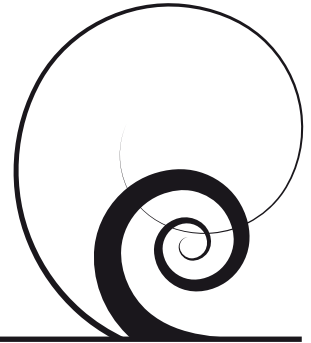

THE ORIGINS OF THE “COMPETITION FOR THE MENU OF LA COLOMBA”

Katia Toso



The “Competition for the Menu of La Colomba” came about in 1953, from the idea of asking artists to create a work to the dimensions of 30cm squared, so it could be reproduced by print for the cover of the menu du jour, which was often given to restaurant clients as a souvenir. The task of organising the first edition was entrusted to gallery owner, Carlo Cardazzo, who enlisted Virgilio Guidi, together with Federico Castellani and Orio Vergani, to join him on the jury. He saw to the participation of Italian artists; particularly the leading figures of Spatialism from the Milanese and Venetian artistic circles. The first prize was awarded to Giuseppe Capogrossi, and joint second to Fulvio Biancone, Gianni Dova and Mario Vellani Marchi, whilst four holiday prizes were presented to Edmondo Bacci, Bruno de Toffoli, Roberto and Luca Crippa.

The second edition of the “Menu of La Colomba” competition came about in 1960. There were several factors which each played a role in creating international interest in the event; its impeccable organisation, taken care of yet again by Carlo Cardazzo together with his brother, Renato; the substantial prize money (ten awards of 100,000 lire each and ten stays at the Hotel Bonvecchiati); and the professionalism and renown of the judging panel (amongst others, Michel Tapié, Marco Valsecchi, Gualtieri di San Lazzaro, Umbro Apollonio). It was a resounding success, with the participation of approximately 300 Italian and international artists. The prizes were awarded to Verdet, Corneille, Maryan, Alcoplay, Martin, Dumitrescu, Alechinsky, Bradley, Saura, Gentilini, Caporossi, Scanavino, Music, Bacci, Morandi, Bergamini, Sanfilippo, Romagnoni, and Rotella.

At the beginning of the two editions of this exceptional project- the artistic results of which still hang today on the walls of La Colomba, and the memories of which are still alive in the minds of the those involved and La Colomba's most faithful customers- there already existed a sense of unity between artistic and human affairs, which had been growing at the tables of the restaurant for more than a quarter of a century.

The fortune of La Colomba is actually owed to the intuition and the tenacity of the original restaurateur, Arturo Deana of Friuli, who in the autumn of 1929 had bought over an old trattoria with booths. The usual guests were labourers, students and other modest types who would bring food from their homes to eat there, accompanying their meal with a glass of wine. Welcoming to his tables artists, collectors and a multitude of critics and scholars, and likewise encouraging a close network of cross-discipline relationships, free of ideological barriers or the conventions of society, Deana took twenty years to build his fortune as a restaurateur and make La Colomba a real cultural reference

point, at the same time established himself as one of the most important Italian art collectors of the twentieth century.

In the case of Arturo Deana, collecting and patronage were intimately linked, so much so that the support he gave (both directly, through the exchange and acquisition of art works, as well as indirectly through the various prize competitions that he either organised himself or generously sponsored) gained him the title of “the new Renaissance patron.” Perhaps the thing that most associates the image of the collector to that of the Renaissance prince- rather than that of a rich bourgeois who aspires to self-legitimation- is the high regard and equal exchange that he managed to establish in comparison with the people of his “court”, allowing himself to be guided by their advice in terms of judging and choosing works. Through this we can trace a path which chronologically outlines the most significant of these encounters.

Only a few months after Deana took over the management of La Colomba, came the arrival of the gentle presence of a very young painter who, as Diego Valeri observed, “was a determining influence on Arturo from that point on.” He was speaking of the 21 year old Paola Consolo. Born in Venice but Milanese by adoption, she was the daughter of the poet Eugenia Consolo Sarfatti and niece twice removed through her mother’s side of Margherita, a writer and very influential figure within the artistic, cultural and political circles of Italy during the second decade of the century. Paola Consolo, Deana would come to remember, one day stopped to look at an extra dining area that he had just made from a box room, and knowing about his passion, said, “Arturo, if you give me carte blanche I’ll paint an entire wall for you.” As so it was that, in a few days, the back room of La Colomba was adorned with Venetian landscapes, still lives and mythical scenes which one can still admire today, if not in their original setting.

The problem of the back room of La Colomba (which lacked natural light as it didn’t have any windows in it) was resolved by an intelligent combination of twentieth-century painting and architectonic details, together with the latest examples of Milanese interior design. The sense of depth created in the panels painted by Consolo widens the sense of space within the room; the physicality of the actual walls disappears through a vista of trompe l’oeil still lives and landscapes. This scene is owed to the imagination of the painter who adapted it to the specificity of the restaurant’s convivial atmosphere and Venetian landscape, giving a view of the interior of the baths of Frezzeria, which didn’t overlook the Canal Grande. It is made apparent through these panels, and the iconography within them, that Consolo had a great understanding of her stylistic references, and total command with which she used them to create her own poetic and individual style. The dreamy and delicate atmosphere and the light application of oil paint in pastel tones imbue the pictorial surface with a smooth and even effect which is very similar to fresco. Such poetic elements are also found in the exponents of the then emerging Milanese “chiarista” group who Consolo already had close links to by the end of the 1920s. Included in this group were painters of Via Solferino; Birolli, Del Bon, Spilimbergo, and Lilloni. At the same time, Consolo clearly includes elements that she gathered from both the visual repertory of her artistic training- which she did towards the end of 1920s- and the teachings of Achille Funi. These elements are particularly evident in the iconographic references taken from the still lives of Filippo de Pisis and from the composed calm within the canvases of Giorgio De Chirico, whilst Carrà’s tuition is seen especially in the colour application of impasto.

If we are to consider the panels of Paola Consolo for La Colomba as the very first part of the Deana collection, then they are simultaneously representative of the beginnings of a blossoming of cultural exchanges and visits which was already starting to flourish at the restaurant, not only by the interest that the work elicited and by the uniqueness of the painter, but also and moreover thanks to the friendships that the painter managed to direct there.

Amongst them, a modest yet significant figure is at the source of such relationships; the Lombard painter Giovanni Colombo da Busnago. Da Busnago was a regular at the restaurant, but would have passed unobserved and free of consequence as he did at within artistic debate, had he not started the custom of “exchange,” i.e. the practise of acquiring works of art which would determine the fortune of Deana’s collecting, which he thus remembers:

I started straightaway, between 1930 and '31, by accepting a painting in exchange for a bill which had been left unpaid by an artist who was short on cash. The first was Giovanni Colombo a.k.a. Giovanni da Busnago, an extrovert character. He had a wooden leg and an exceptional ability to paint. He was capable, when he so desired, of doing three or four paintings a day. He took lunch here for several months, and in the end, left me several canvases.

From that point onwards the “exchange” became a proper custom, so much so that even Diego Valeri confirmed that the beginnings of

such a practise were due to that “poor devil of a painter who disappeared into the mists of his landscape paintings without any ever hearing from him again”:

Everyone, enjoying the hot meals that Arturo served, paid their debts with freshly executed paintings and watercolours and drawings. And so the dream Deana had had as a young man started to take shape: the collection of beautiful paintings started to grow...

The presence of Giovanni da Busnago at La Colomba moulded the possibility of other aesthetic analogies with the work of those painters who brought life to Venice. Firstly, the l'enfant prodige from the second generation of the Burano school, Fiorvante Seibezzi, who ended up being, by the end of the 1960s, one of the most instinctively understood and loved artists within the collection. As a matter of fact, the works of Seibezzi, presented many similarities in terms of painterly ability and working style to those of Giovanni da Busnago, who shared a similar ease and speed in painting landscapes as well as an innate instinctive ability which is seen in the beauty of painterly touch without studying in depth his expressive possibilities. The painting done by da Busnago was entirely free of any sense of intellectualising, and was purely the exquisite rendering of his vision. It does not surprise us, therefore, to read the testimony of a commentator, according to whom the painter's virtuosity actually roused “the great wonder of Vedova who, then a young boy, brought his easel to him, and that of Arturo Deana, the owner of La Colomba where the artist, and Fillipo de Pisis were both guests.”

The most significant merit of Paola Consolo is, however, that of having introduced her illustrious aunt, Margerita Sarfatti, to the restaurant. Sarfatti was one of the most influential people within Italy's cultural scene between the mid 1920s to the early 1930s, and she in turn brought Milan of the 1930s, or rather, the nationally renowned artists who were drawn there, to his establishment as well. In doing so, she offered Deana, besides from a new and fascinating clientele for the restaurant, also an exceptional occasion for cultural renovation. Later, he himself would come to acknowledge the determining role that these two figures had in his life:

“Sarfatti was recognised for her private relationship with Benito Mussolini, but most of all she was known within cultural and artistic circles as a brilliant figure within writing, academia and art criticism. She herself even started to come to the restaurant, bringing along to lunch with her the likes of Carena, Carrà, Campigli, Morandi, Rosai, Soffici, Tosi, and Zanini. These artists, in turn, invited friends and colleagues to come and try the culinary specialities that we offered. The old “osteria of the gondoliers” transformed into not only a renowned restaurant, but also an artistic coterie, frequented by the most notable figures of the literary, poetic and art worlds. It became the meeting place for every artistic happening in Venice.”

Margherita Sarfatti, an art critic of Venetian origin who moved to Milan between 1907 and 1909, was often present in her home town, especially during the Biennales, becoming a reference figure of the second half of the 1920s, particularly between 1926 and 1932. As her niece, Magali Sarfatti-Larson, remembers, as well as being extremely wealthy and part of society's upper echelons, Sarfatti was often a lunch or dinner guest, but almost always in the more inexpensive restaurants. It isn't difficult to imagine her, as she brought those artists who were closest to her, to the tables of La Colomba, capturing their attention with her mentor-like tone, set to educate them about culture and art. Sarfatti- eclectic and bold in her choices since the end of the 1800s- had enriched her own home with the works of twentieth century artists who she patronised. These included the works of young and established masters, as well as French post-impressionist painting, of which she was a great connoisseur. Her authoritative presence offered Deana the chance of attaining a model of private collecting which was amongst the most distinguished on a national level.

Another figure who advocated this particular attention for characteristic Venetian painting was one of the first and most devoted regulars at La Colomba; Diego Valeri. A professor of French Literature and Italian Modern and Contemporary Literature at the University of Padova, Valeri was just over forty years of age when he moved to his Venetian home at the end of the 1920s. His acquaintance with Deana was immediate, as was their mutual friendship which blossomed, “right at the moment,” Valeri would remember, “that I, having in turn become a Venetian myself (finally, and for good), first made contact with him. It was a happy occasion for both of us; it couldn't have been anything otherwise between two art lovers.” Due to his aesthetic and ideological nature, as well as his own disposition, Valeri was impelled to choose as an elective society, within Deana's establishment, the formation of Venetian painters: Pio Semeghini, Marco Novati, the young painters of the Venetian Vedutismo movement including Scarpa Croce, Dalla Zorza, Varagnolo, Scattola, Da Venezia, Mori, Cobiacono, Privato, Bergamini and Ravenna. If his passion for Venetian painting was a constant in his life which he cultivated and proudly acknowledged until

his death, during the 1930s it was exclusive, persistent and all-absorbing, without any concession to new movements or recognitions of them which appeared from the early 1940s onwards. Until that time Valeri practised a sort of Venetian irredentism based on the values of poetic sensibility and local colour. Valeri's cultural activism actually became part of the artistic debate of his time, creating a gap within the standardising monotony which the exhibition system organised by fascism was generally marked by. Already, in his review at the "23rd Exhibition of the Bevilacqua la Masa Work" or "The 2nd Regional Fascist Exhibition of Fine Art" in 1931, Diego Valeri maintained that "it isn't a question of origin, but... the eyes of a Venetian don't see like the eyes of a Florentine (much less those of a German and Frenchman)... Venice is a pictorial world in itself... the New has to concern, by sheer force, the imagination from the environment in which it naturally lives (especially if this environment is Venice)."

The artistic and cultural scene in Venice during the second half of the 1930s is remarkable for the innovative collecting and publishing that came about as well as the intellectual bonds created due Carlo Cardazzo. Still a young man, he had appeared on the collecting scene during the same few years when Deana himself was starting out, and by that point was already an important figure not only within the local artistic circle, but for all the intellectuals and scholars who passed through the city. In fact, from the group of people surrounding the Edizioni del Cavallino (the art publishing connected to the Cavallino Gallery), which was run by him, came about a true meeting of noble minds. The "salons" that he held on Saturday afternoons produced a renaissance within the city of considerable interest in contemporary art. In the discussions that were held at 3478 Ragusei Lane, figurative art was not, however, the only topic spoken about because Cardazzo considered music, literature, philosophy, poetry as well as figurative art simply as different forms of cultural expression. This was a cultural interest which rose above others, and was completely free of any form of restriction. As evidence of this deep conviction, he continually accepted new ideas transmitted through the most diverse forms of expression; rather, he provoked it in the artists themselves. The regular guests for Saturday afternoons at Cardazzo's home- Cesetti, Viani and Santomaso- were often joined by Gaspari, Scarpa, De Luigi, Valeri and Marchiori, as well as any illustrious guests who happened to be passing, including such figures as Sinisgalli, Cardarelli, Montale, Soffici, Morandi and Rosai. The opening of the Cavallino Gallery (by Cardazzo on 25th April 1942 at Riva degli Schiavoni, next to Hotel Danieli) would therefore come to represent a crucial change; the shift from the private, cultural domain to the public eye.

There is no doubt that many of Cardazzo's personal acquaintances in turn joined the "Colomba coterie," even if it's likely that in certain cases the exact opposite took place. This period brought about, for example, Cardazzo's first contact with Giuseppe Cesetti, his trustworthy "artistic advisor," who had come to Venice in 1932 as an assistant to the Academy's chair of painting, Virigilio Guidi. Carlo Cardazzo availed himself of Cesetti's precious advice both in terms of buying the work of a particular painter's work, and in terms of handling the complex assemblage of his own collection, which, at the beginning of the 1940s, included approximately 400 works by the great Italian masters of the century (and indeed, with a monograph from 1935 dedicated to Cesetti, Cardazzo opened, as a mark of esteem, a proper publishing house). The mediation of Cesetti at the Colomba, can be imagined firstly in the acquisition of Tuscan Landscape by Ottone Rosai in 1935, an artist who had already arrived in Venice following in the footsteps of Sarfatti. Cesetti would go on to be a constant presence at the Colomba until at least the 1950s and, it was thanks to him that the collection was greatly enriched. But the interest that Deana had in collecting, in comparison to the painter, had much less importance in respect to the developing influence caused Cesetti's mediation in favour of his artist friends.

The most important case undoubtedly concerns Filippo de Pisis; occasionally present in Venice since the 1920s, De Pisis arrived at Cardazzo's gallery by way of Cesetti, who was the exclusive intermediary for acquisitions of his works. Certainly, Deana had no need for any stimulus from Cesetti or Cardazzo to be drawn to the work of this artist. De Pisis was substantially promoted in the city by dealers such as Zamberlan or Pietro Mentasti, the latter making the most of his collaboration with the "depisian" Juti Ravenna in the running of the Arcobaleno gallery. The first documented presence of de Pisis at the Colomba actually dates back to 12th September 1937, as he noted in the journal about a holiday in Venice (the writing came to be of extraordinary importance because the level, as it were, of the people who ate with him at La Colomba gives us a very clear indication of both the restaurant's fame and the close network of relations that was developing there):

"Concert at Goldoni, Strawinsky, Rieti, Milhaud, Marchesi, splendid evening at Castelbarco's home. Work in Venice. André Campigli Cagli Funi at the Colomba for breakfast. Dinner with Castelbarco, two servants in livery. Delightful Venice."

At the time, the works of de Pisis could be bought for relatively little either directly from the artist himself or through dealers such as

Zamberlan. Even on the market his prices weren't increased, so much so that, even until the end of the 1940s, a still life by de Pisis could be bought for three times less than, for example, a landscape by Tosi. For collectors, such economic accessibility made the desire to add ever new works to those they already owned particularly tantalising, extravagantly stacking up still lifes and landscapes and floral paintings against the walls. These works, far from weighing down the atmosphere or falling into the trap of repetition, increased in worth as they were added to. An atmosphere of tonal interaction came about through the dialogue between the works, and it was through this and the variations in composition that the abundance of work found its aesthetic unity. Deana sensed this particular quality about these paintings by the Ferrarese painter, and would go on to collect and exhibit a significantly high amount of them, continually varying the layout within the limited exhibition spaces so as to allow a constant dialectic between the works.

In the same way, during the second half of the 1930s Deana had the opportunity to develop his interest in the painting of Vedova. By that stage, Deana was hearing increasing approval of the young artist and was spurred on to become more acquainted with his work. Vedova had a boldness of design and colour use that was introduced to him through his knowledge of the pictorial inventiveness seen in the work of de Pisis and da Busnago, and he had been inspired by them since the beginning of the decade. Looking back at the artist's story one can imagine Deana sat at the table with Arturo Martini, who also aided with the generous offer requested by the Trevignano sculptor in what would be the first prize-giving to happen at the Colomba, certainly the most spontaneous and unselfish in the history of the restaurant. Vedova himself remembers:

Martini was intrigued by me, probably he was letting his mind wonder, he wanted to see what it was I did, he even lashed out at me to get a reaction from me... Like many others, I was fascinated by it. That's why I've always given such importance to that unofficial, unorganised award, which Martini, who was sat at the Colomba restaurant one evening in 1938, wanted to give me. He saw me come in, looking off the cuff, with my portfolio like Lorenzo Viani... dressed in that strange way which was considered to be flamboyant... he called to me across the way, and he addressed me light-heartedly: "Just look at him, who does he think he is? Come here..." And so I, knees shaking and my heart racing, I walked up to him quickly... Having looked at my drawings, Martini said: "I'm going to make an award, those of you beside me, get your money out." And he even pulled the money out of his pocket, and gave it to me, leaving me to go... I've always been very touched by this, and when I remember it I always have reason to be moved by it."

Despite the warmth between Deana and Vedova, which we can be sure of due to the artist's presence at the Colomba since the end of the 1940s, (in spite of the name that the L'Angelo restaurant had made for itself, making it the only social meeting place to be preferred by the charismatic head of the New Front for the Arts) it no longer led to any actual purchases because of their increasing aesthetic and ideological differences, which later became unalterable.

The Biennale of 1942, which almost coincided with the opening of the Cardazzo's Cavallino Gallery, offered Deana the opportunity to meet gallery owner Ettore Gian Ferrari, who had been called upon by Antonio Maraini to the management of the Official Sales for the 23rd Biennale, thanks to the success he achieved at the "3rd Exhibition of the National Syndicate of Fine Art" of Milan in 1941 due to his own initiative and professional skill. This new appointment had brought a breeze of change into the old sales procedure of the Biennale, which up until that point had been entrusted to unqualified staff; at the same time, he contributed to the tripling of sales at the Biennale in comparison to the previous year. Consequently, as of 1942, Gian Ferrari would hold the post without interruption (with the sole exception of 1948, when it was entrusted to fellow townsman, Barbaroux) until 1968. This post, in turn, allowed him to meet numerous collectors, significantly widen his commercial influence, and at the same time, ease his assimilation into the Venetian cultural set. Gian Ferrari was a pragmatic supporter of Italian figurative painting, and had modest taste, being entirely uninterested in fashionable art, preferring those artists who had entered their own original work without giving in to the stylistic conventions forced by the regime or militant criticism.

Remarkably, the historical situation in Venice during the final years of the war was actually favourable for La Colomba in that it strengthened those relations which were so important to the restaurant and its collection. During this short time span there were actually several significant encounters amongst artists and other cultural figures of national renown; due to evacuation, or the fear caused by the war, they had been escaping to Venice since 1942 to seek refuge, and were arriving more frequently following the events of 8th September 1943. During those difficult times, Venice was commonly regarded an island of salvation, protected by a halo of sanctity; an image derived from its illustrious past and the richness of its artistic heritage which would preserve it from enemy bombings. But for the artists and scholars, Venice offered something extra. It represented a place where they could continue their work in relative calm and above all, the natural location for the

gathering of great minds. And so it was that between 1943 and 1946, in comparison to the rest of Italy, Venice lived an extraordinary chapter of its history in what was almost a state of grace, for a brief period becoming a true cultural capital. An in-depth history of the true importance of so many illustrious figures residing in Venice at that time is still to be written.

Of course, even here the effects of the war had been felt. Already, upon the occasion of the Biennale of 1942, Maraini had recognised the material difficulties that artists would have to face throughout the island, such as the scarcity of basic materials “like artists’ canvases, colours and base metal, such as bronze for sculptors and copper for engravers.” However, within the city, as Comisso had to say “the black market was astoundingly well organised,” and from the secret base at Chioggia, together with rudimentary food stuffs, would arrive all kinds of basic or luxury goods to make living easier. These made life more comfortable not just for the artists, but also for numerous other refugees, such as the upstart industrialists, wealthy landowners from the mainland and important political figures who were searching for protection by way of the German commanders. Venice was literally inundated with money, and the busy daily life that was led there tried to chase away the ghosts of the war that was taking place outside it. As a consequence, these circumstances determined the final change in fortune for La Colomba, which had become the meeting place par excellence for the artists and renowned personalities who were residing in the city at the time, and as a result Deana’s collecting was aimed at its highest goals.

In fact, on the 18th June, 1942, upon signing the contract (written up by Ettore Gian Ferrari) in the Sales Office of the 23rd Biennale, for the purchase of a Still Life from 1940 by Cesetti, Arturo Deana added his name to the prestigious list of buyers at that major national art exhibition and thus emerged from the understated collecting he had been carrying out for over a decade. The not unsubstantial amount of 9,500 lira given for the painting by Cesetti was an intentional statement at this public debut among the elite of reputable collecting.

It was during these years that La Colomba started to gain recognition for the cultural activity that surrounded it, and with that recognition came the requests for contributions and involvement by way of sponsorship. Therefore, in 1942, having arrived at the Academy and being aware of the lack of teaching material for students, Arturo Martini had banked on Deana and a few other friends involved in collecting, such as Benno Geiger, Aldo Camerino and Astolfo de Maria, in order to gain donations to buy paints and clay. In July 1944 the request then arrived from the “The Organisation for the Welfare of War Evacuees” to contribute a work for public auction to raise funds for the evacuees who were kept in the Napoleonic Wing of the Procuratie. Deana donated a painting depicting flowers by Luigi Donzelli, a young artist who would debut a month later in the “14th Art Exhibition of the Syndicate of Fine Art” in the very same Napoleonic Wing.

Amongst all the figures who were part of Venetian art scene during those years, Filippo de Pisis always rose above the others. The worries about the war in progress and about the frequent bomb raids that were happening in Milan (where the artist was then residing, in Via Rugabella) did not appear to bother de Pisis in the slightest. And whilst Venice was starting to draw people to her shores from all over, the painter continued to travel without making any arrangements, oblivious to it all. De Pisis was absorbed in his art, which evidently represented a world in which any concerns outside of the aesthetic were forbidden access. He only arrived in Venice in August 1942, and his first port of call was at the home of Diego Valeri, who had Massimo Campigli and his pregnant wife, Giuditta, as guests at the time. By the time of de Pisis’s stay in Venice, Deana was in all likelihood already in possession of two of the most beautiful and outstanding pieces in his collection of Campigli’s work: *The Theatre* and *The Four Sisters*, both from 1940. The choice of these works fits in at the start of the 1940s to a new collecting trend; within figure painting there was a tendency to favour more delicate female portraits, with a strong sense of solidity within the composition of the image. An example of this is seen in the painting *The Four Sisters*, portraying the female figures as enchantress-like femme fatales, yet at the same time conveying a reassuring sense of intimacy. It is perhaps precisely in order to admire the works of his friend (hanging on the walls of Deana’s restaurant) that de Pisis decided to take lunch there, taking along with him his pet parrot, Coco. This happened on 1st September, just two days following his arrival in Venice, having spent the morning with his cousin Maria Costilde and Campigli himself, visiting his personal room at the Biennale. It was only on 21st August 1943, almost a month after the fall of fascism was announced and during the chaos that was Badoglio’s forty five days of rule that the artist decided to move to Venice for good, due to the increasingly unstable situation in Milan.

In the meantime, Venice was welcoming the best of high society and the eccentric, noisy world of show business, becoming the temporary residence for established artists. Following the events of the 8th of September and the birth of the Italian Republic, actors, directors and film crews from the film industry and national theatres were moving to the Gardens of the Biennale, followed by almost the whole cultural world. At La Colomba, by virtue of this practice of exchange, more artists than ever before were dining alongside the rich and wealthy, and the war seemed to be an entirely surmountable event. It would have passed by unnoticed had it not been for the barbed wire that enclosed the little

outdoor garden, where Deana had tables for lunch-time alfresco dining. It was an undeniable mark of the appropriation of the restaurant and the surrounding area by the Germans, who had in fact established their Platzkommandatur in the nearby Piazza San Marco in order to uphold the order. Despite the government orders, Deana managed to offer entirely home-made lunches to his guests, hiding the food which had been restricted by rationing or banned from import under the vegetables he served. His father's farm at Travesio and the secret black market based at Chioggia allowed them to compensate for the restrictions which were elsewhere too hard to overcome. It mustn't be believed, however, that the problem with the food shortage was a simple matter for those who, like the evacuated artists, were unable to stock up on provisions by themselves, either due to a lack of local connections, or the difficult economic situation, or due to a natural ineptitude in dealing with practical affairs.

Out of everyone, it was undeniably de Pisis who made the most use of Deana's invitation, even if initially he was in the habit of regularly paying for his meals, as can be understood from the notes in his pocket-book from October 1943 where the signs of the illness that had been bothering him for a few years can be read:

23/10: Je suis à un tournant de ma vie! Depression, fatigue, weight loss, nervous complaints. I eat well at the Colomba 117 lire, and it cheers me up.

It was entirely thanks to this practice of exchange that Deana consequently increased his collection of works by de Pisis, as well as the collections of other Venetians. If, indeed, Deana dealt his winning card by playing to the artist's greed, Cardazzo made use of the family business to rebuild the small palace of San Bastian which he had bought the previous year, to his taste. The dealers Zamberlan and Pospisil provided canvases and paints and, in order to win him over entirely, flourished a wad of banknotes before his eyes. So as not to mention it, a yearly fee equal to eight hundred thousand lira were imposed due to his greedy nature and were paid by Cardazzo and Pospisil "half each, in exchange, naturally, for paintings."

The event of greatest cultural interest to take place in 1943 was the opening in Calle Larga XXII Marzo of Robert Nonveiller's Piccola Galleria, just a few paces away from the Baths of Frezzeria. Nonveiller's exhibition had come to equal the Cavallino Gallery in qualitative terms regarding the choices of work. Thus, purchases were made of the several works by different artists. These included the works of Bruno Saetti (among which Boy with seashell from 1945 and a few portraits of his daughter Maria, done on commission, two of which are still in the collection today, which capture with great realism the proud and knowing beauty of the twelve year old girl), of Arturo Martini, an artist who was shown in both galleries, but more frequently and with more attention at the Piccola Galleria alongside Anton Zoran Music from Gorizia. Music was an original discovery by Nonveiller, having stayed in Venice for a few months after coming back to Italy from Ljubljana where he lived previously, following the occupation of Dalmatia and Slovenia.

Together with the great influx of wealth that had been poured into the city, Deana's collection had reached a considerable amount, so much so that in August 1944 the first photographic reproductions of works in the collection were made, an order entrusted to the Venetian photo lab "Interphoto" which had recently opened. As far as the reasons that caused the collector to undertake what seems to be an unofficial recognition of the collection, these can be traced back to two things; to the desire to have a documentation of them as a precautionary measure so as to protect them from possible theft, but moreover, to the demand of having reproductions on the back of which either the author of the work or experts could put a declaration of authenticity, as was in vogue at the time, in anticipation of future exchanges with other collectors. Another possible motive behind carrying out these orders could be traced back to the functional use of such photographs, in anticipation of publishing postcards for the restaurant, or to reproduce the works in exhibition catalogues which Deana started to get involved with at this point. What is certain is that the significance of such orders provides us with an idea of the dimensions that the collection had reached during this period. Just five months after the first commission, at the beginning of December 1944, 87 works had been reproduced; another 65 were then added to that within the year, and a further 86 by the end of 1946. That aside, going through the handwritten record which gives witness to this, we are informed of the incredible vitality of the art world in Venice, particularly during 1944-46, and further to that, one can sense the astonishing flourishing of exchanges between the art collectors, both old and new, their tireless search for the missing pieces of their own collections, and all this happening despite the gravity of the events at the time.

Venice endured the last frenetic months of 1944 unperturbed; not a single event connected to the war affected the city directly. After the first international rejoicing of the end of the war, followed a rather lengthy period of adjustment, during which the wealthy evacuees, who had been the source of energy in daily life over the last few years of conflict, started to leave the city, causing a significant fall in sales of

art work. During this period, which is also marked by the notable rise in prices, even the highly sought after de Pisis found himself suddenly struggling with the decrease in the commissions that he had grown accustomed to. In contrast, Deana did not encounter such difficulties; during the course of 1945, the collector could finally and with great style complete the purchases which he had made in Florence before the 1943 armistice, and which had been interrupted, against his will, due to the impossibility of crossing the Gothic Line. On this occasion he bought a group of four paintings from the Florentine antiquarian bookshop, Gonnelli, situated at the heart of the city in Via Ricasoli. These included works by Ottone Rosai, Felice Carena and, above all, the Self Portrait by Giorgio De Chirico, dating back to the early 1920s, for cost 170,000 lire, which still today remains to be one of the most prestigious pieces in the collection. The subject of the work is difficult to analyse due to the numerous intellectualistic meanings and ideas belonging to the Ermetismo school of poetry which are within it. In his Self Portrait, De Chirico represents himself as Hebdomeros, the reflective and meditative sage who was the protagonist from the novel of the same name, written in 1929. Hebdomeros represents the metamorphosis from human into statue through a quasi-absolute tonal monochromatism, and seeking, in the symbiosis between man and statue, the reassembling of the apollonian/dionysiac dichotomy formulated by Nietzsche. What was undeniably crucial in terms of Deana's choice, apart from the evident quality of technical ability, was the provenance of the work from a prestigious Roman collection: it isn't hard to imagine the impact that was made by ascertaining that the work being sold by the antiquarian bookshop was reproduced in the luxurious catalogue connected to the Fiano collection, (a volume which Gonnelli surely showed the collector, as an helpful, explanatory addition to his sales pitch), so much so that he himself was able to quote the reference in great detail in the sales declaration. With this acquisition Deana was making a choice which on one hand drew him closer to Cardazzo, who was already the owner of a Self Portrait by De Chirico, (portraying the artist wearing a scarf and jumper in front of his framed canvases with unusual casual familiarity) and on the other, the purchase distinctly differentiated him from the others, from the moment that the psychological weight of the work bought by him, showed itself to be a great deal superior in the sublime *aulicità* which emanates from the image. Upon buying the Self Portrait in 1945, it became the *pièce de resistance* of the collection, so much so that Deana would never want to let it go, not even at the burning request from De Chirico himself who wanted to gain ownership of it in the following years. Uccia Zamberlan said that during the course of the 1950s, De Chirico offered two huge canvases depicting a metaphysical subject which he had newly completed in exchange for the early piece, and that Deana, in no way intimidated that the lofty status of the artist, swinging his hat in his hands, exclaimed, "No! I'm keeping it to myself!" The collector even had to give up the very modest Self Portrait bought in 1946 (it too of very high quality but in no way comparable to the first in terms of intensity and iconographic singularity) and in a very short space of time, since there was no trace of it in the exhibitions which regularly took place during the second half of the 1940s. Deana clearly had understood that the first painting, being a true masterpiece, allowed him to go beyond the level of Cardazzo's corpus "dechirichian" and by doing so reached, not only through sheer quantity of works but as regards to the quality of them, a position at the pinnacle of Venetian collecting. In June 1946 came about the first documented entries within the collection of paintings by Morandi (a painter who, it should be noted, became one of the artists to arrive at the Colomba in the course of the 1930s in the wake of Sarfatti's presence there). By the middle of 1946, the most highly anticipated event in Venice had still not taken place, namely the reopening of the Biennale, which had been suspended since 1942. Within the city, the lack of an official event was truly felt, of an "institutional" exhibition, after the inevitable temporary interruption due to the world war, which assumed the responsibility for a historicizing selection for the art of the first half of the century and that were listening to the recommendations coming from private galleries and fashionable groups. On the first of July 1946, at the Gardens of the Biennale, the "La Colomba Award for Painting" was launched, organized by Arturo Deana, who succeeded in including both these points of view within it. Even if it came out as a private initiative, it didn't hide its aspiration to the institutional model, which was that of the Biennale. The immediate suggestion by the organisers was, however, to attach the label of "Biennale minore" to the prize, whilst waiting for the official one to reopen. To this suggestion was added another, more far-reaching one; that of taking on the connotation of an art event with a true, stable and independent form, adopting the formula of alternated periodic cadence like that of the Biennale, as prescribed in the Announcement of Competition. The definitions that were most often used by the press in regards to the award were, notably, such tags as "the short trial for the future Biennale," "the short preface to the Biennales of the future," "the little Biennale," "the minor Biennale" and "the alternative Biennale." Amongst those who best emphasised the connection of these ambitions to the enthusiastic feel of the moment was Diego Valeri, who, in his speech given upon the presentation of the catalogue that was read on the 1st July in the presence of the city authorities, highlighted the coexistence of the two cores within this initiative:

This exhibition of painting, brought about by the romantic idea of a group of artists, and taken shape outwith any sense of "officialness", has a meaning which transcends it and, as it were, crowns it. That this is simply an artistic affair, a show of beautiful painting and nothing more hardly needs to be said (the experts and the public will judge if, and if so, to what extent, it will succeed in doing so). But as an idea and an undertaking, it has come to signify, even unintentionally, something more than that. It has come to represent the desire for spiritual revival within our country, after so much suffering and shame and misfortune only death seemed worse; the return of our country to her deepest truth, to that tradition of high civilisation which has always belonged to her, throughout the ages. In anticipation of the Biennale, which should renew and revitalise our contact with this new period, this smaller Biennale named "La Colomba" (and smaller only in a quantitative sense) shows, in the meantime, that Italy's artistic life goes on and that it is not lacking in either courage or faith. That this should taken place in Venice, the glorious capital of painting and of beauty, is true and proper; and is also, let us hope, of good omen.

The first requirement to fulfil was its international quality, that receptiveness that had always characterised the Venice Biennale and helped differentiate it from, for example, the Quadriennale in Rome. The opening lines of the Announcement of Competition says, in fact, that the "La Colomba Award for Painting" of one hundred thousand lire was established in Venice for "Italian and international artists." The international participation in the Award was effectively marginal and exclusively concerned artists from abroad who had already been living in Italy for some time. However, the invitation of the Announcement of Competition is an important indicator, which undoubtedly came back into the discussion of the reopening of the Biennale at a moment in which the enthusiasm that was felt about artistic reunification could have lost sight of the traditional cosmopolitanism of Venice, in favour of a passionate redefinition of the identity of national spirit. The intention was to have the show in the hallowed location of the Biennale, where no private exhibition had dared to take place before. It was this aspect of the Deana's initiative which caused a difficult situation; that of the evocative and symbolic vernissage which gave the event national importance and prestige, arousing a general sense of anticipation. The situation that the organizers had to face, and the costs that Deana had to pay to make the exhibition possible were not insubstantial; given the fresh aftermath of the war, the conditions that the most important art exhibition in Italy and in the world was going to be held in were disheartening.

Actually, as it so happened, after September 1943 the Cinecittà establishment was moved there, in the belief that Venice would be safe from the bombings and because the Biennale already had a lot of film equipment. After a while, even the Istituto Nazionale Luce were granted permission by the Commissario Straordinario, Giovanni Barberini, for the temporarily usage of the buildings of the Biennale. So, from 21st February 1941, when the filming started and until the Liberation, the Pavilion of Italy was transformed into a theatre and several other pavilions were adapted for use as development and printing laboratories, or dubbing laboratories, or more simply as spaces to store the film gear, which markedly damaged the structures. During the summer of 1946, a problem emerged; that of removing the film sets and readapting the two pavilions which had already been chosen by the organisers of the "La Colomba Award for Painting," namely the pavilion of the recently defeated Germany and, directly opposite it, the pavilion of France. It's impossible to know with any certainty the grounds for these specific choices, the reason for this being that there isn't any trace of the details relating to the production of this exhibition in the Biennale archives, and so today that period in time appears simply as an unexplained black hole. The war, or rather the fresh aftermath of the war, appears to have wiped out all documentation relating to those difficult years, including even the slightest reference to the Award, which must have had the necessary permits and insurance documents. In regards to the pavilion of Germany- which didn't participate in the 24th Biennale after its defeat- it isn't hard to imagine how the space could have been granted without too many reservations. In regards to the pavilion of France, however, besides from the fact that by facing the Germany pavilion it made going round the show rather more pleasant and gave the show itself more coherence, the profitable relations established between the organisers of the Award, along with the upper management of the Biennale, the Consulate and the Italo-French Association of Culture have to be taken into consideration. There was no need to resort to employing an architect to readapt the two pavilions, but despite that, it seems that Deana's claim of having spent an "arm and a leg" on the work is still credible, in light of the fact that manual labour was particularly expensive during this time of galloping inflation.

The coordinating and directing mind behind this complex organisation was Carlo Cardazzo. It was only natural that such a task should, by right, concern the most important gallery owner in Venice, a gallery which Deana regularly visited since the beginning of the 1940s. With remarkable business sense, Cardazzo had noticed the first signs of crisis within the Venetian artistic market, owed firstly to the combined effects of inflation and the mass departure of the rich collectors who had populated the city during the wartime, sensing that the moment had arrived to expand their own influence. He had decided to work in two distinct directions: on one side, further developing the image

of Cavallino and his Edizioni by means of an advertising campaign which aimed to conquer new territory, and on the other opening a new gallery in Milan, a city which not only was rapidly gaining back the economic and cultural dominance that it had before the war, but was also free of the seasonal market that Venice was subject to. The organisation of the Award was undoubtedly the most successful promotion of both galleries during the immediate post-war period. Yet, in the first instance it was started as an immediate reaction to the zealous amount of exhibition and arts enterprises that came about after the Liberation from other private Venetian galleries and from newly-formed cultural groups; first of all the "Free School of The Plastic Arts" by Mario Deluigi, Carlo Scarpa and Anton Giulio Ambrosini, and the artistic organisation of the "Youth Centre for Cultural Unity" with its exhibitions and editing happening at Gallery Arco.

Cardazzo's participation in the organization of the "La Colomba Award for Painting" comes across, therefore, in two main directions: Trieste and Milan, cities in which the vogue for exhibitions that was evidence of a strong commercial interest aimed at re-establishing the interest of collectors. The two most prestigious galleries of Trieste, the Galleria Michelazzi and the Galleria Trieste, were given the task of expanding upon the Announcement of Competition and including the necessary information that artists had asked for. In the meantime, Deana bought a space on the cover of the local specialist magazine, "Vernice" for the promotion of his La Colomba trattoria. If the scene in Trieste represented a fairly fertile ground for supporting a successful, widespread advertising campaign, then the line of action taken in Milan, through the old connections that Cardazzo had there, and the new contacts made at the opening of the Gallery del Naviglio, was undoubtedly important in order to pursue success on a national level.

The Commission that Cardazzo had gathered together included journalists and literary critics, amongst them Gaetano Baldacci, one of the biggest names in Italian publishing and responsible for launching "Il Giorno" newspaper in 1956, and Arturo Tofanelli the new director of the extremely popular illustrated weekly, "Tempo." The critics included Diego Valeri and Francesco Flora, the latter holding the position of president. At this point, a balancing of the "literary" establishment with a qualifying presence of movers and shakers from the art scene was called for. To this end, Cardazzo looked beyond the professional art critics and directly to the artists, choosing four representatives: Cesetti, de Pisis, Tosi and Casorati.

Cardazzo turned once again to his circle of friends in Lombardy in order to bring a person into the heart of the Commission who, aside from being an old friend of Cardazzo's, was one of the most important and noted collectors of Italian contemporary art at the time: the Brescian lawyer, Pietro Feroldi.

Valeri added an extra duty to his task of official responsibility, which was more in accordance with the cordial mood; this happened one evening at La Colomba, on the 1st July once the Commission's verdict had been announced, when Valeri improvised a poem in Venetian dialect called "A Toast (in set rhymes) at the lunch for the Award de La Colomba" which Deana later had published as an elegant leaflet by Zanetti. The aim of the poem to recognise the event is conveyed in its verses by ironic and deglamourising simplicity, an event which through the work of some of those who had come together for the inaugural dinner, brought the event back to its most natural and direct meaning; that of a union of friends and artists who had once again found their enthusiasm, due to the atmosphere of cultural revival after the sad events of the previous few years.

The secretary of the Award was Milena Milani, Cardazzo's partner, who he met at the end of 1943 when, still a university student in Rome and pupil of Cardarelli, she entered one of her works into the competition for writer-painters organised by Cardazzo himself.

The geographical division of the 161 admitted participants reflected, naturally, the organisational structure of the Award. Although there were representative artists from almost all the regions of central-southern Italy, the three most highly represented areas were Lombardy, the Veneto, and Trieste-Friuli. Amongst the other regions represented, one can identify artists from Emilia, Turin (all students of Casorati: Albino Galvani, Paola Levi Montalcini, Nella Marchesini, Riccardo Chicco and Piero Martina who, although he wasn't one of his students, was encouraged by him), Rome, Tuscany and Trentino. The total lack of representation of any artists from the South of Italy or the islands is wholly justifiable due to the organizational difficulty in widespread distribution of the Announcement of Competition. Only five international artists were admitted into the competition: Eugenio Dragutescu, Maurice Esnault, Carlotta Frumi Radnitzova, Carlo Hollesch, Henri Steiner, all of whom were residing in Italy at the time.

The competing artists in the Award belonged to different age groups and various artistic backgrounds. A proportionate space was taken up by those artists who were known as the "masters of the twentieth century," a role which, by this stage, had seemed somewhat outdated and stigmatised. Most notably among them are Carrà, Borra, Campigli, Carena, Rosai, Saetti, Carlo and Mirella Sbisà, Tozzi, Gigiotti and Zanini. A notable space was inevitably dedicated to the exponents of modern (and primarily Venetian) landscape painting or Vedutism, the most

charismatic figures being Semeghini, Seibezzi, Novati, Mori and Vellani Marchi, followed by a significant amount of smaller artists belonging to various movements, despite the approach of the “Burano Award,” which was specifically dedicated to the theme of landscape painting. As far as the representation of those artistic movements which had, over the previous decades, provided an alternative to the principles of the twentieth century but had later fallen into decline following new developments, their presence gradually becomes more consistent the closer we get to their latest formations. Whilst the artists belonging to, for example, the Chiarismo movement in Lombardy during the 1930s only put forward Frisia, and, in the same way, the Roman School was only very marginally represented, the Corrente movement (which had very recently dissolved) put forward almost all their most notable figures: amongst them Birolli, Sassu, Migneco, Guidi, Tomea and Vedova. Three artists which entered the competition as a united group were Anzil, Canci Magnano and Rapuzzi from Friuli, the signatories of the Invitational Manifesto for Modern Classicism during August that year. Those included in the younger exhibitors from the Arco are Breddo, Brindisi, Minassian, Pornaro, and Rizzetto, headed by Guidi. Amongst the future signatories of the Manifesto of the New Italian Artistic Secession are the two friends, Vedova and Turcato, joined by Birolli. What is particularly interesting is the absence of Santomaso, who had been a devoted guest at the tables of the Colomba during the 1930s, having even been photographed at the Gardens on the opening day of the Award.

The most heated debates, both for the public and at the heart of the jury, concerned the awarding of first prize, the “La Colomba Award for Painting” of 100,000 lire offered by Deana to Venere Anadiomene (Venus Rising From The Sea) by Carlo Carrà; it was both a homage to Venice, the anadyomene city par excellence which rises out of the sea, as well as a reference to its risen beauty, to the re-blossoming of art which this meeting of Italian artists tried to symbolize after the war, at the heart of the city. More than simply a prize awarded for the work that was entered, it was seen more as a recognition of the artist’s career, and the role that the Lombard painter played within the history of Italian art during the first half of the century. The second prize (25,000 lire), named after the Gallery del Naviglio and the Cavallino Gallery, was given to Campigli, who had entered a small oil painting *The Ball Game*: the work was later sold by Cardazzo to Peggy Guggenheim between 1947, the year in which the American collector established herself in Venice, and the spring of 1948, when the work was the only example of Campigli’s art on show in the room at the Biennale which was reserved for her collection. Finally, the third prize, “Astolfo de Maria,” was awarded to Semeghini. After these initial awards, rather than continuing the prize-giving in order of merit, the Commission made a decisive change in the selection criteria in order to give a greater opportunity to the younger generations. One cannot deny that this was a remarkable broadening of scope. In this second award category, a comparison between the two “generational” groups can be made: on one part, the older participants, Bergamini and Cantatore, and on the other the incredibly young, Darzino, Galvano and Vedova. The latter, with *Storm Over The Dockyard*, won the “Margot-Vanelli” prize for the sum of 10,000 lire, (which was to be awarded to a Venetian painter and offered by the Milanese gallery-owner, Enrico Vanelli). It should be borne in mind, nonetheless, that this work wasn’t representative of his latest work at the time, in terms of both the ideological neutrality of the subject as well as the fact that it was a landscape painting, and free from the geometrizing stylization and distortion of his then current work (like the dark and unsettling Picasso-influenced tempera paintings that he showed during the same month at the Gallery dell’Arco).

The final prize, awarded by the Commission on behalf of the publishing house, Arte Veneta, to *Music for the oil painting, Dalmatian Women*, represented a tangential choice in respect to the aims described above. In this case, the reason for the choice by the Commission was entirely down to the merits of the painting itself. The choice was made outside of all aesthetic or ideological referencing or critical debate, and for the simple fact that *Music* had its own independent style which was free of any programmatic formation. After this important victory, which was the first official recognition of the artist’s work, new paths of success opened up to the artist. Over the following months, these led him to two important people: through the first path he was introduced to Cavallino- who was given the opportunity by Cardazzo to make up for lost ground that in respect to Nonveiller’s the far-reaching promotion- the second brought him to Galleria Trieste in the regional capital, where the winning work of the “La Colomba Award For Painting” was also on show. Besides from the diversity of the winners and the different critical opinions on the overall success of the show, there was the unanimous conviction that the Award undoubtedly represented “a short preface to the Biennales of the future.” It did not, however, mark a clear divide between the past and the future or signal the rebirth of painting. Undoubtedly it suffered from the impassioned expectations of the time, which neglected to take into consideration the fact that the rebirth of painting could not happen as a single process, through the end of the war in itself, but instead would have to follow its own paths and times.

If we put the criticisms made of the event put to one side, it is very clear that it had an extraordinary effect on a national level. Several Italian cities copied the show’s winning formula, creating an immediate blossoming throughout the peninsula of award-givings based on the

Deana's model, which had become a universal reference point. Together with this desire to emulate the event, came a reawakening of artistic interest and a drive to promote tourism in the places where the shows were held as was the case, for example, with the Auronzo Award.

On the 29th May 1948 the memorable 24th Biennale of Venice was finally opened. Even the restaurant appeared in the Biennale catalogue with an advertising space where it was defined as a "traditional cuisine from the good old days in the setting of a modern art gallery, only two minutes from Piazza San Marco, where artists feel right at home." It was during this occasion that Deana was able to add to his collection through a series of acquisitions of works by some of the most internationally renowned artists of the time.

Amongst these is a work entitled *Les Amants aux fleurs*, by Marc Chagall from 1926, added to his collection a week after the opening. The payment of almost one million lire was allowed by the brief transfer of two paintings, *Flowers and Piazza di Burano*, that de Pisis had done in 1946. Since he was a boy, Deana, along with the rest of Venice, had been able to admire *The Rabbi* hanging in the Gallery of Modern Art at Ca' Pesaro (and, at the time, the only example of a work by Marc Chagall present in any public art collection in Italy), but with this purchase Deana became the first Italian private collector to possess a painting by this artist. Only the American collector, Peggy Guggenheim, who had just established herself in Venice, owned one: *I and the Village* from 1911, a painting which had been placed in the show of her art collection in the Gardens of the Biennale.

Two months later, Deana paid 3,250,000 lire for an "anthological" corpus of four paintings by De Chirico owned by Barbaroux: it included *The Disquieting Muses*, *Hector and Andromache* (dated 1916), *The Great Tower* (dated 1915) and *The Troubadour*; a collection which truly conveyed the ideas of the Ferrara school of Metaphysics.

Even the consequent acquisition of *The Basin of San Marco* by Oskar Kokoschka which took place during those months, added to the international renown that had directed Deana's collection. It could certainly be possible that the first encounter between Deana and Kokoschka came about within La Colomba itself: for the matter, during that summer of 1948, La Colomba was host to several illustrious artists, such as Braque (he too had come to Venice, for his first solo exhibition at the Gardens) and Dali, but their presence there wasn't followed up by any acquisitions by Deana.

With the advent of 1949, the collector had another occasion to renew the goal he had aimed for with the first edition of the "La Colomba Award for Painting," conceived as a smaller Biennale, set take place during the alternate years of the Biennale itself.

This came about with his involvement in organising "The Review of Contemporary Italian Painting" during the autumn of that year. However, the features of this event were in no way connected to the tradition that was started in 1946. The historical situation that had made the achievement of the "La Colomba Award for Painting" both possible and significant had entirely changed, and as a result, the causes that determined the change in the features of this new event came about in entirely different circumstances. The Biennale of 1948 had re-established a certain order within the value and principle movements of international art history of the twentieth century, and had furthermore marked the direction of new art; in particular, it had undeniably introduced and "institutionalised" the new movements within Italy, which were creating works on a national level. The expectations of progress and the eagerness for renovation had been, if not wholly fulfilled, then at least partially satiated; the unrepeatability of political affairs of 1946 had led to the 1948 election, the outcome of which resulted in hard-won political stability. The multitude of shows that had adopted the formula of the Award organized by Deana, on a national level starting with the 1946 show, as well as the Biennale of 1948, had made reintroducing the show in the same terms as before entirely meaningless.

"The Review of Contemporary Italian Painting" was defined by the same organisers and perceived by its contemporaries as being derivative of the previous Award, rather than a renewed edition of it. An anonymous reviewer of "Vernice" gave a clearer explanation of it, announcing in the January edition that:

The Review of Contemporary Italian painting is going to take place, which as far as we are aware is going to be organised in an altogether new way from the La Colomba Award that happened 2 years ago, which it is based upon. The show wants to have its own distinct sense of significance and originality: it wants, basically, to be something far distanced from the typical prize competitions which recently have been cropping up all over the place to great or little success and with mixed results.

The admission by invite only, as well as the close inspection by a special Judging Panel of the submitted works (as stated in point no.4 of the Rules and Regulations) undoubtedly allowed for a fair competition, both in historical and qualitative terms, but by the same token, this prevented the possibility of discovering new talent or at least impeded that great occasion for success that had been offered by the open access of the "La Colomba Award for Painting". To avert this problem some corrective measures were brought in; running alongside the real

show, a competition dedicated to young artists was introduced, but the exhibition itself didn't change for this reason. Such a radical change in the planning of the show implied not only momentous changes in conditions but also a turnover in the organisational management.

The most striking development was the total estrangement of Carlo Cardazzo from any directorial and organizational function of the Review. Cardazzo was busy in Milan with the running of the Gallery del Naviglio. This was where, in 1947, upon his return from Argentina, Lucio Fontana had signed the first manifesto of Spatialism, and where, in February of 1949, he had set-up the *Ambiente spaziale con forme spaziali a luce nero*.

The allocation of this task to Giuseppe Cesetti on behalf of Deana came as a sign of faith and moral support to a tired and demoralized friend, who over the course of summer of 1948 had not hidden that fact, in a letter he wrote, that he had gone through a moment of difficulty, seeing himself as being weakened both from a strictly artistic point of view as well as a diplomatic one. Cesetti, however, took on total responsibility (which in 1946 had been the prerogative of Cardazzo) and with so much determination as to bridge the gap in the relations between those two old friends and collaborators. During that time, a difference in critical and artistic views had come between Cardazzo and Cesetti, an obstacle which, for the elder of the two, was insurmountable. Accustomed (due to his profession as a teacher) to speaking with younger artists and to an almost continuous exchange of ideas with them, it certainly could not be said that the Maremma painter had remained tied to traditionalist aesthetic views and was unreceptive to the expressive needs of the new generations. He had always recognized the validity in it, as long as they remained within traditional forms of pictorial or sculptural expression, no matter how detached they were from opposing fashions and formal conceptions: in this sense, the controversy between figurative painting and abstraction (even if Cesetti's preferences naturally leaned towards the figurative and to a form of abstraction which did not exclude a priori every reference to the real) could be accepted and overcome, and the claims of contemporary extremists could still be tolerated, like from The New Front for the Arts (*Fronte Nuovo delle Arti*), which went on to be officially recognized within the Review, organized by him. But in his view, the path taken by Cardazzo promoted forms of expression which could not even be regarded as art: creations such as Fontana's *l'Ambiente spaziale* leapt over the three-dimensional physicality of sculpture and the two-dimensional nature of painting, and banished all manual skill and artisan expertise of the artistic object to memory, at the same time destroying the parameters of appraisal which had always been employed by critics, like the categories of form, volume, colour, tone, composition, plasticity or superficial values.

A considerable part of the expenditure was reserved for the design of the exhibition by Scarpa, which happened in the central and prestigious Napoleonic Wing of the Procuratie building. The momentous occasion of enlisting of the Venetian architect happened in the wake of his latest and most acclaimed successes, which came about through his designs for a number of the pavilions at the last Biennale. These included the Greek pavilion (which housed the Italian collection belonging to Peggy Guggenheim), dedicated to the Metaphysical painters and the sculpture of Arturo Martini, the small space reserved for Klee's pavilion (which was particularly noted for the ingenuity of its design solution). There was, furthermore, the latest (and closest, in terms of spatial order) adaptation of the interior of the Palazzo Ducale for the occasion of the great retrospective of the work of Giovanni Bellini, curated by Pallucchini, a show which at the time of the inauguration of the Review had not yet ended.

It is on the basis of those recent accomplishments that Scarpa had leapt into the pages of the press, becoming noted in the public eye for visiting artistic events. The assignment of this task to the most fashionable architect of the time came about, however, from a relationship of esteem and friendship that had began over a decade ago. It actually goes back to 1937, when Scarpa met Cardazzo during the time the collector held his Saturday salons, and so their friendship had also been unavoidably extended to his artistic advisor at the time; Cesetti. When the Gallery del Cavallino on Riva degli Schiavoni was opened in 1942, it showed off the refined and innovative designs of his friend, with a ritual that would also repeat itself at the opening of its new location at the Piscina di Frezzeria, opened in 1949 as well. With the placing of such a refined icon of modernity in front of his restaurant, Deana could not deny his desire to have an equally elegant setting for the show that he was going to sponsor (and so as not to be late in asking, the undeniable mark of the architect's hand in the decoration of some rooms of La Colomba was already seen by the 1950s).

Scarpa's design of the "Review of Contemporary Italian Painting," marks, both in terms of the originality and purpose of the solutions employed by him, an important stage not only in the architect's career, but also in the development of Italian museology. Scarpa constructed drapes to hide the nineteenth-century ceiling of the ball room through the use of grey-white material heavily draped to cover the wooden scaffolding whose structure added to creating volume in the empty space at the highest point in the room. In this way, the visitor who entered into the room from the ante-chamber came before a path which was punctuated by these volumes of material which recreated the

coffered ceiling in gigantic proportions, mirroring the geometric structure of the flooring. Through the positioning of neon lights on tracks directed towards the paintings came about an almost theatrical effect: the light came through only by reflection, and dulled by the volumes of material of the ceiling since it collected at the lower part of the windows in a continuous, luminous band, punctuated only by some brief exhibition panels of dark colour, thoughtfully placed at strategic points throughout the room so as to contrast with the monotony of the visual journey.

The prize-money of the Review, which amounted to the substantial sum of 2.5 million lira, was regarded as “extraordinary” by contemporaries, since no other show had had such a “large wealth of prizes” at its disposition. It was mainly the organisers who added to this amount, but also a great number of traders from the world of industry and finance.

A broad correspondence can be seen between the people involved in the Review and those involved in the two editions of the Biennale which were chronologically closest to it: there are 46 names which are mentioned in relation to the 1948 Biennale, and 43 names to the 1950 Biennale. Not even a half, only 24 artists had, on the other hand, already participated in the “La Colomba Award for Painting,” but in making this comparison, it has to be remembered that there was a considerable Venetian participation in the 1946 exhibition.

The selection of 60 artists (with three pieces each) was intended to identify those artistic personalities who had so greatly determined the artistic development of our century. This anthological and didactic intent is still largely evident in the publication made at the time of the luxurious catalogue “Contemporary Italian Painters”, which Giuseppe Ungaretti introduced and which was printed by the Bolognese editor, Cappelli, in 1950, as the result of another good choice. This comprised of roughly 20 artists, in a fascinating chronological journey which curiously starts with Armando Spadini and, crossing the avantguard of the first decade of the century which is also identified by the Futurist, Boccioni, and the exponents of Metaphysics; Carrà, De Chirico and Morandi (represented however by later works), and goes on to markedly recognise the aesthetics promulgated by Sarfatti (Campigli, Carena, Cesetti, Guidi, Rosai, Saetti, Sironi and Tosi) as well as the works of those irremissible artists at the time; Gino Rossi, and above all, Modigliani, represented by the splendid Red Nude from the Feroldi Collection and the Portrait of Madame Menier from the Cardazzo collection, true pearls of the exhibition which shone within the layout of Scarpa’s design.

The chronological and stylistic difference between the “Masters” written about in the anthological catalogue and the other ten artists that made up the “widened” array of participants in the Review was instantly noticeable, especially within the younger generations. This was due to the formation of an apposite, qualified Commission for Young Artists (Commissione per i giovani) which included Nino Barbantini, the journalist Silvio Branzi, and the future director of the Historic Archives of the Biennale, Umbro Appollonio. The less obvious recognition within the “widened” anthological purpose of the event is that made of the works of Afro, Menzio, Cassinari, Sassu and Pompilio Mandelli. Amongst the younger artists who were still at the beginning of their careers, can be seen the body of artists who were influenced by the spatial works of the “maestro” Guidi, represented here by varied selection, such as De Luigi (winner of the “La valigia” prize), Breddo (who showed his work alongside those of Guidi) and Gaspari. In the middle of dissolving is, instead, the “del Fronte” group, represented here in fact by the Venetian abstract painters Santomaso, Pizzinato and Vedova (the winner also in this edition of the “Garisenda” prize with works that the collector Cavellini had sent in his name) and Turcato. The way in which this corresponding competition for young artists was organized, advertised and realised is completely unknown, as is the provenance and age of the participants as well as the actual number of works sent in and their level of quality. In the catalogue for the Review the names are actually limited to those two winners of the competition; the 25 year old Giuseppe Zigaina of the “Gigliola” Prize of 100,000 lire, awarded to Domenica, and the 23 year old Aldo Andreolo for the “Angiola” Prize of 50,000 lire, awarded to Seated Figure.

The show that Deana had truly hoped for and which had been achieved with critical and museological worth equal to the most impressive of exhibitions from art institutions, represented the proud and disarming vindication of Deana’s influence within both artistic culture and Venetian society. The initiatives and the sponsorship that he was invited to be involved in following the achievement of the Review were the natural consequence of his laboriously gained prestige.

This is the historical background and the cultural atmosphere from which the idea for the “Competition for the Menu of La Colomba” developed, to which should be added one final initiative that took place in 1962: the “Gonfalone Colomba” competition, consisting of asking the artists invited to carry out a work on canvas, to the dimensions of 115cm x 70cm, to be displayed as like a banner. There were several Italian and international competitors, and for years following it there were commissions for the same type of work, which would be displayed on occasion of important exhibitions, to form a curtain that would charmingly go round the terrace of the trattoria. La Colomba had always

represented an exceptional place, where passion for art found its truest expression; through the spirit of hospitality and conviviality. Diego had beautifully captured this aspect of it in the verses of “A Toast (in set rhymes) at the lunch for the Award de La Colomba” declared during the inaugural banquet of that hot summer evening in July 1946:

And though it may be with pure art,
We are not at risk of getting fat,
At Anna's table we can have faith,
That we shall not die a hungry death!
Such is the image which consoles,
Every heart and every soul,
The image is of this table here,
Where each has made his honour clear.