Villa Reale is one of Milan’s best-kept secrets, a little gem of a building where art history unfurls all the way from the restrained gestures of Antonio Canova’s sculptures to Futurism’s maelstroms of energy. With its succession of rooms and marbles on the ground floor and its sumptuous halls on the piano nobile above, the story of Villa Reale is deeply rooted in Milan’s Napoleonic period, and it is now the prestigious home of the Galleria d’Arte Moderna, with a collection of 19th- and 20th-century masterpieces.

Originally known as Villa Belgiojoso, Villa Reale is one of the most outstanding examples of Neoclassical architecture in Milan. Designed by architect Leopoldo Pollack—who studied under architect Giuseppe Piermarini—it was built between 1790 and 1796 over the remains of the San Dionigi and Carcanine monasteries as a residence for Count Lodovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso. The overall decorative scheme was conceived by Enlightenment poet and intellectual Giuseppe Parini. Upon Count Lodovico’s death, the villa passed through a succession of owners, though it was always linked to distinguished names and pivotal figures in Italian history. The villa of delights—as it was then known—was home to the French general and than King of Naples Joachim Murat and his wife Caroline Bonaparte, Napoleon’s sister. Named President
of the Italian Republic in 1802 and crowned king in 1805, Napoleon received the villa as a gift from the Republic in 1802. He and his wife Josephine de Beauharnais also spent considerable time at Villa Reale, and famous aristocrat Paolina Borghese was a guest there in the same period. In the second half of the 19th century, Villa Reale became the residence of Austrian general Joseph Franz Radetzky.

The villa also includes a lush English garden stretching out behind the building. Designed like a small grove, it houses a rich variety of rare plants and trees and is known as the Giardino dei Bambini, since adults are admitted only if accompanied by children.

Inside, Villa Reale houses a significant collection of 19th-century art, including the last fresco by Andrea Appiani, whom Napoleon called “the leading painter in Italy”: Parnassus, with the Muses gathered around the god Apollo. One of the most important works of Italian Neoclassicism, Appiani’s fresco is located on the piano nobile, while on the ground floor, visitors can admire cartoons for the cycle of frescoes that the artist painted in the ancient sanctuary of Santa Maria presso San Celso, depicting the four Doctors of the Church and the four Evangelists.

The history of the museum at Villa Reale is inextricably tied to that of the city. As early as 1877, the municipal council began discussing the need

La villa comprende anche un rigoglioso giardino all’inglese, che si estende alle spalle dell’edificio: concepito come una piccola foresta, il parco raccoglie una ricca varietà di piante e alberi rari ed è oggi conosciuto come il Giardino dei Bambini perché gli adulti possono accedervi solo se accompagnati dai bambini.

All’interno la Villa Reale conserva una grande e importante collezione di opere dell’Ottocento tra cui l’ultimo affresco di Andrea Appiani – definito da Napoleone “il nostro primo pittore in Italia” – Il Parnaso in cui le Muse si raccolgono attorno al dio Apollo. Una delle opere più importanti del neoclassicismo italiano, l’affresco di Appiani è collocato al piano nobile mentre al piano terra si possono ammirare i cartoni del ciclo di affreschi che lo stesso artista realizzò per l’antico santuario di Santa Maria presso San Celso con i quattro Dottori della Chiesa e i quattro Evangelisti.

La storia del museo di Villa Reale è legata a doppio filo a quella della città: già nel 1877 il Consiglio Comunale si interrogava sulla necessità di designare una sede appropriata per la sua collezione d’arte. Costruita grazie ai lasciti delle più importanti famiglie meneghine – dai Guascroni ai Marchesi, dai Taverna ai De Cristoforis – la collezione comunale arrivò tra le mura della villa con lo scopo di fornire uno strumento educati-
to find a suitable home for its art collection. Built up through bequests from some of the most prominent families in Milan—Guasconi, Marchesi, Taverna, De Cristoforis—the city’s collection was installed at the villa with the aim of offering an educational tool to the public, and remained there until 1903, when it was moved to Castello Sforzesco.

During the First World War, the collection was transferred to Castel Sant’Angelo in Rome to escape the barbarities of the conflict, and when it returned to Milan, it was allocated to Villa Reale, which finally became the permanent home of the Museo dell’Ottocento.

From Antonio Canova’s suspended gestures to Rudolf Schadow’s classical poses, the sculptures in the collection stand alongside mythological compositions by Andrea Appiani and Gaspare Landi. Aristocratic life in the 19th century is portrayed by Francesco Hayez and Giovanni Carnevali (“il Piccio”) while just further on, Medardo Rosso turns space into a new sculptural vision. From the lofty simplicity and serene grandeur of Neoclassicism, by way of arcadian visions, bourgeois portraits, Romantic landscapes, sentimental atmospheres and complex theatrical devices, a visit to Villa Reale is a stroll through art history, but it is also a journey through Italian mannerisms, poses, and expressions: this is the land of melodrama.
The rooms of Villa Reale are also the house for one of the most important 20th-century pieces: purchased in 1921 with considerable citizen funding through a public subscription by city institutions, *Il Quarto Stato* (1901) by Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, on the first floor of the villa, throws open the gates of the 20th century to usher in its new protagonist – the masses.

And from here, the passage to the turmoil of Futurism is a truly short one. The section of the villa dedicated to the collection of industrial magnate Carlo Grassi, on the second floor, preserves some of the best-known work by Umberto Boccioni and Giacomo Balla, alongside masterpieces by Giorgio Morandi and a series of rare gems by Paul Cézanne, Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin and Edouard Manet.

Like many historic buildings in the city, Villa Reale was seriously damaged in the Second World War, losing, for example, the 18th-century stables over whose foundations the Padiglione d’Arte Contemporanea (PAC) was built. Only recently, through a complete restoration, did Villa Reale return to its original splendour, and the spaces of this ancient residence can now be visited in all their extraordinary charm.
no della villa, spalanca le porte del ventesimo secolo per lasciarvi entra-
re il suo nuovo protagonista assoluto – la folla.
E da qui il passaggio ai tumulti del futurismo è davvero breve. Nelle se-
zioni della villa dedicata alla collezione dell’industriale Carlo Grassi, al
secondo piano, sono conservati alcune tra le opere più note di Umberto
Boccioni e Giacomo Balla, accanto a capolavori di Giorgio Morandi e
a una serie di squisite rarità di Paul Cézanne e Vincent Van Gogh, Paul
Gauguin e Edouard Manet.
Come molti edifici storici della città anche Villa Reale fu seriamente dan-
neggiata durante la Seconda Guerra Mondiale e perse per esempio le
scuderie settecentesche sulle cui fondamenta fu costruito il Padiglione
d’Arte Contemporanea (PAC). Solo di recente, grazie a un restauro com-
pleto, la Villa Reale è tornata al suo sfolto originario e gli spazi dell’anti-
ca residenza sono ora visitabili in tutto il loro straordinario fascino.
Villa Reale is the most recent venue chosen by Fondazione Nicola Trussardi to present its nomadic museum. For each new exhibition, Fondazione Nicola Trussardi seeks out forgotten places, spectacular buildings, magical spaces in which to display works of contemporary art that are specially conceived and created for each show.

Fondazione Nicola Trussardi is an agency for the production and promotion of contemporary art, mounting large-scale exhibitions twice a year in historic locations throughout the city of Milan. Before Tino Sehgal, the Foundation has presented projects by other major international artists such as Peter Fischli & David Weiss, Pawel Althamer, Paola Pivi, Martin Creed, Anri Sala, Urs Fischer, Maurizio Cattelan, Darren Almond, Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset.

With the aim of bringing contemporary art directly to the city, the foundation explores today’s art world, but also provides a compass for navigating the urban space; after rediscovering some of Milan’s most prestigious landmarks — including Palazzo Litta, Istituto dei Ciechi, Circolo Filologico Milanese, Palazzo dell’Arengario, the Old Warehouse of Porta Genova Station, Palazzo della Ragione, the Ottagono in Galleria Vittorio Emanuele — Fondazione Nicola Trussardi has now arrived at the Villa Reale in Via Palestro, one of the most prestigious buildings of the city of Milan, opened for the first time to the energies of contemporary art.

The entrance to all the exhibitions by Fondazione Nicola Trussardi is free: art belongs to everyone.
La Fondazione Nicola Trussardi è alla Villa Reale dall'11 novembre al 14 dicembre 2008

The Fondazione Nicola Trussardi is at Villa Reale from November 11 through December 14, 2008

Via Palestro 16, Milano

Tutti i giorni dalle 10:00 alle 20:00

Ingresso libero

Open daily 10 am - 8 pm
Free entrance

A cura di / Curated by
Massimiliano Gioni
Direttore Artistico / Artistic Director
Fondazione Nicola Trussardi

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Stazione Centrale, Milano
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Scarp de’tenis, Milano
Scuola d’Arte Drammatica
Paolo Grassi, Milano
Ariella Vidach
Frank Willens
e tutti gli interpreti delle opere
and all the interpreters of the works

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