Tuscan painter and architect Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), that was kept in his house in Arezzo (passed on to heirs) and included extraordinary documents such as the records of his works and correspondence with personalities and patrons of the Arts of that time. Despite being under tight control of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage from 1991 onwards, in the years between 2000 and 2010 due to economical difficulties of the proprietors, it was in danger of being auctioned off and access to it denied forever to the European citizens. This caused an international sensation and stirred public opinion thus provoking a discussion about Private Historical Archives.

It is worth mentioning the case of another precious private Archive, and unique within its genre, that does not contain documents written on parchment or paper but documents created thanks to the evolution of technology in the 19th century. I am talking about the renowned Photographic Archive of the historic firm Fratelli Alinari, founded in Florence in 1852: the oldest firm in the world working in the field of photography and communication.

This Archive, with around 4.000.000 pieces, was produced by the photographers of the firm Alinari and then it merged a series of photographic fonds produced by generations of other photographers: the Alinari Archive reconstructs the birth and development of the art of photography, as well as demonstrating that photography is the science and practice of creating durable images, on the one hand, and on the other -spanning 150 years- it illustrates social, cultural, political, artistic life not only of Italy, but also of a long series of European States and many other countries of the World.

This truly precious Archive was also at risk of being torn away from its cultural environment to probably be fragmented and dispersed: in fact, it was about to be removed and sold to a buyer from outside Italy, outside the context of the European Union. Only at the last minute was this terrible fate avoided.

These examples should encourage the European Institutions to come up with policies that reinforce the protection of Cultural Heritage.

Moreover, these examples commit European Institutions to supporting owners of Historical Archives, as well as the many Institutions all over Europe that conserve them, so as to enable them to carry out their digitization thus making available, even remotely, the Archival treasures scattered across all of Europe.

Without a doubt the Historical Archives must be kept in the place where they were formed over the generations and often over the centuries, that they must be conserved in the original context in which they have been created. Nevertheless, people should be able to benefit from them,

and therefore Europe should give increasingly greater emphasis to policies that favour remote access to these precious materials through modern technologies.

Finally, a few words from the Art Historian.

It is wrong think that the Archives formed by historical Families, or by historically significant Individuals, are useful only to scholars of History. For us, scholars of History of Art and disciplines related to Art, they are an invaluable and indispensable source.

For example, here is the statue I am studying, which is a work by the famous sculptor Giovanni Dupré, whose signature, as well as the date of completion, 1881, is visibly engraved on the side.

This great sculptor was born in Siena in 1817 and died in Florence in 1882 which means this statue was one of his last works, making it important.

Who was this young woman with such unique, unmistakable facial features?

See photograph n.7

The research I need to carry out, as Historian of Art, in order to give a name to this young woman and to ascertain her identity, is to explore the Archival documentation left by master Dupré or connected to him. However, research of this kind can only be done if one knows which Archival Fonds are fit for the purpose and also their location.

This thought brings me to the conviction that the existing Archival Heritage should be promoted through an accurate census of Archival Fonds, by means of an efficient system of information exchange between Curators and Proprietors and through the diffusion of data by way of today's advanced technologies.

To conclude, let me draw your attention to an Art and a Technique that make Europe prominent in the world: the tradition of Restoration of Archival Materials.

This European tradition too has to be supported and promoted, for its excellence and relevance, by the Institutions in all of Europe.

See photograph n.8

So, all I can do is thank, from the bottom of my heart, the Organisers of this Conference, for having invited me. And I sincerely hope that what has been pointed out today will be translated into initiatives able to benefit as many European Citizens as possible through the knowledge of Historical Archives.

And I, Aleksandra Gorb, too thank you warmly for the attention you have given me this evening.

COPY RIGHT 26 SEPTEMBER 2012.

Legally deposited at the SIAE (Italian Society of Authors and Editors) for full copy rights protection.