

PRESS RELEASE
8 July 2010

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Palazzo Grifoni Budini Gattai – An Online Exhibition of the Photo Library of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut

The Photo Library of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut is for the first time presenting an online exhibition devoted to the interior decoration of the Palazzo Grifoni Budini Gattai, an outstanding example of Florentine palace architecture. So in this way it is once again making hitherto inaccessible monuments available to scholarly research.

The Photo Library of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz has been located in its new home in the Palazzo Grifoni Budini Gattai since January 2010. It was transferred from the nearby main building of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut at the end of December 2009, to make way for an extensive programme of renovation, which is expected to be completed in 2013.

Erected by Michelangelo's pupil, Bartolomeo Ammannati, between 1561 and 1565, the Palazzo Grifoni was purchased by the affluent Budini Gattai family in 1890. The family then commissioned a comprehensive refurbishment of its interior. With its lavishly decorated *piano nobile*, it is indeed one of the most significant and best preserved examples of the representative culture and interior décor of the wealthy Florentine bourgeoisie in the period around 1900.

Leopoldo Gattai (together with his son-in-law Francesco Budini) was one of the most successful building contractors in the initial years of the Italian National State. Their firm, the 'Ditta Gattai Budini', realized a series of major infrastructural projects such as the railway line between Florence and Vaglia or the harbour in Livorno. In 1890, after the winding up of the business, they purchased a prestigious Renaissance palace situated in one of the most prominent piazzas in Florence and commissioned Giuseppe Boccini to renovate it. Boccini's designs for the restyling of the palace interior were also entered in the 'Premio Martelli' held by the Florentine Academy of Art. The most important of the architect's alterations was the incorporation of a monumental staircase leading up to the newly renovated 'Appartamenti Budini Gattai' on the *piano nobile*. The decoration of the stairwell and of the two large reception rooms overlooking the street on the first floor is lavish: allegories of the Virtues, personifications of the figurative and performing arts, and the repetition of the family coat of arms in the decorative ensemble, are all aimed at celebrating and enhancing the patrons' prestige. In the *salone verde* the central ceiling painting imitates a tapestry, while the surrounding frieze with objects from the worlds of art, science and technology once again alludes to the family's status as building contractors and engineers. Also remarkable is the floor of this room; it is painted with



tempera colours to imitate marble and decorated with genre scenes descriptive of rural life. To enable the room to be used as part of the Photo Library the floor has now been protectively sheathed – but thanks to the recent photographic campaign of the Photo Library its painted decoration has now been made permanently ‘accessible’ in virtual form.

The two smaller rooms, the *sala della musica* and the *sala di lettura*, belong, both in terms of size and iconography, to the ‘private’ sphere, while the *Gallery* on the garden side of the palace formerly served for the display of the Budini Gattai family’s sculpture collection. It will now be used as a lecture room and venue for special events of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz.

Now transferred to the rooms of the Palazzo Grifoni, the Photo Library’s complete holdings – some 600,000 images of Italian Art and Architecture from Late Antiquity to the modern period – are once again available for the consultation of scholars in the usual open-shelf plan. It was essential that the modern infrastructure installed as part of the Photo Library, and the advanced technological facilities that go with it, should be compatible with the conservation of the Palazzo Grifoni and its rooms as a protected historic monument. Thanks to a ‘floating’ double floor, neither the painted floor panels nor the upholstered and frescoed wall surfaces will in any way be touched by the modern installations.

Before its entry into its new home, the Photo Library conducted an extensive photographic campaign, which has for the first time comprehensively documented the interior decoration of the Palazzo Grifoni – so the online exhibition belongs to the ongoing series of its photographic campaigns, aimed at making accessible for further scholarly research Tuscan palaces and villas that are often difficult to get into.

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Director of the Photo Library: Costanza Caraffa

Concept, texts and coordination: Almut Goldhahn

Open from 15 June 2010 online on <http://expo.khi.fi.it>

The next online exhibition will open on 18 October 2010 and will be dedicated to the sculptures of the Boboli Gardens in Florence.

Further info:

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Photographic Material

Florence, Palazzo Grifoni Budini
Gattai, staircase;
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Baroque Painting and Modern
Painting sections of the Photo
Library of the Kunsthistorisches
Institut in Florenz, Palazzo Grifoni
Budini Gattai, Florence;
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Florence, Palazzo Grifoni Budini
Gattai, Salone Verde;
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Florence, Palazzo Grifoni Budini Gattai, Salone Rosso and ceiling fresco of the Salone Rosso, 1883; Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz - Max-Planck-Institut



Allegorical figure of Fortuna and coat of the Gattai family, fresco, around 1892, Palazzo Grifoni Budini Gattai, staircase;
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G. Ferrini after Raffaello Sorbi, Farmers ploughing the land, 1906, Florence, Palazzo Grifoni Budini Gattai, detail of the painted floor;
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