

Reconstructing a Legacy: Donations, Documents, and Memorabilia at the Accademia di Belle Arti di Carrara

Academic Supervision

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Project Overview

Since its foundation in 1769, the Accademia di Belle Arti di Carrara has distinguished itself by **welcoming, as ordinary or honorary members, a wide range of prominent figures —physicians, poets, scientists, musicians, historians, deputies, ministers, sovereigns, and later also artists.** Among the non-artist members are personalities such as Napoleon Bonaparte, Elisa Baciocchi, Cavour, Spallanzani, Gioberti, Carducci, D'Annunzio, Bettino Ricasoli, Niccolò Tommaseo, Cesare Cantù, Giovanni Gentile, Giuseppe Bottai, Mario Luzzi, and Carlo Rambaldi; among the artists, numerous sculptors, painters, architects, and medallists **who contributed decisively to the Academy's cultural life and collecting history.**

To date, **928 members** have been identified, though the actual number is likely higher. Upon nomination, many members expressed their gratitude by presenting the Academy with a gift—an act documented in letters of thanks preserved in the archives. Sculptors donated models, plaster casts, and marble or bronze sculptures; painters offered drawings and canvases; medallists their medals; writers their books, and so forth.

Several of these gifts have been traced and are still preserved among the Academy’s artistic and bibliographic holdings. Sixteen original plaster models, for example, survive as tokens of gratitude from their creators. Yet archival evidence suggests that the number of donations must have been far greater.

Numerous documented gifts remain unaccounted for, including sculptures by such notable artists as Charles-Antoine Bridan, Fausto Baratta, Pompeo Marchesi, Giovan Battista Del Monte, Giuseppe Del Nero, Demetrio Carusi Jr., Streichenberg, Salvino Salvini, Tito Angelini, Restituto Del Canto, Edvard Eriksen, Carl Vilhelm Olaf, and Peter Aarsleff. Other contributions may have arrived without ever being formally registered.

The long absence of systematic documentation has led not only to missing catalogue entries, but also to the loss, theft, or deterioration of many works. A striking example is the group sculpture *Elbano Gasperi a Curtatone* by Bernardo Tacca Jr., which today lacks its right arm—although an archival photograph records the work in its original state. The Academy also suffered a major bibliographic and archival theft in 1981, which further compromised the integrity of its heritage.

This project addresses these gaps by **reconstructing the history of the Academy’s donated holdings**, documenting both extant works and those that have been lost, dispersed, or damaged. Its goal is to **restore historical continuity, recover the cultural significance of these contributions, and establish a lasting framework for knowledge and preservation.**

After an initial mapping of extant and missing works, the project proceeds with the **identification and cataloguing of artworks and memorabilia**—including medals, diplomas, and other objects—that have never been inventoried or whose existence is known only from archival sources.

Each Honorary Member, patron, or donor—whether or not their contribution survives—is treated as an **“intangible historical asset”** and included in a dedicated catalogue. Each entry presents a biographical profile, documentation of the nomination or donation, and a relational narrative that links the individual to the Academy, the local context, and any associated artefact.

All cataloguing is carried out using the expedited ministerial form (MIDV) or another model agreed upon with the lead institution. The data are entered into the **SIGeCWeb platform**, while a selected group of records—chosen for their historical and documentary relevance—is published in enhanced form on the **IartNET database**.

Actions

- **Map and identify** all artworks and memorabilia linked to the Academy's Honorary Members, including sculptures, models, medals, diplomas, books, and other objects—whether extant, lost, stolen, or documented only in archival sources.
- **Reconstruct provenance histories** by cross-referencing archival materials, letters of thanks, historic inventories, and photographic documentation, in order to trace both the biographies of donors and the trajectories of their gifts.
- **Catalogue each Honorary Member, patron, and donor** as an “intangible historical asset,” creating a biographical and contextual profile that documents their nomination, their donation (extant or lost), and their relationship to the Academy and its cultural environment.
- **Compile a complete inventory and relational catalogue** of donated and historically connected artefacts, integrating both existing and missing works and establishing links between members, works, archival sources, and historical events.
- **Catalogue artworks and memorabilia** not yet included in the ICCD OA records, using the MIDV expedited form or another model agreed upon with the lead institution.
- **Upload all data to SIGeCWeb**, ensuring consistency with national cataloguing standards and preservation of metadata.
- **Publish a selected group of enhanced records**—chosen for their exceptional historical, documentary, or artistic significance—on the IartNET digital platform, contributing to national and international knowledge-sharing.