The Venice Committee of the World Monuments Fund maintains an office and Visitors Center in the Church of the Pietà in Venice. It has supported more than 20 major building restorations and conservation projects since the disastrous floods of 1966. The Committee also sponsors a wide range of activities in Venice including exhibitions, concerts, and walking tours during the summers to restored sites. In 1986 it sponsored a special edition of The American Express Guide to Venice in celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Venice campaign.

In recognition of the work of the Venice Committee, various hotels, restaurants, and shops in the city offer discounts to WMF members. Further information is available through the WMF offices in Venice and New York.

Below: Quadratura ceiling by Cristoforo and StefanoRossi, 1559-1560, tempera on wood.
Cover Detail of the Antisala ceiling.

Architectural Restorations
Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista
San Pietro di Castello
Church of the Pietà
Scuola Grande dei Carmini
Santa Maria del Giglio
Bovolo Staircase, Palazzo Contarini del Bovolo
Querini Stampalia Library: modernization
Campanile of the Frari Church
Ca’ d’Oro: partial facade restoration

Fine Arts Restoration
Scuola Grande di San Rocco: Tintoretto painting cycle
Santa Maria della Assunta, Torcello: participation in international campaign
Palazzo Ducale: Scala d’Oro and ceiling paintings in Sala del Maggior Consiglio
Santa Maria dell’Ospedalotto: interior and paintings
Biblioteca Marciana: Antisala ceiling
San Gerolamo dei Gesuati: ceiling paintings
Frari Church: tomb sculpture
Madonna dell’Orto: Bellini painting
SantaEufemia, Giudecca: Vivarini paintings
San Moise: paintings
San Salvador: paintings

Conservation Equipment and Facilities
Misericordia Laboratory
San Gregorio Laboratory
CNR Laboratory

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A world of power and glory inhabits the ceilings of the great public buildings of Renaissance Venice. Nowhere has the beauty of art so enhanced the ambitions of state as in the vast allegorical panorama that presided over the activities of the Most Serene Republic of Venice.

One of the most singularly beautiful ceilings is found in the vestibule, or Antisala, of the Biblioteca Marciana, the Library of St. Mark. Here, an architectural perspective of astonishing complexity transforms the shallow vault. A gallery of paired columns, enriched with carvings and picked out in gold, appears to soar away into the heavens. In the center, painted by Titian, an allegory known as Wisdom — Sapienza — serenely reigns.

The brilliantly contrived perspective, so convincing from every corner, was created by Cristoforo and Stefano Rosa, two brothers from the Venetian mainland town of Brescia, who worked on the ceiling from September 1559 to April 1560. On its completion, according to the contract, the value of their work was judged by Titian and Jacopo Sansovino, the architect of the building.

By the mid-summer of 1560 the room was equipped as an academy where sons of the nobility gathered for lessons in Greek and Latin. The walls were hung with paintings, including works by Tintoretto and Domenico Molin, and the allegory by Titian was placed in the ceiling. Surrounded by these images, young Venetians learned the classics.

Later in the century, the Antisala was adapted by the architect Vincenzo Scamozzi to house the great Grimani collection of ancient Greek and Roman statuary, donated to the Venetian Republic in 1586. Filled with more than two hundred marble sculptures, the room — known as the Statuario Pubblico — became the first public museum of Europe. For two centuries, until the fall of the Republic, it was one of the foremost sights of the city.

Today these antiquities may be seen in the Archaeological Museum of Venice. Although the Antisala has suffered changes, its present appearance approximates the architectural interior of the late sixteenth century. The recent restoration has returned the quadratura ceiling to its original beauty.

In 1986 the Venice Committee of the World Monuments Fund agreed to finance the urgently needed restoration of the Antisala ceiling. As recorded in a series of "before" photographs, the entire surface of the quadratura ceiling was a mass of blistering paint beneath layers of varnish and soot.

Working on the top of a moveable scaffold a team of six restorers, under the supervision of the Soprintendenza ai Beni Artistici e Storici di Venezia, undertook the painstaking task of reattaching each individual blister of paint to the original wooden surface. Once this was accomplished the ceiling was cleaned. Removal of accumulations of surface grime and discolored varnish revealed an architectural fantasy that was far richer in its gilded highlights, far more dramatic and convincing in its calculated shadows, than had been imagined. A timely intervention has not only preserved an historic, important ceiling — it has also returned to this room in the heart of Venice its original, breathtaking sense of space and light.

Marilyn Perry
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