

NEWSLETTER
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VENICE IN
PERIL FUND

Antonio Canova, *Cavallo Colossale* “Not so much a story of restoration, as one of resurrection”

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Barbara Guidi, Director of the Musei Civici di Bassano del Grappa, joined Christopher Baker, Editor of *The Burlington Magazine*, in conversation about the conservation, placing the project within the broader context of Canova's career, artistic inspirations and remarkable technical mastery. The evening also saw the premiere of a short documentary commissioned by Venice in Peril Fund and produced by Joan Porcel Studio in Venice, bringing the story of the *Cavallo Colossale* vividly to life.

The London event afforded not only celebration of an exceptional conservation achievement but also reflection on the project's particular significance for Venice in Peril Fund. It represents the charity's first conservation project on the *terrafirma*, extending our long-standing commitment to preserving the work of Antonio Canova.

Many Venice in Peril Fund Patrons will already be familiar with the remarkable story of the *Cavallo Colossale*. During our Supporters' Trip visit in October 2024, the sculpture could still be seen in hundreds of fragments. By the following autumn, at a conservation studio near Padua, it had been almost entirely reassembled. One of Canova's final works, the *Cavallo Colossale* is the monumental plaster model for an equestrian bronze of Ferdinand I, King of Naples. Its exceptional artistic and historical significance made its recovery all the more important. Donated posthumously to the city of Bassano del Grappa, it was dismantled during a reorganisation of the museum's collections in the 1960s and remained in storage for more than fifty years as hundreds of separate fragments.

The word 'colossal' applies not only to the sculpture itself but equally to the scale and complexity of the conservation project undertaken by Passarella Restauri. Reflecting on the autumn of 2024, when

On 8 June, the Italian Cultural Institute in London hosted *In Praise of Antonio Canova and his Cavallo Colossale*, celebrating the completion of the ambitious conservation project of Canova's sculpture. The London event introduced the remarkable story of the colossal horse to Venice in Peril Fund's UK audience and provided an opportunity to reflect on an extraordinary collaborative achievement.

We were delighted to welcome an official delegation from Bassano del Grappa, led by the Mayor, Nicola Finco, together with Giordano and Guglielmo Passarella, whose painstaking conservation has brought Canova's monumental plaster model back to life.

Right: At the Italian Cultural Institute, London. From left to right: Christopher Baker, Guy Elliott, Guglielmo Passarella, Anthony Roberts, Barbara Guidi, Giordano Passarella, Nicola Finco, Giada Pontarollo and Chiara Tessarolo
 Image: Tommaso Giacomini @ Joan Porcel Studio

Opposite: The completed Cavallo at the Gallerie d'Italia, Milan.

Image: Joan Porcel @ Joan Porcel Studio

work first began, Giordano Passarella admitted that the prospect was “exciting and at the same time rather worrying”. He described it as “the most challenging restoration project I have ever undertaken on plaster”, adding that seeing it completed had been “a source of great satisfaction”.

The ambition of the project was widely recognised. Barbara Guidi described it as “a pioneering restoration”, and is quoted in *Arte Magazine* calling the *Cavallo* not only “a fundamental piece of Canova's legacy” but also “part of Italian identity”. *Il Giornale dell'Arte* referred to it as “a project without precedent”. Nicola Finco spoke with pride of Bassano's role in “returning one of Antonio Canova's most important works to the whole world”, and when interviewed by *Il Corriere della Sera Veneto*, referred to conservation efforts as “an act of love for our artistic heritage”.

Following the completion of its conservation in late 2025, the *Cavallo Colossale* travelled to Milan for its first public appearance as the centrepiece of the exhibition *Eterno e Visione. Roma e Milano Capitali del Neoclassicismo* at the Gallerie d'Italia.

The Italian press celebrated the unveiling of this long-lost masterpiece. *Turismo Italia News* proclaimed



that “the giant of Canova resurges from oblivion”, while *La Stampa* described the exhibition as “an unparalleled occasion to rediscover a precious, yet little-known, chapter in Canova's remarkable legacy” and offered “a new take on one of the most fertile moments in the history of art”. Reviews highlighted the dramatic impact of the sculpture, with *Arte Magazine* describing it as the “fulcrum” of the exhibition and *Spettacoli News* noting that it was “astounding” to visitors upon entry.

Venice in Peril Fund is proud to support this project in collaboration with Intesa Sanpaolo and the Musei Civici di Bassano del Grappa, and values the close relationship that has developed with the city. A particularly meaningful recognition came in January 2026, when the Fund was awarded the *Premio Cultura Città di Bassano del Grappa*. Vice Chair Anthony Roberts accepted the award on the Fund's behalf, in recognition of both his personal commitment to the project and Venice in Peril Fund's contribution to bringing Canova's extraordinary *Cavallo Colossale* back to life.

All quotations have been taken from articles readily accessible online, or from interviews commissioned by Venice in Peril Fund and conducted by Joan Porcel Studio.