





The Vasari CORRIDOR





Dear friends.

Exclusive Connection had the idea of producing a series of books dedicated to the major attractions of Florence with the wish to promote art and culture. This educational initiative originated from the desire to offer more information for your individual visit, or to preserve the precious memory of what you learned during one of our tours led by one of our expert guides. Unfortunately, nowadays, time is our worst enemy: it is never enough and it is hard to get back on the thoughts and emotions aroused by the places and beauty we've admired during our travels. These books offer you the opportunity, once back home, to read again and relive, in total relax, what you experienced during your stay in Florence: a way to pique your curiosity and keep alive the thought of beauty and harmony that you enjoyed with us. With the hope of having offered you some unforaettable moments we thank you and we wish to see you soon for another unforgettable experience.

Lucia Montuschi Exclusive Connection T.O. Founder & CEO Keeper of the Ex libris Florence Series





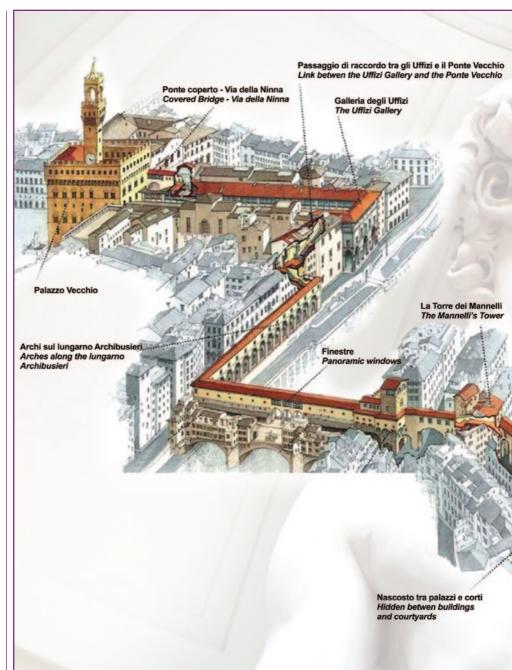


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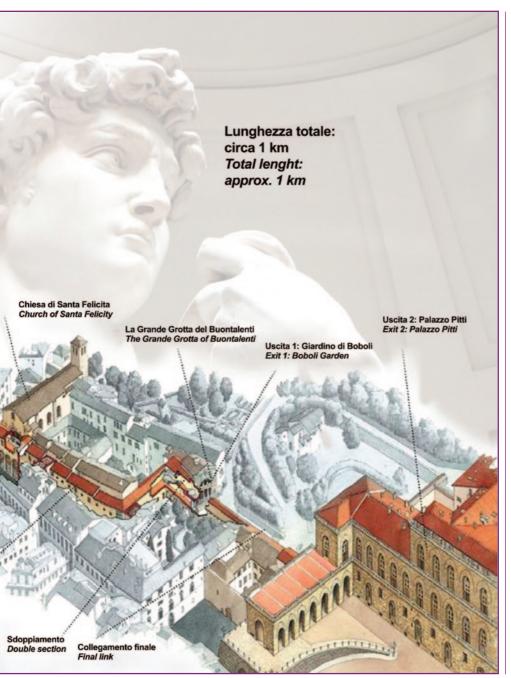
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THE VASARI CORRIDOR

The start of the itinerary

Our exclusive walk starts out from the West Wing of the Uffizi Gallery where the "magic door" opens, taking us into the Vasari Corridor (figure 1).

As soon as you enter you are struck by the width of this architectural space (figure 2) because, given that it is a corridor, we would expect it to be much narrower, almost a sort of tunnel. We must consider, on the other hand, that the Vasari Corridor was designed from the beginning as a passage constructed for the Grand Duke and his family, and was therefore given a monumental and wide entrance from the Uffizi Gallery.

Going down the first flight of stairs, under vaulted frescoed ceilings from the Savoy era, immediately we stop on the small landing to observe a painting of which, unfortunately, only a few vague traces of colour remain on the canvas. The work calls to mind a tragic event





8 Fig. 1 Fig. 2



which struck the city of Florence on the night of 27 May 1993 and which partly involved also the Vasari Corridor.

At 1.05 that night, in fact, 250 kg of explosive were detonated in via dei Georgofili, right behind the Uffizi Gallery and the Corridor. As well as the irreparable loss of five human lives, a good 400 works in the museum were affected and 103 of them seriously. One of these is precisely the *Nativity* by the painter Gerrit Van Honthorst, known as Gherardo delle Notti, which we find on this landing and of which we can now only evoke the memory from the few fragments attached to a new canvas.

The Caravaggesque painters

Other works damaged by that event have been relocated at the bottom of the staircase itself to decorate the wide vestibule (figure 3). In particular, the central painting, the work of Bartolomeo Manfredi, which has been seriously damaged (figure 4). The paintings displayed here are works from followers and imitators of the style of Caravaggio, and in particular Bartolomeo Manfredi is considered a major figure in spreading awareness of the language of the great master, inventor of



Fig. 3 9





Fig. 4

a "Manfrediana Methodus" that is of a more delicate, tranquil and far less dramatic translation of the innovation of Caravaggio.

Already from 1976 the works of these painters defined as Caravaggesque painters were displayed here in this first section of the Corridor, up to where it joined the Ponte Vecchio. This was done by the person who was then director of the Luciano Berti Gallery, and who also decided to open the Corridor itself to the public.

The intent of the director was to somehow give visibility, however limited, to the paintings of these seventeenth century artists which at the time did not have space in the gallery and that were finally located in this spot, but which unfortunately were badly damaged in the abovementioned tragic event of the Georgofili attack.

Major tragic events

However the attack was not the only tragic event in the last century to hit the Gallery and, with it, the Corridor and in general the city of Florence.

In fact we must remember that in 1944, as the front line passed through during the Second World War, the Germans retreating to-



wards the north blew up all the bridges in Florence with large mines, with the exception of Ponte Vecchio.

However, having blown up the two banks of the Arno giving access to the bridge, the part of the Corridor on the Via dei Bardi was also destroyed and then rebuilt after the war.

The other great tragedy took place on 4 November 1966.

At dawn the Arno flooded Florence causing enormous damage which in some cases was irreparable.

On this occasion, also, the corridor suffered great damage because the water rose to a good 7 metres high and the walls of the corri-

dor were soaked with humidity, naphtha and diesel. The restoration work to make the corridor decent again took a long time, even though at the time, fortunately, there were not yet any paintings there.

Leaving aside these dramatic events and returning to the history of our corridor, it is important to clarify that this was designed first of all as a private passageway and escape route in case of danaer.

For this reason the corridor was also given three secret exits.

We find one of these right at the start of the itinerary, in the section dedicated to the Caravaggesque painters: a little door (figure 5) which must have had a sort of combination, given its unusual lock, and which led through a stairway to the high part of the palace and from there directly to the rooftops.



Fig. 5

11





Fig. 6

The Electress Palatine

Their own protection and safety were certainly fundamental for the Medici Grand Dukes, but for the family it was equally important to safeguard their own immense artistic heritage.

For this reason a large painting depicting a noble couple (figure 6) was placed in the next room. We are facing a work in which – a rare thing – the most important person is the woman and not the man! The woman portrayed is, in fact, the famous Electress Palatine, that is



Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici, the last descendant of the Medici family. Anna Maria was a key figure for the city of Florence.

Indeed, in 1737, she drew up the famous "Family Pact" with the House of Lorraine which was appointed to govern the Grand Duchy of Tuscany at the end of the Medici family. Under this pact, Anna Maria bound, inextricably and for ever, the immense artistic heritage and property that her family had collected over the centuries to the city of Florence and its people.

Although this pact was not respected either by Napoleon first of all, or later by Hitler, nearly all the treasures were later returned and brought back to the Florentine region.

And speaking of the many treasures which adorn Florence, here from the nearby window we can take advantage of the fascinating view of the Brunelleschi lantern (figure 7) and even see the precise place where the explosion of May 1993 happened: exactly opposite, in front of the stone building on the right, is the seat of the Georgofili Academy.



Fig. 7



The paintings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries

Continuing our walk (figure 8) we arrive at the point at which the corridor leaves the Uffizi Gallery building to begin its path over the city. From here onwards our walk will be flanked by a long series of paintings, currently about a thousand, distributed along the route. But alongside these works there are certainly other masterpieces to be admired, and they are the magnificent views over the city that we can enjoy from the windows placed at regular intervals on the left and right (figure 9). In particular from the window in the corner we can see the arcade which goes along the embankment of the Arno from the Archibusieri, characterised by the series of arches which support the corridor and the original round windows, which emphasise the paradox of the Medici power and presence in the city: "watch without being seen, listen without being heard".

The corridor, created by Giorgio Vasari in only five months, was designed as a new structure projecting out over the Arno, about 4 metres wide and 5.10 metres high, covered with a truss ceiling and naturally without either artificial lighting or paintings on the walls. Vasari



14 | Fig. 8





Fig. 9 15





Fig. 10

described it as a long white telescope.

Today, on the other hand, we can admire (figure 10) the many works of art exhibited; in this first section up to the Ponte Vecchio there is

a selection of seventeenth eighteenth century and paintings, and amongst these we can pause at the View of the Marina with a Medici Villa by Claude Lorraine and at the portrait of Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici (figure 11) by the Genoese painter Jacopo Gaulli, known as il Baciccio. Cardinal Leopoldo, son of the Grand Duke Cosimo Il de' Medici, was one of the most enlightened and cultured personalities in the Medici family. A great



Fig. 11



collector, connoisseur, scientist, fervent supporter of Galileo and his scientific discoveries. But above all it was Cardinal Leopoldo who began the greatest existing collection in the world of artists' self-portraits which we shall see on display right here, in the Corridor, from the section which starts at the Ponte Vecchio up until the Corridor ends. We are therefore approaching the Ponte Vecchio and we continue to enjoy the views from



Fig. 12

the windows such as of the Piazzetta del Pesce on the right (figure 12), which reminds us that here, originally, the loggia del pesce stood near the Arno since the Middle Ages, which was then destroyed by Giorgio









Vasari to make room for the support portico for the corridor. Near this - a little before entering the section above the Ponte Vecchio - it is pleasing to remember the works of an eighteenth century painter, Rosalba Carriera, shown here with four female portraits and famous for her works of pastel on paper (figure 13).

Fig. 13



Ponte Vecchio and the series of Self-portraits

And here, having said goodbye to Rosalba Carriera, we cross the threshold and enter the section of the corridor built above the east side of the Ponte Vecchio (figure 14).

This bridge, as well as being the most famous in Florence, is also the oldest and the first stone one to be built across the Arno.

The project, attributed to Neri di Fioravante who is thought to have built it between 1335 and 1345, is considered particularly interesting also from an architectural point of view for its three very wide "hump-back" arches.

Today Ponte Vecchio enjoys a very particular fascination thanks also to the very famous goldsmiths' and jewellers' shops. However, you have to consider that, in reality, since the Middle Ages, this bridge was destined to house an activity which was certainly not pleasant. It was intended for butchers, the butchers of Florence, who needed a lot of running water to keep their merchandise fresh. But the fate of these shops was to change definitively when, a few years after the conclusion of the corridor works, an edict from the Grand Duke ordered the expropriation of the butchers' shops to make room exclusively for workshops for goldsmiths. The reason for this change is easy to deduce, and even Latin teaches us in fact that pecunia non olet.



18





Fig. 15

The extraordinary collection of the Uffizi self-portraits begins in this section of the Corridor above the bridge. It numbers more than 850 works and, as previously mentioned, it is a collection which is unique in the world. All the artists gathered here offer us the opportunity to meet their gaze and also understand what was the image that they wanted to communicate of themselves.

The first self-portrait which we see is that of Giorgio Vasari (figure 15). Painter, architect and engineer, Vasari was the invaluable assistant of the Grand Duke Cosimo I de' Medici for whom he took on the modernisation of all the main Florentine churches in accordance with the new Counter-Reformation principles; he designed the ex-





Fig. 16

tension of Palazzo Vecchio also taking care of the pictorial decoration of the various rooms, and then designed the Uffizi Building and, of course, the Vasari Corridor, which still bears his name. This is a aenuine self-portrait, a detail to be emphasised because in the search for this particular genre it could happen that the Medici agents were tricked and brought to Florence unsigned or invented copies, like the alleged self-portrait of Leonardo da Vinci, which is located not far away (figure 16).

The self-portraits in the corridor are exhibited in chronological order so the collection opens with the sixteenth century Florentine School



20 | Fig. 17



portraits (like Andrea del Sarto, Baccio Bandinelli. Giovanni San Giovanni, da Carlo Dolci etc.) and also ones from other schools, like that of the Venetian painters (figure 17) amongst whom stand out those of Titian and Veronese, great protagonists of the Renaissance, from Venice. Seeing the works at a first glance, you are struck by the brown, dense and sometimes even sombre tone. This characteristic must not be linked to a bad state



Fig. 18

of conservation and certainly neither to a need for restoration, rather it reflects the taste of the times when the work was done which, for the most part, also inspired the contemporaneous frames, particularly the more elaborate ones, whilst the simpler ones are from later periods. Amongst the various portraits it is interesting to point out the self-portrait of Sofonisba Anguissola (figure 18), a famous female painter of the Renaissance, a native of Cremona, who, with her painting depicting a child playing with a crab, is said to have inspired the young Caravaggio for his famous painting of a young boy Boy bitten by a lizard.



Windows over the Arno

But here we are now at a key point in the itinerary, where, at the centre of the Ponte Vecchio, there are three large windows (figure 19). According to tradition these windows were made by Mussolini on the occasion of Hitler's visit to Florence, when they signed the visitors' book of the Palazzo Vecchio together on 9 May 1938. The two dictators walked down the Corridor from Palazzo Pitti to Palazzo Vecchio, and it is therefore probable that on that occasion the windows were enlarged to give the German guest an even more unforgettable view over the city.

However, for historical accuracy, it should be pointed out that the central window had been made previously, as testified to in old Alinari photographs from the beginning of the century. It is no coincidence during the Romantic era that travellers came to the city and told of spots of amber light on the hills of Fiesole and of these reflections on the waters of the Arno which inspired poetry and stories set in the city.







Fig. 20

From the central windows on the Ponte Vecchio you can see the fountain dedicated to Cellini and located right in the centre of the bridge, and, a little farther on, also the Ponte Santa Trinita (figure 20), the finest bridge in Florence, designed by Ammannati perhaps from a Michelangelo drawing but also destroyed by the Germans in 1944 and then rebuilt after the war in accordance with the motto "how it was, where it was".

What is more, to rebuild the bridge identical to the original, an ancient stone quarry in Boboli was reopened, the garden which extends behind the Palazzo Pitti palace and where we shall go at the end of our walk.

The Oltrarno

To reach it we must go into the Oltrarno, which with its characteristic districts of San Niccolò, Santo Spirito and San Frediano enlivens the city of Florence on the other side of the Ponte Vecchio.

When crossing the bank in this last section of the Bridge, we go past portraits of famous artists of the 17th century, amongst whom are protagonists of the Bolognese School such as the Carracci brothers, Guido Reni, Domenichino and Guercino; the greatest sculptor of the



Italian Baroque period, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, in a rare self-portrait and also Salvator Rosa, Luca Giordano and many others.

To complete this first part of the itinerary at the final head of the corridor, the great sculpture by Giovan Battista Foggini is exhibited, who portrayed the Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici (figure 21) whose portrait we have already seen in the work of the Genoese painter, Baciccio. Foggini was the best Baroque sculptor in Florence and is also the creator of the bust of Galileo Galilei placed on his tomb in Santa Croce. This sculpture visibly marks an obsta-



Fig. 22



Fig. 21

cle that the Corridor encountered on its way to Palazzo Pitti. It is the Torre dei Mannelli. According to tradition, the owner was opposed to its destruction, decreeing "everyone is king in his own home".

Vasari was forced to "circumnavigate" the tower, building a very narrow walkway (figure 22) right outside using triangular stone shelves known in



Florence as "sporti". This architectural misfortune revealed, however, some positive aspects, since, in view of the protective nature that the corridor had for the Grand Dukes, this narrow part represented a point which could be easily defended. This could prove very useful in case of attack or invasion, because with few men it would be very easy to block the advance of the enemy.

Leaving this narrow passageway supported by the ancient tower – note the walls made of hot, strong stone – the corridor goes over the via Guicciardini below with a wide arch (figure 23) and finally enters Oltrarno. This part was destroyed by the German mines in 1944 and, as already stated, rebuilt after the war.

This stretch of the corridor opens with the section dedicated to the self-portraits of foreign painters, opening with the great Dutch master of the Seventeenth century, Peter Paul Rubens (figure 24), famous for the mix of colours in his works, born, moreover, on the same day as the death of Titian, who was also a great master of colour, from whom, in a certain way, he took over.



Fig. 23 25







Fig. 24 Fig. 25

In its exquisite workmanship, however, the portrait of Rubens looks rather conventional, unlike the next self-portrait of a little known Tyrolean painter, Johannes Gumpp (figure 25), who curiously explicitly illustrates the technique used by painters to produce their own self-portrait: the painter is shown with his back to us, with the shell to mix the colours, the mirror on the side and the canvas on the right on



26 Fig. 26





Fig. 27

which part of the image is already painted.

Continuing along the Corridor, going past the Torre dei Mannelli, another tower presented an obstacle for Vasari, once again obstructing the corridor's route. This time, however, Giorgio Vasari did not adapt to the obstacle but "shamelessly" went into the structure of the tower, crossing it on the left-hand side. For this reason it was necessary to close the connecting openings with the tower itself.

On the wall of the tower hangs the portrait of the famous painter and writer Angelica Kauffaman (figure 26), a remarkable example of Neoclassical painting, whilst on the opposite wall is a very special canvas done by two people, which combines the passion for flora with the representation of an exuberant garland of flowers painted by the specialist painter Nicola van Houbraken and the self-portrait of the friend Rivière who, in an amusing manner, emerges from the canvas (figure 27).





Fig. 28



Fig. 29

Corresponding to the ancient tower there was probably the second secret exit to the street and the bricked up door could mark the exact spot (figure 28).

The last section of the corridor

The final corridor section which opens up before us goes downhill because if, up until now, Vasari managed to always keep the same level, from here onwards it had to prepare for the descent to the Boboli Gardens (figure 29). Here we can really say that

Here we can really say that the Corridor presents itself as a sort of tunnel because of the



artificial barrel vaulted ceilina re-made in the restoration after the war, which, in reality, conceals the original truss ceiling which still exists today. Continuing, we arrive at the same height as the piazza Santa Felicita, and, from the windows on the right, we see the column placed in the centre of the square (figure 30). At this point, on the left, we can finally enjoy one of the finest views visible from the Corridor. Indeed, from the famous window we can see inside the church of Santa Felicita, one of the oldest in Florence, whose original structure dates back to the far distant 4th century A.D. Today we see

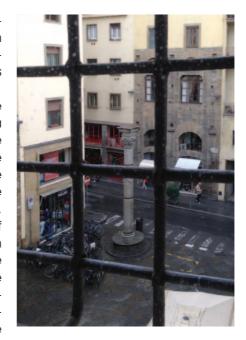


Fig. 30

it with its eighteenth century look, given it by the restoration carried out by the architect Ruggeri who, however, wanted to retrieve the style of the Florentine Renaissance architecture tradition, particularly by using Serena stone. The current window (figure 31) was created only after the modern restoration, when the Corridor became a museum. Originally, in fact, the Medici Grand Dukes accessed the balcony by going through a door placed along the corridor and, going down a small staircase which is still visible today, they sat on the balcony in order to be able to be present at the liturgical celebrations without going down into the church and without being seen (figure 32). The balcony is built above the two chapels which you see immediately after entering the church. The one on the right is the famous Barbadori-Capponi chapel built by Filippo Brunelleschi at the start of the fifteenth century and decorated a century later by the extraordinary Florentine painter Jacopo Carrucci, known as Il Pontormo, assisted by his pupil Bronzino. And it is Bronzino's work, a little farther down on the right of the corridor, that we can see in the series of miniatures that the court artist made to portray the various members of the Medici family, both of the main





Fig. 31



30 Fig. 32







Fig. 33

branch and the secondary one.

The view of the church is really fascinating and we would like to stay longer, but our itinerary invites us to continue and as we descend we see important artists of the Neoclassical period such as Anton Raphael Mengs and Élisabeth Vigée-Le Brun (figure 33), who wanted to be shown with a pen in their hand almost as if they wanted to be represented more as writers than painters.

Opposite, on the other hand, appear the great protagonists of the





Fig. 34 31





Fig. 35

Napoleonic period. They are Jean-Louis David and Antonio Canova (figure 34), considered as amongst the greatest protagonists of Neoclassicism in Europe respectively in painting and sculpture.

Going down farther we then find portraits of Italian painters which mark the birth of the nineteenth century academy and with it the change in representing the artist himself: more bourgeois and distinguished, and on the opposite side, on the right, the foreign painters amongst whom are some female painters who, during their lifetimes, did not have the same fortune and success as Élisabeth Vigée-Le Brun.

On the other hand, fame and notoriety were what the French art-





ists Ingres, Corot and Delacroix (figure 351 achieved. They are shown here with selfportraits which are rather significant because of their nature and painting style, and because thev also hide an interesting story. When the inheritor of the self-portrait of Eugène Delacroix, greatest exponent of French Romanticism, sent it as a gift to the Uffizi collection he demanded that it be placed next to the one of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, a great exponent of French and

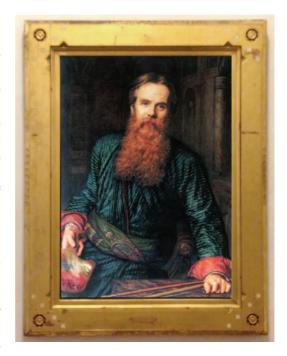


Fig. 37

European Neoclassical painting, a contemporary of Delacroix but also his real rival. The response from the management of the gallery was exemplary because, whilst agreeing to the donor's request, they mitigated it by placing between the two of them the self-portrait of Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, master landscape painter of the Barbizon School which thus, respecting the histories of the two masters, could act as "peacekeeper" between the two enemies.

On the left side dedicated to the Italians we go from academy painters to those who, around the middle of the nineteenth century, opened new roads into painting, breaking with the academic rules, amongst whom we mention the great Tuscan Macchiaioli, Giovanni Fattori and Silvestro Lega.

At the end of this part of the corridor (figure 36) we find some of the hundreds of self-portraits making up part of the Rezzonico collection donated to the Uffizi Gallery and which are exhibited here in chronological order and divided on the two walls between Italian and foreign artists.



Amongst the foreign ones, how can we not remember John Singer Sargent, an American painter, born in Florence and considered as amongst the greatest exponents of Post-Impressionism, and William Holman Hunt (figure 37), amongst the greatest protagonists of the English Pre-Raphaelite movement.

Twentieth century self-portraits

But here at last, having passed the point at which the corridor turns at right angles to connect with the Boboli Gardens and goes towards the exit, we find the last section of self-portraits, inaugurated on 28 September 2013, and which presents an interesting collection of twentieth century artists.

This section starts with the great painting of the Florentine Baccio Maria Bacci (figure 38) suitably placed at a point where the sense of perspective which characterises it is emphasised due to the window painted open onto the gentle and sunny countryside of the hills surrounding Florence.

The importance of this last section, in addition to the very prestigious name of artists displayed, is also from the fact that it is one of the very few collections, together with that kept at the Museo Novecento (Twentieth Century Museum) inaugurated in 2014 and the prestig-





ious Galleria d'Arte Moderna in Palazzo Pitti, where one can admire twentieth century art in Florence.

Amonast the various Italian and international protagonists of the last century we find Giorgio Morandi, De Chirico, Balla, Sironi, Rosai, Chagall, Arnold Böcklin, Siqueiros, Vasarely, Rauschenberg, Tapies and the Florentine artist Stefano Pistoletto. who ends the corridor with his spectacular self-portrait (figure 39). Pistoletto, still alive, has stuck a photographic reproduction of himself onto a steel sheet. polished to the point



Fig. 39

where it becomes a reflecting surface like a mirror, together with the important contemporary Tuscan patron Giuliano Gori.

The choice of placing at the two ends of this last section two works created in the same century but which express two profoundly different concepts is not casual. If indeed in the work of Baccio Maria Bacci, the artist portrays himself in intellectual, domestic and bourgeois surroundings, with the Florentine countryside in the background, in the company of his wife, his friend the painter Peyron who is playing the guitar and his partner, Pistoletto with his self-portrait reminds us that art surely exists thanks to the eye of the viewer but also thanks to whoever, like the patron Gori, supports and finances it. And whilst Baccio was a rich bourgeois who painted, we could say, for passion, Pistoletto shows how, in the modern times in which he lives, artists like him need, on the other hand, patrons and purchasers.

Even we, if you like, with our presence here have contributed in a certain way to this promotion and support of art, and with our face reflected together with Pistoletto and Gori we can consider ourselves to be part of this gallery of artists.



The exit

Unlike them, however, we cannot stay here but must go to the exit into the Boboli Gardens next to the Grotta del Buontalenti.

"Like the Medici family after all" – your readers will think – but even at this juncture there is a difference between us and the powerful Florentine family.

There, where indeed everything seems to come to an end, there is



Fig. 40



36 Fig. 41



still a surprise waiting for us: in reality the corridor does not finish in the garden but has two exits, one of which is directly inside Palazzo Pitti, which can therefore be reached avoiding even walking through the garden (figure 40).

Climbing the steps placed beside the self-portrait of Pistoletto, we find, in fact, the real last part of the corridor, and here we discover the exhibition of the small and last section of self-portraits of contemporary artists with an interesting selection of sculptured self-portraits amongst which are Mitoraj, Ceroli, Venturini, Wotruba, Fabre (figure 41) and the representatives of the new type of work of art known as video art of which Katty la Rocca and especially Bill Viola are amongst the best





Fig. 42

exponents. Moreover, this latter owes his education in his early vears to Florence and the cultural turmoil which animated the city in the seventies and eighties of the twentieth century (figure 42).

Looking then beyond the video artists mentioned, with a charming perspective effect your eye runs along the narrow corridor up to the door beyond which are the vast and sumptuous rooms of Palazzo Pitti (figure 43) ... but unfortunately we are denied this last privilege!

Fig. 43 37

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