

Contemporary Elite Italian Art Collectors and the Cultural Context that Shaped Them Claudine Chartouni, 2020

My research aimed to deepen the understanding of the elite Italian art collector active within the past decade. As we are approaching the end of the decade, not much has been published on this group in Italian; however, close to nothing more than a webpage had been written on the group and their habits in English. In turn, the value in my research lies in both the presentation of new information and in the translation of the Italian perspective on an Italian matter for an English-speaking audience. My work looks to define their shared traits, and look at the biggest influences of the Italian context on their collecting habits.

To conduct my research, I extend my stay in Rome after finishing a semester at La Sapienza in the spring. This allowed me a great amount of access to the Italian language materials I needed and the Italian context my research focused on. I spent the majority of the introductory phase of my work reading both English and Italian language sources. I visited specialist bookstores and libraries to find and read books relevant to my work but otherwise difficult to access. I conducted four face-to-face interviews with academics and art professionals in both English and Italian and received two written responses as well. The most important part of my research revolved around visiting the three Northern cities most associated with art--Turin, Milan, and Venice--to see these collections and the environments of these collectors first hand. I also had the opportunity to see a private collections in Pieve di Cento--to see the first private museum consecrated in Italy and an example of the interest in perfect and unusual locations for their collections that many of these collectors possess.

The results of my research indicated that, though Italy's art scene is incredibly complex and varied between cities and regions, the majority of Italy's elite collectors live in Northern provinces but live very international lifestyles and gravitate towards Modern and Contemporary art. Their collections sometimes maintain an Italian focus but most tend to be international, almost all of them are very well educated, and a large number of these collectors work in luxury fields. They are more likely to buy art from auction houses or directly from artists compared to gallerists. After establishing who they are, my research connects these traits to elements of Italian culture. Although many elements of the Italian context that are most pertinent to Italian daily life do not hold much effect or sway over these collectors, there are two aspects that greatly influence their habits: The Italian Cultural Heritage Codes (ICHC) and the importance given to art in Italian Culture historically. These elements not only shape collectors but actually make them ideal in respect to collectors in the modern-day, supporting the arts in a much more active way and significantly more likely to buy out of a personal interest in art than an interest in an investment. This research culminated in a large-scale paper, detailing the majority of the relevant research, some specific cases as examples, and looks towards the future. The work ends in an inquiry into how the art landscape might shift in the next decade, especially considering pending changes to the ICHC. In the Fall 2019 semester, I will continue to work with Dr. Arielle Saiber, mainly translating excerpts of the work into Italian and possibly adding to it.

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Arielle Saiber

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