



VENICE CARNIVAL MUSEUM

Welcome to the Venice Carnival Museum!

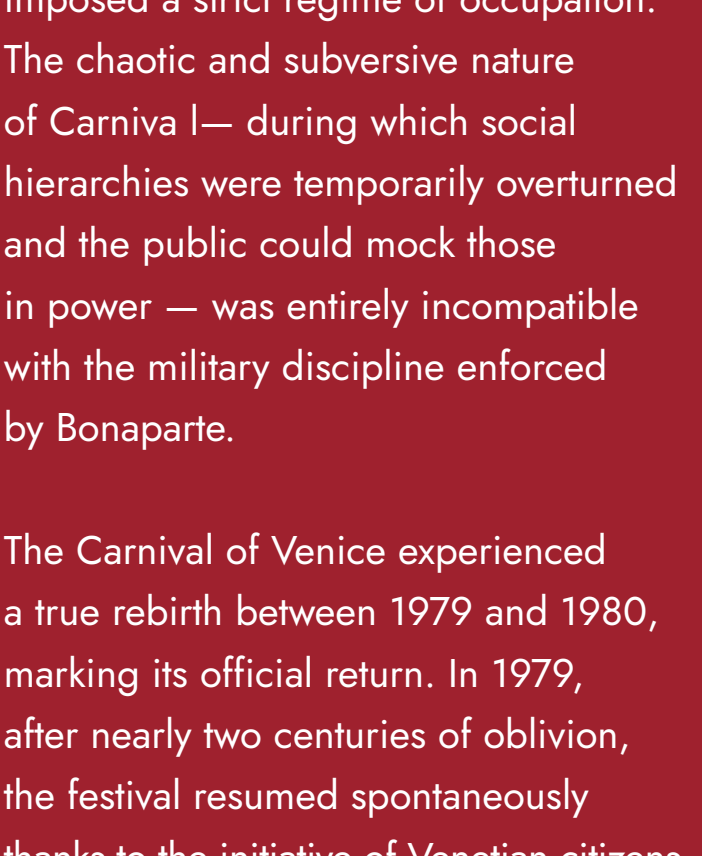
The Venice Carnival Museum is entirely dedicated to the artistic imagery and cultural heritage of the Carnival of Venice. The exhibition covers a time span ranging from the 17th to the 20th century, offering an artistic and cultural interpretation of Carnival as an aesthetic and social phenomenon.

The museum was born from the private collection of Arnold Uvarov, who spent many years collecting works inspired by Carnival and the Commedia dell'Arte. His goal was not only to bring lost Venetian artifacts back to light, but also to show how deeply the Carnival of Venice has influenced — and continues to influence — the greatest figures in art history.

The Carnival of Venice has very ancient origins. The word “carnival” first appeared in a document by Doge Vitale Falier in 1094 in reference to a period of public entertainment. In 1296, it became an official festival thanks to a decree by the Senate of the Serenissima that declared it the day before Lent, Shrove Tuesday, a public holiday.

The Carnival of Venice served as an outlet for citizens: social divisions disappeared behind masks, allowing everyone to express themselves freely and criticize the authorities without fear of repercussions. Carnival celebrations included dances, theatrical performances, musical shows, acrobatic displays, parades, and processions.

ROOM I “History Begins Here”



The first room is a space that embodies the historical and theatrical soul of Venice, where art, history, and tradition converge into a single, timeless story.

The 18th century saw the waning power of the Serenissima following the Ottoman — Venetian Wars and the subsequent loss of Cyprus, Crete (Candia), and Morea. Nevertheless, Venice continued to shine artistically, boasting several prominent artists such as Vivaldi in music, Goldoni in theater, and Tiepolo and Canaletto in painting.

The 18th-century Venetian Carnival offered a wide range of pleasures to the population. Amid dances, shows, gambling, and banquets, the entire city hid behind extravagant masks and richly decorated clothes, savoring an illusion of freedom for a few weeks. Every act of folly was forgiven, to the point that during the second half of the century, capital executions in St. Mark's Square were even suspended.

Two richly dressed Moors welcome visitors, evoking the lavish aristocratic banquets held in historical Venetian palaces.

Venetian theaters staged performances linked to the Commedia dell'Arte: a form of theater based on improvisation, in which fixed stock characters create their scenes relying on *canovacci* (scenarios) or *lazzi* (comic routines).

The artworks dialogue with one another like chapters of a shared cultural heritage, evoking the grandeur of the Serenissima and its theatrical spirit, inextricably linked to the Venetian Carnival and the Commedia dell'Arte. Every detail leads the visitor into the Venice of the Carnival period, among streets (*calli*) brought to life by masked figures and charlatans.

However, when the Serenissima fell to Napoleon in 1797, Carnival was banned out of fear of subversive activities...

HALLWAY “The New Era for the Carnival of Venice”



In 1797, Napoleon arrived in Venice and abolished Carnival. The French army and the subsequent administration imposed a strict regime of occupation. The chaotic and subversive nature of Carnival — during which social hierarchies were temporarily overturned and the public could mock those in power — was entirely incompatible with the military discipline enforced by Bonaparte.

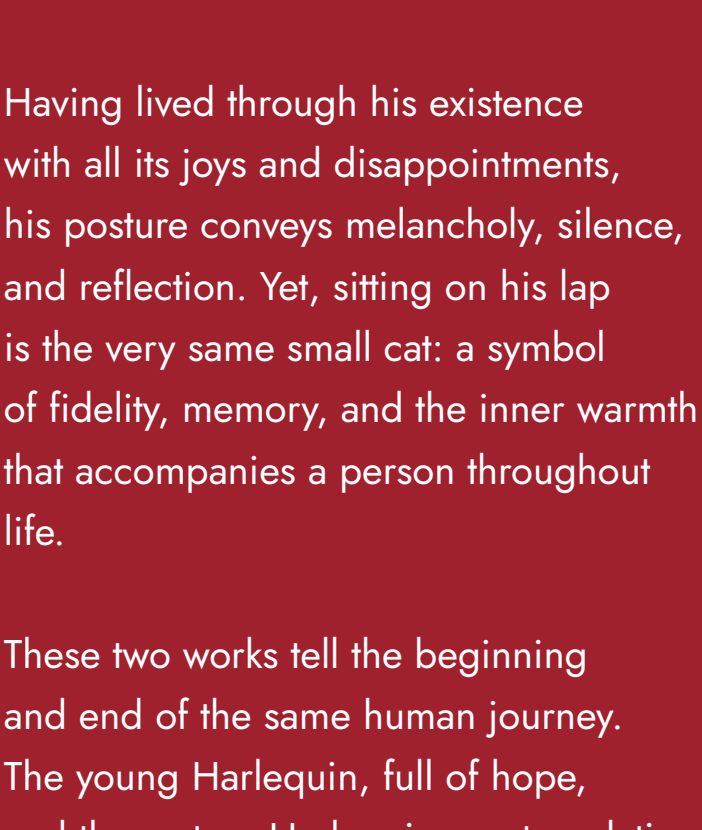
The Carnival of Venice experienced a true rebirth between 1979 and 1980, marking its official return. In 1979, after nearly two centuries of oblivion, the festival resumed spontaneously thanks to the initiative of Venetian citizens, local associations, and students who began donning masks and dancing in the city's squares (*campi*) and alleyways (*calli*) once again.

The true institutional and international revival took place in 1980. The Municipality of Venice, together with the *Biennale Teatro* directed by Maurizio Scaparro, transformed Carnival into a major cultural and theatrical event (“The Carnival of Theater”).

The very first editions of the modern Carnival were characterized by a strong community spirit and creative “homemade” costumes. Through the 1980s and 1990s, the event evolved into the world-famous, spectacular, and elegant celebration we know today, featuring sumptuous 17th and 18th-century Baroque costumes.

Now, let us proceed to Rooms II, III, IV, and V to discover how the Carnival of Venice changed and how it continued to influence countless famous artists for two centuries.

ROOM II “Grand Tour”



The second room invites visitors into a world of elegance, harmony, and refinement — the founding values of European artistic culture between the 18th and 19th centuries.

Historically, while the 18th century witnessed the slow decline of the Serenissima, the 19th century brought its definitive fall. On the other hand, it was during this very period that the city rediscovered its identity as a capital of art and culture. The advent of the Grand Tour and the founding of the Academy of Fine Arts (*Accademia di Belle Arti*) attracted writers, painters, and musicians, fascinated by the melancholic and romantic atmosphere of Venice.

In the Late Baroque and Rococo eras, clothing played a primary role in the daily life of the nobility as well as the lower classes. Costumes from this period, made with fabrics such as Indian cotton, silk, or damask, featured pastel colors, floral embroidery, lace decorations, and ribbons. The Rococo dress displayed here enters into dialogue with the surrounding paintings, allowing visitors to compare an authentic garment with its artistic depiction.

The paintings in this room celebrate the human figure, depicted with dignity and grace, set against the evocative backdrop of the Venetian Carnival — a symbol of measured theatricality and sophisticated social life. Beside the paintings by Claudio Rinaldi and Henri Serrur, the decorative ceramic works by Geminiano Cozzi and the dress that belonged to the lady of the company of the daughters of King Louis XV of France draw attention to meticulous detail, technical perfection, and harmonic forms.

ROOM III “Venice Between Dream and Reality”

The Venetian art scene in the first half of the 20th century was particularly vibrant and dynamic. The Venice Biennale, inaugurated in 1895, provided a forum for comparison where various artistic movements met: Impressionism, Symbolism, the Viennese Secession, and later, the Avant-garde.

Following the Napoleonic ban, Carnival continued to be aimed primarily at the city's inhabitants in a more understated and less spectacular atmosphere compared to the past. Nevertheless, Venice was seen as an evocative, romantic, and melancholic location — themes cherished by Symbolism and Decadentism — and remained a sought-after destination for many foreign visitors.

The third room welcomes visitors into a luminous and refined atmosphere where light, color, and emotion take center stage. Venice emerges as a central motif: canals, masks, festivities, and architecture become opportunities to experiment with reflections, movement, and visual perception. Alongside painting, the room showcases refined sculptures by Luigi Fabris, in which masked figures, ladies, and gentlemen create a universe suspended between reality and dream.

ROOM IV “Venice's Belle Époque”

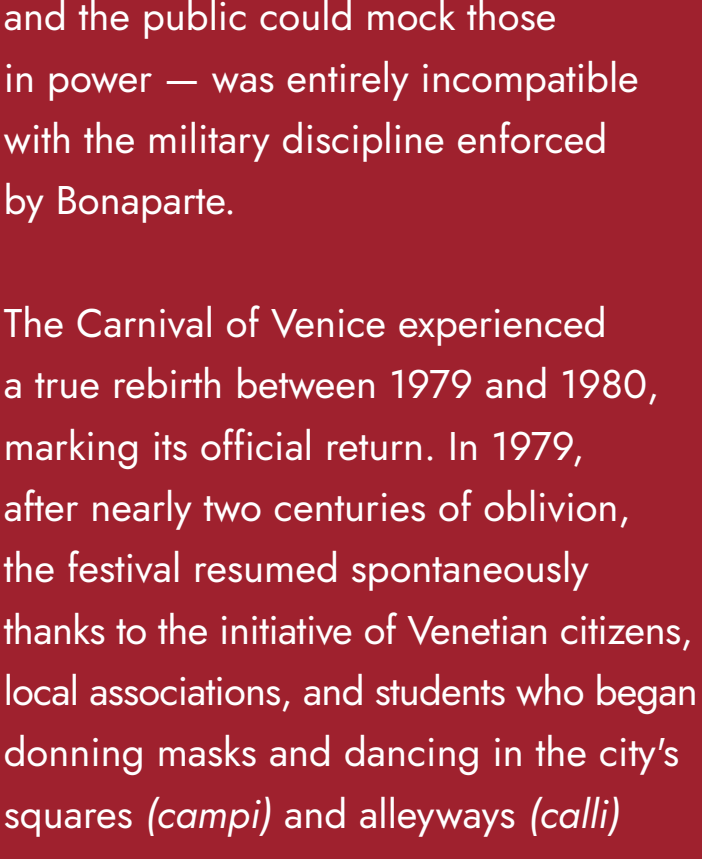
The fourth room transports visitors into the sophisticated, bright atmosphere of the early decades of the 20th century — an era marked by a desire for modernity, elegance, and progress.

With the end of the First World War began a radiant era of immense economic and technological development: the Roaring Twenties. Closer ties with the United States catalyzed a strong push toward modernity across Western European nations, leading to the rapid spread of new technologies such as the automobile, cinema, and radio. The gramophone played a particularly key role in introducing many people to jazz music and dance.

In this context, Venice — and Lido in particular — transformed into a premier tourist destination for the European wealthy elite. Affluent guests stayed at luxury beach resorts to enjoy an opulent, idyllic setting and attend high-society events in Art Nouveau (*Liberty*) palaces and hotels.

In the fourth room, paintings, sculptures, and one of the symbols of Venetian fashion from the period — the Delphos dress by Mariano Fortuny — dialogue with one another. Together, they evoke images of high society, masquerades, and refined female figures symbolizing freedom and charm. The room invites visitors to immerse themselves in an elegant, theatrical world where art, fashion, and design merge into a timeless style.

HALLWAY “Playing with Reality”

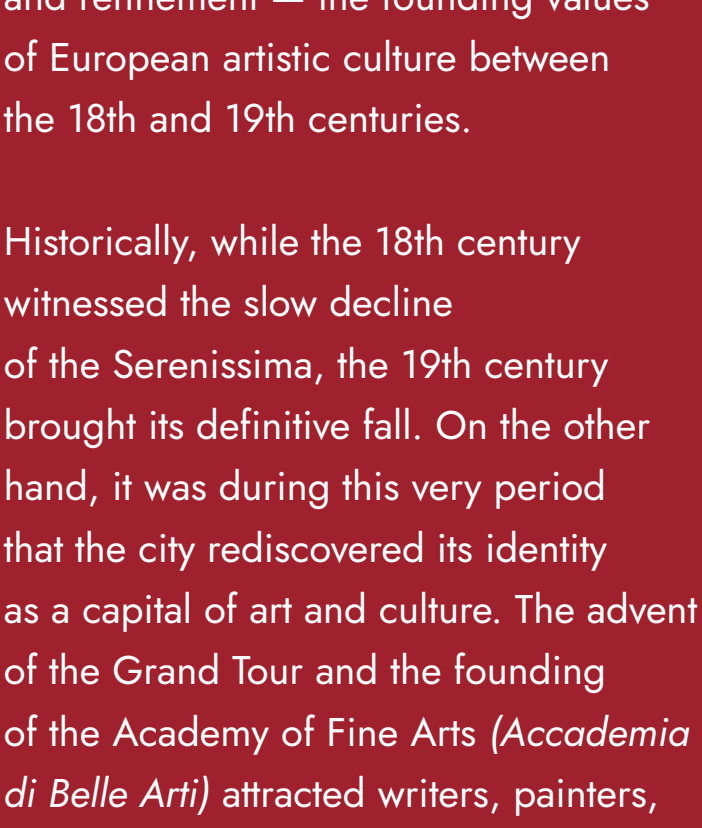


Welcome to the world of masks.

Look into the mirror and try to smile, just like the masks by Eugenio Patarino do.

Please be careful: these ceramic masks are very fragile. We kindly ask you not to touch them.

HALLWAY “Little Life”



In this space, two works separated by time but linked by the same story engage in a dialogue. Before us are the sculpture “Harlequin” from the Spanish manufactory Lladró and the painting “Sad Harlequin” by Ivan Puni.

The sculpture depicts a young Harlequin. He sits facing us, holding a tiny kitten on his lap. His gaze is open, full of hope and trust in the future. An entire lifetime lies ahead of him: new experiences, encounters, and dreams. It is the embodiment of youth, innocence, and anticipation for what life will bring.

Opposite it hangs a different Harlequin, painted by Ivan Puni. Forced to leave Russia and emigrate to France, the artist turned increasingly to the motif of the sad Harlequin in his later years. In this work, the subject sits with his back turned, almost turning away from the world.

Having lived through his existence with all its joys and disappointments, his posture conveys melancholy, silence, and reflection. Yet, sitting on his lap is the very same small cat: a symbol of fidelity, memory, and the inner warmth that accompanies a person throughout life.

These two works tell the beginning and end of the same human journey. The young Harlequin, full of hope, and the mature Harlequin, contemplating his existence, remind us how time transforms every person while leaving intact our truest affections and what we hold deepest in our hearts.

ROOM V “Eternal Carnival”



The fifth room illustrates how Carnival, though partially suspended and absent from daily life during this historical period, lived on in the imaginations of 20th-century innovative artists.

When the festivities fall silent and the streets empty, the mask does not vanish: it shifts into the realm of art. Figures from the Commedia dell'Arte — Harlequin, Pulcinella, Pierrot — re-emerge as powerful symbols of freedom, metamorphosis, and inner resilience in the works of Pablo Picasso, Jean Cocteau, and Gino Severini.

Stripped of their original festive context, these masks take on new meanings, serving as a mirror of the human soul and vehicles for irony, melancholy, social critique, and dreams.

In this room, Carnival is no longer a collective celebration, but an intimate, creative act. Through modern and experimental artistic languages, these artists reinterpret a tradition that seemed over, demonstrating art's ability to preserve, transform, and project it into the future.

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