

# Lionello Venturi and the taste of the primitives: from text to context (1918–1931) The Concept of the Primitive as a Perspective for Analysis

Antonella Perna

The cover photo of my book perfectly condenses the topic of my research in all its complexity and multiple focuses. (FIG. 1) Two men, quite elegant, are absorbed in looking at old buildings. Not much is going on, but they are completely engrossed in their observations. The two men are the art historian Lionello Venturi and the entrepreneur and art collector Riccardo Gualino, and they are major protagonists in my thesis. Even though they are not recognisable, the picture epitomises the connection between the learned and knowledgeable art scholar and the wealthy and cultivated art collector, sharing their time, expertise and resources in the name of art appreciation.

One aspect of my thesis addresses the relevance of the commercialisation of art and social networks in the analysis of aesthetic ideas. Today we live in the



**Image 1. Lionello Venturi and Riccardo Gualino in San Gimignano, Italy. Family photo album. Courtesy of the Gualino family.**

era of globalisation when mobility and communication are not an issue. But what was the situation 100 years ago? Indeed, international and cross-disciplinary connections were not only possible, but actually frequent, and above all influential. When focusing on theoretical ideas, one tends to forget that they belong to actual people with an actual life marked by material interactions. Looking at Venturi's extensive international network of fellow scholars, art dealers and collectors, I came to consider the potential impact these connections could have had on his work.

The terms of my research have thus been renegotiated many times in the process of undertaking this study. It began by focusing on Venturi's aesthetic ideas, more specifically as a textual analysis of his major book from the 1920s, *The Taste of the Primitives*.<sup>1</sup> However, the angle of my research progressively widened to include Venturi's professional life and his historical context because it was not possible to understand his work in isolation or solely through employing a theoretical approach.

Lionello Venturi (1885–1961) (FIG. 2) is one of the founding figures of art-historical scholarship in Italy.<sup>2</sup> In





**Image 2. Lionello Venturi on the way to North America by cruise ship. Family photo album. Courtesy of the Gualino family.**

1915, Venturi was appointed Professor of Art History at the University of Turin. However, this first tenure was interrupted due to the outbreak of the First World War. He returned to professional life only in 1918, having suffered a serious injury to one eye.<sup>3</sup> In spite of this traumatic experience, Venturi returned to the University of Turin with a renewed enthusiasm. This became a fertile period in his personal and professional life. The outcomes of his work at this time are in many ways condensed in *The Taste of the Primitives* (1926).

*The Taste of the Primitives* is an art-historical account that involves a critical perspective and aesthetic considerations in the analysis of artworks at a time when connoisseurship and a documentary approach prevailed.<sup>4</sup> The book makes fascinating, yet not easy reading. It is a complex book that defies classification due to its idiosyncratic structure and language. In particular he used a comparative approach, drawing a parallel between artworks belonging to a different chronological context and cultural background.<sup>5</sup> (FIGS. 3) The result of these sets of juxtapositions is the definition of a dualism between primitive and classical taste, which, in Venturi's words, ends up representing the polarity between art and non-art, creativity and spiritualism on one side, and imitation and materialism on the other.

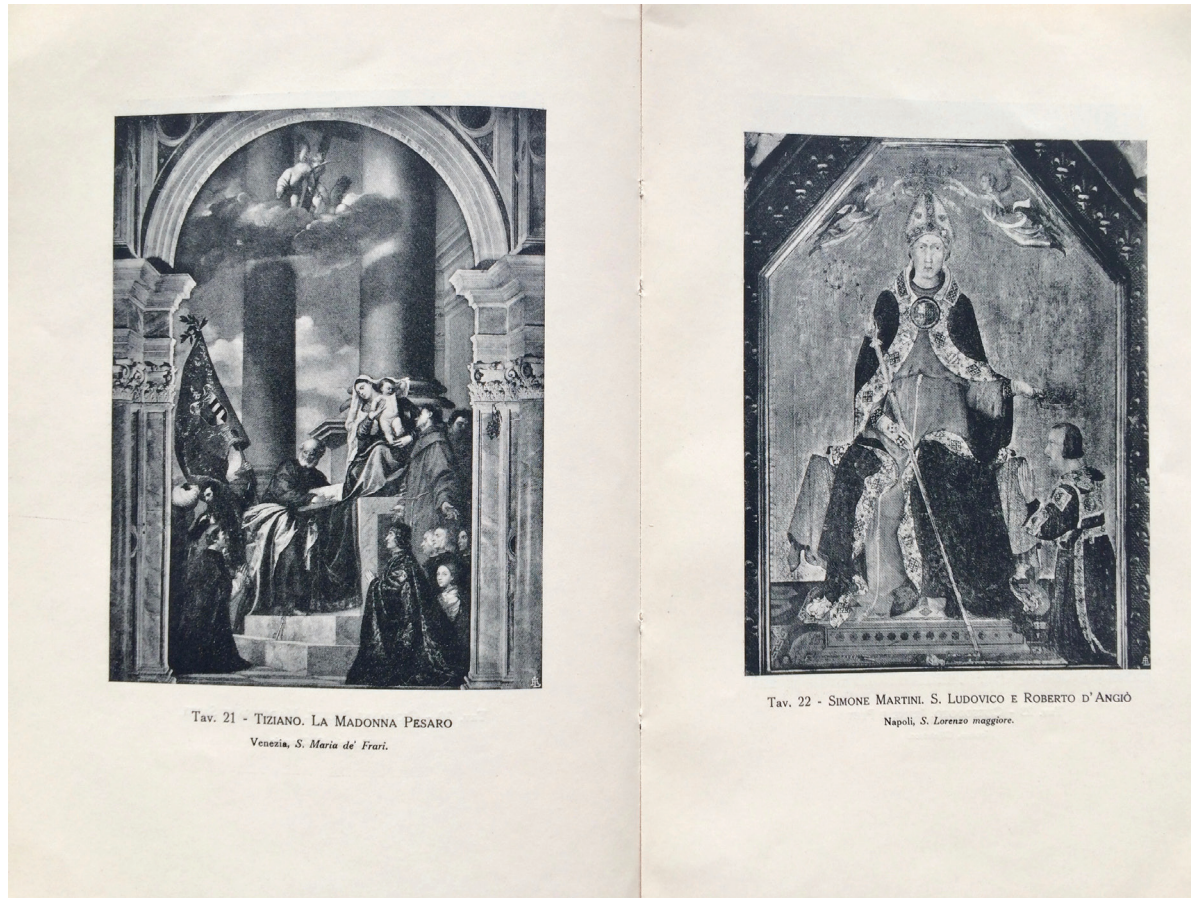
The term "primitive" in this text emerges as crucial and yet ambiguous. It seems to be attached to a plurality of meanings at different levels. Therefore, the first

question in my study concerned the understanding of the term primitive in Venturi's work, the way in which it had been employed, and the motivation behind its usage. The term the primitive had been widely used before Venturi in different contexts and carried different meanings. Thus, I realised that the definition of this concept presented a challenge of its own.<sup>6</sup>

The Primitives in Venturi's book are first of all the Italian old masters. The term, following the Vasarian tradition since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, referred to those artists who preceded the Renaissance.<sup>7</sup> But that was not all. Venturi extended this definition to all those artists whose works he thought demonstrated similar aesthetic characteristics. Venturi indeed used the term primitive, shifting its meaning from its historical connotations to its aesthetic qualities, such as creativity, abstraction, and spiritual inspiration. In other words, he turned a set of historically determined aesthetic characteristics, typical of the Italian old masters, into a universal aesthetic category, which reveals many points of contact with Formalist theories.<sup>8</sup>

However, the concept of the primitive not only condensed Venturi's aesthetical mindset. It was also used as a discursive frame. The discourse theory, as elaborated by Michel Foucault, allows an analysis that calls into consideration contextual elements, such as the influence of historical, cultural, and sociological conditions.<sup>9</sup> From this perspective, primitivism can be





**Image 3. Plates from Lionello Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi* (1926): Titian, *La Madonna Pesaro* (pl. 21); Simone Martini, *San Ludovico and Roberto d'Angiò* (pl. 22)**

interpreted as a discursive practice that, by creating knowledge and truth, justifies the authority of the textual claims. The primitivist discourse, therefore, was used as a means to explain, promote, and provide legitimacy for a set of aesthetic ideas. It provided the frame needed for the appropriation and interpretation of single artworks. The discursive frames, therefore, also constituted a context, which contributed to branding the value of the artworks presented within an art collection. As suggested by Mieke Bal in relation to her explanation of exhibitions in terms of discursive practices, the context of the collection could contribute to producing knowledge and authority by projecting the curatorial agents' presentation and interpretation over the objects included.<sup>10</sup>

For instance, the aesthetic premises laid down by formalist theorists constituted the ground for the inclusion of Chinese pieces along with Italian primitive artworks, making them popular among Western collectors in the 1910s. The appropriation and interpretation of Chinese art within this discursive frame contributed to establishing its aesthetic and economic value, although remaining essentially misunderstood and interpreted according categories that did not belong to it.<sup>11</sup> Because of the potential of discursive practices to influence the taste of collectors, scholars gained an important role in the art market at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup> Art historians, in their role as art advisors,



not only guaranteed quality and originality, but they could shift the boundaries of what was considered as art, conditioning the taste of their contemporaries and setting new trends and new collecting opportunities.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, I also consider Venturi's primitivism in terms of a discursive practice that promoted his ideas and his collecting choices as an art advisor. In this regard, the Gualino Art Collection can be considered as part of Venturi's primitivist discursive frame.<sup>14</sup> The collecting choices, including modern and Chinese art along with Italian old masters, was unusual in 1920s Italy, but they reflected Venturi's theories and followed his strategic advice. As part of the primitive discursive frame, the collection gained meaning and value as a coherent whole.<sup>15</sup>

The investigation of the connection between Venturi and Gualino from the perspective of the concept of the primitive opened up new insights, as for instance, the influence that Gualino had on Venturi in terms of financial opportunity (and travelling) and gaining access to a progressive circle. In particular he was exposed to Theosophy, an esoteric religious current popular among intellectual circles across Europe from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>16</sup> This is a particularly important aspect that casts some light on the spiritual emphasis of Venturi's aesthetic ideas. Moreover, this theme also highlights the special importance of Venturi's connection with the Finnish-Swedish art historian Osvald

Sirén, with a special regard to the mystical interpretation of the artworks and the inclusion of Chinese art in the collection, which has never been considered before.<sup>17</sup>

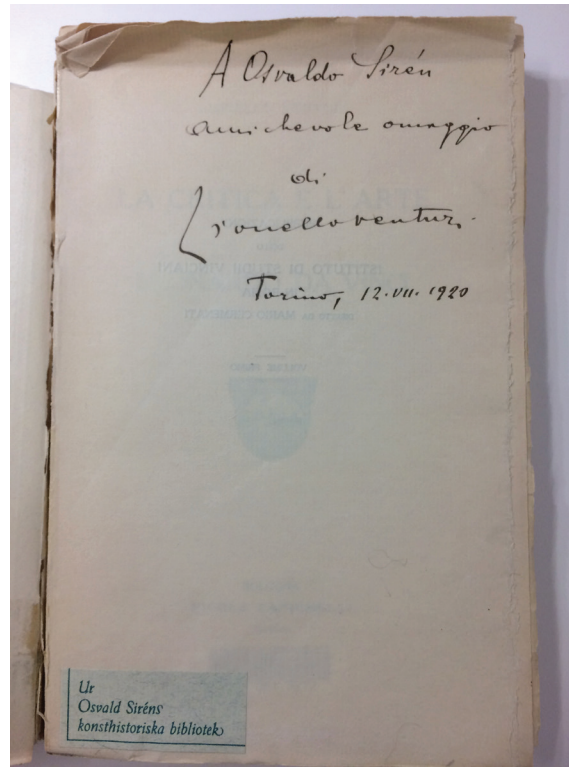
In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sirén had become a respected expert on Italian old masters. Since 1901 Sirén had travelled to Italy on a yearly basis and thus there had been plenty of opportunities for Venturi and Sirén to meet and network.<sup>18</sup> They reconnected in 1920, when Sirén was touring Italian cities, studying Italian old masters in preparing his last major publication on Italian Art.<sup>19</sup> His new interest in Eastern art was blossoming following his first tour of the Orient (1917-18), but his main focus was still on the Italian primitives. In that year, Sirén met Venturi (and most probably Gualino as well) in Turin, as suggested by Venturi's dedication on the book he donated to his colleague.<sup>20</sup> (FIG. 4) In this regard, it is also significant that two Madonnas published in Sirén's book in 1922 then entered the Gualino Collection, respectively attributed to Cimabue (post 1924) and to Berlinghiero (1928).<sup>21</sup> (FIGS. 5 and 6)

Although the main reason for Sirén's trips to Italy, and his contact with Venturi in 1920, concerned the Italian old masters, it seems likely that he would make mention of his new interest in Chinese art, as he was actively preparing for his second journey to Asia (1921-23).<sup>22</sup> Sirén and Venturi met once again in Paris

in 1923. Returning from his trip to China, Sirén had settled in the city, where Venturi also started to spend considerable time with Gualino. At this point, it was mainly the interest in Chinese art that brought them together. Indeed, in 1926 Venturi returned to France with the specific aim to study Chinese art under the supervision of Sirén.<sup>23</sup> The year 1923 was also when Gualino began purchasing Chinese artworks in Paris.<sup>24</sup> (FIG. 7) It is significant that, although the international art market was quite competitive, the Gualino Collection, in a relatively short time, secured a coherent group of Chinese art of the first order in terms of their aesthetic importance and representation of different epochs and styles. Many of the artworks acquired by Gualino between 1923 and 1929 indeed show some link to Sirén.<sup>25</sup>

The importance of primitivism's function as a discursive frame emerges as crucial when considered in the light of the historical context of the 1920s and it indeed appears as motivated by contextual dialectics. In this regard it is meaningful that, although Venturi's aesthetic ideas were rooted in the 1910s, the definition of a primitivist discourse is specific to the 1920s. In those years, Venturi became involved in the cultural debate of the time beyond the limits of the academic context. Even the nature of *The Taste of the Primitives*, which is recognised as polemical, despite its historiographical content, suggests its role as a critical intervention.





**Image 4. Lionello Venturi's book *La critica e l'arte di Leonardo da Vinci* (1919), which includes a dedication to Osvald Sirén. Helsinki University Library.**

At that time, Modern Classicism was the dominant aesthetic trend. Venturi, who had defined the primitive as an antidote to classicism, interpreted it in terms of a celebration of the past that lacked creativity and was subjugated to political control.<sup>26</sup> Venturi instead proposed Impressionist artists – who he considered as the last primitives – as an inspiration for regenerating con-

temporary art in terms of modernity and spirituality.<sup>27</sup>

However, Modern Classicism in the 1920s represented an international aesthetic orientation that, while taking the classical tradition as a source of inspiration, represented a continuation of modernist researches.<sup>28</sup> Classical aesthetic principles, like the constructive approach, represented an attempt to explore a new hu-

manism, while transcending the measured harmony to metaphysical orientations.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, Venturi's statement about Modern Classicism poses a problem: How should we interpret the contradictions in his claims about Impressionism and Modern Classicism? And the connection to political power?

When Modern Classicism came to dominate, it was not simply as an aesthetic trend, but as part of a discursive practice that promoted the Fascists' values. Although it developed independently from Fascism, and in fact before the establishment of the Fascist regime, this trend nevertheless became absorbed by the Fascist strategy of hegemonic pluralism.<sup>30</sup> This strategy aimed at controlling and exploiting art by mainly manipulating its meaning, i.e. through exhibitions. Modern Classicism was appropriated because it was considered a good source of images with which to express Fascist identity. However, there was a profound gap between Modern Classicism as artistic practice and its political interpretation made within the Fascist discursive frame.<sup>31</sup>

I found that both the Fascist arts policy and Venturi followed a similar discursive strategy. During the 1920s, the primitivist and Fascist classicist frames were concurring with each other, supporting oppositional aesthetic perspectives within the cultural debate of the time by means of appropriation, interpretation,





**Image 5. Plate 7 from Osvald Sirén's *Toskanska målare på tolvhundratalet: Lucca, Pisa, Florens* (1922): Berlinghiero Berlinghieri (now attributed to Maestro della Madonna di Rovezzano), *Madonna*.**



**Image 6. Plate 110 from Osvald Sirén *Toskanska målare på tolvhundratalet: Lucca, Pisa, Florens* (1922): Cimabue (now attributed to Duccio di Buoninsegna), *Madonna con bambino*.**

and re-elaboration. Frames could serve in attributing different meanings to any artwork independently of their actual content and formal appearance. Both were inexact and non-objective in their focus. Venturi's particular formulation of a primitivist discursive frame emerges in its historical context as a reaction to the fascistisation of the dominant discourse. It was a way to respond and to challenge it with more efficient tools in order to brand his unconventional aesthetic perspective.

Within a primitivist framing, for instance, Venturi exalted Felice Casorati's art in terms of its spontaneity and spirituality and could thus isolate him from the dominant discourse. Nevertheless, although adding a personal twist to it, Casorati's work reflected the aesthetic trend of Modern Classicism in many ways. His artworks were executed in a classical manner regarding depth and volume, while his use of colours and the appearance of flatness, harked back to his formative Expressionist experiences. His portrait figures, solid in their physical appearance, stood melancholic and hieratic. Although Casorati escaped a direct association with the Fascist rhetoric, his work was well received and was included in the Fascist discourse, which tended to highlight aspects such as tradition, harmony, and construction, while neglecting those that were more difficult to absorb.<sup>32</sup>

This clash of frames also involved the interpretation of the art of the past. Quattrocentismo is a good



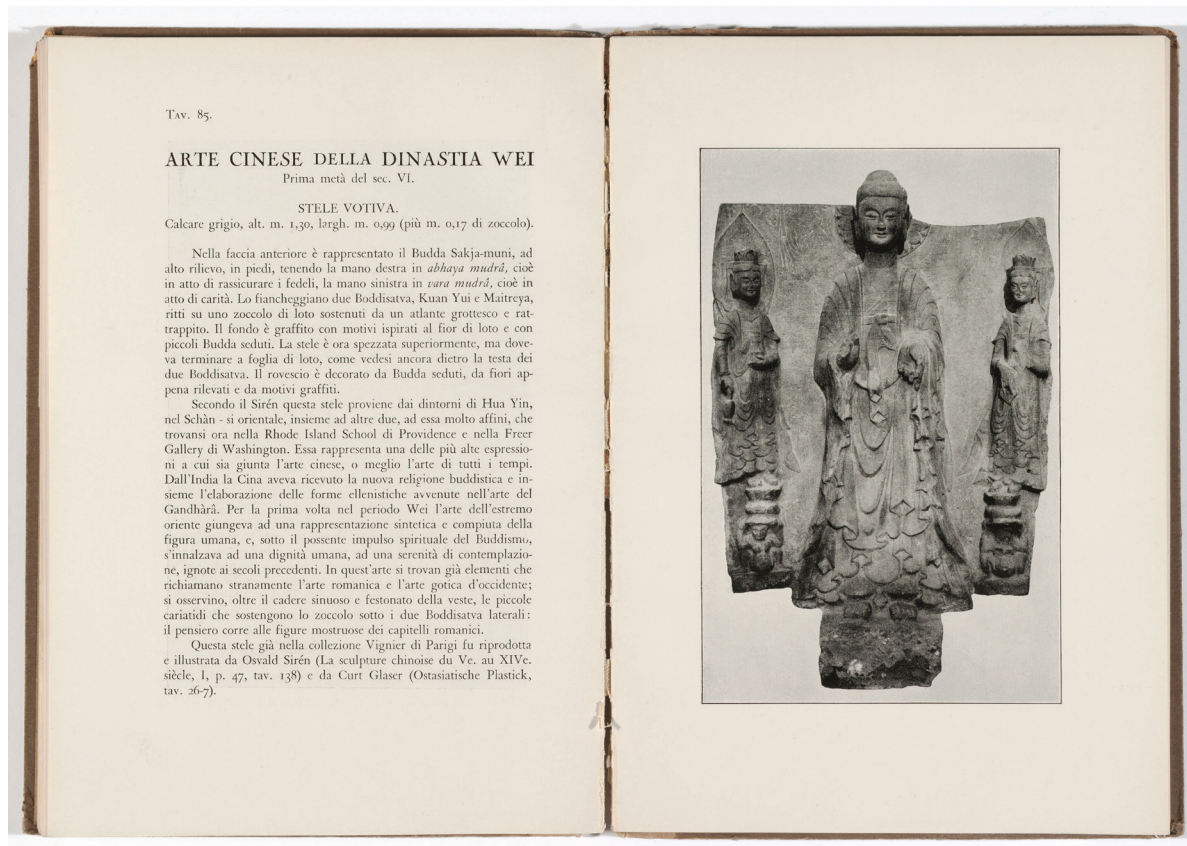


Image 7. Plate 85 from Venturi, *Alcune opera della collezione Gualino (1928)*: Wei Stele.

example of how the evaluation of the same phenomenon could acquire a different meaning, within different frames, although in both cases positive. The art of the 15th century was seen within the Fascist frame in terms of the roots of an Italian artistic tradition founded on classical principles. Venturi instead praised their spiritual inspiration and synthesis of expression.<sup>33</sup>

This interpretation of the primitive in terms of a discourse with cultural implications helps in understanding the contradictions in Venturi's claims, and thus his departure from Italy in 1931.<sup>34</sup> Venturi's anti-classicism, as part of a discursive frame, addressed the appropriation of Modern Classicism that was carried out within the dominant discourse rather than actual artworks. Primitivism says more about Venturi as an agent in the cultural debate of the time, than it does about the artistic practices he evaluated and criticised. Primitivism was associated with the idea of modernity, but in truth it turned out to promote a backward-looking aesthetic perspective. Venturi indeed later, after World War II, reconsidered his criticism of the artists working in the 1920s.<sup>35</sup>

As discursive frames had proven to be useful in promoting unusual collecting trends, primitivism also became an empowering tool for justifying Venturi's ideas and promoting his authority as scholar within the cultural debate of the time dominated by a different aesthetic orientation. In its shift from a position within an



aesthetic category, to one in which it occupied a place within a discursive frame, Venturi's notion of primitivism became a ground within which his theory and his criticism, his collecting choices and cultural initiatives, gained meaning and value in a coherent way. Venturi's notion of primitivism indeed constitutes a common thread connecting the rich variety of his undertakings in the 1920s, in his multiple roles as art advisor, professor, scholar, critic, theorist, curator, and committed intellectual. The focus on the concept of the primitive in this study constituted a perspective for analysis that provided a more consistent and less fragmented intellectual profile of Lionello Venturi.

## Notes

- 1 Lionello Venturi, *Il gusto dei primitivi* (1926), 2nd ed. (Torino: Einaudi, 1972).
- 2 Giacomo Agosti, *La nascita della storia dell'arte in Italia. Adolfo Venturi. Dal museo all'università 1880–1940* (Venezia: Marsilio editori, 1996).
- 3 Antonello Venturi, "Dal nazionalismo familiare all'esilio," in *Dal nazionalismo all'esilio. Gli anni torinesi di Lionello Venturi, 1914–1932*, ed. Franca Varallo (Torino: Aragno, 2016), 47–48; Stefano Valeri, "Lionello Venturi e il rinnovamento della critica dell'arte in Italia," *Laboratorio de arte* no. 30 (2018): 419–438, 420–421, [http://institucional.us.es/revistas/arte/30/023\\_Stefano\\_Valeri.pdf](http://institucional.us.es/revistas/arte/30/023_Stefano_Valeri.pdf)
- 4 Gianni Carlo Sciolla, *La critica d'arte del Novecento* (Torino: Utet, 1995).
- 5 Antonella Perna, "Taidekritiikin historia ja taidehistoria. Benedetto Crocen taiteen henkisestä olemuksesta Lionello Venturin parataktiseen menetelmään," transl. Riikka Niemelä, in *Kuinka tehdä taidehistoriaa?*, eds. Altti Kuusamo, Minna Ijäs and Riikka Niemelä (Turku: Utukirjat, 2010), 240–265.
- 6 Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Mark Antliff and Patricia Leighton, "Primitive," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 217–231.
- 7 Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti* (Roma: Grandi tascabili economici Newton, 1993).
- 8 Antonella Perna, *Lionello Venturi and The Taste of the Primitives: from Text to Context (1918–1931). The Concept of the Primitives as a Perspective for Analysis* (Turku: Annales Universitatis Turkuensis, 2020), 36–84. (<http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-29-7910-3>)
- 9 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, transl. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 107; Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, transl. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 78–108; Michel Foucault, "Politics and the Study of Discourse," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).
- 10 Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 2–9, 88; Mieke Bal, *On Story Telling: Essays in Narratology* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1991), 1; Tony Bennett, "Exhibition, Truth, Power: Reconsidering 'The Exhibitionary Complex'," in *The Documenta 14 Reader*, eds. Quinn Latimer and Adam Szymczyk (Munich: Prestel, 2017), 339–400; Carol Duncan, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship," in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 280.
- 11 Lenore Metrick-Chen, *Collecting Objects/Excluding People: Chinese Subjects and American Visual Culture, 1830–1900* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012); Yiyou Wang, *The Louvre from China: A Critical Study of C. T. Loo and the Framing of Chinese Art in the United States, 1915–1950* (Ohio, Ohio University, 2007), 17–18 (<https://etd.ohiolink.edu/>); Michelle Huang, ed., *The Reception of Chinese Art Across Cultures* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).
- 12 Rachel Cohen, *Bernard Berenson: A Life in the Picture Trade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Elizabeth Mansfield, "Making Art History a Profession," in *Making Art History: A Changing Discipline and Its Institutions*, ed. Elisabeth Mansfield (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1–9.
- 13 Frederick Baekeland, "Psychological Aspects





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14 Lionello Venturi, *La collezione Gualino* (Torino–Roma: Casa Editrice d’Arte Bestetti e Tumminelli, 1926).

15 Maria Mimmita Lamberti, “Riccardo Gualino. Una collezione e molti progetti,” *Ricerche di storia dell’arte*, no. 12 (1980); Krzysztof Pomian, “Collezione,” in *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, vol. 3 (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1978), 330–364.

16 Marco Pasi, “Teosofia e antroposofia nell’Italia del primo Novecento,” in *Storia d’Italia. Annali 25. Esoterismo*, ed. Gian Mario Cazzaniga (Torino: Einaudi, 2010), 569–598; Perna, *Lionello Venturi and The Taste of the Primitives*, 154–159; Beatrice Marconi, “Cesarina Gualino musa mecenate pittrice. Quasi un’autobiografia,” in *Cesarina Gualino e i suoi amici*, eds. Maurizio Fagiolo dell’Arco e Beatrice Marconi (Venezia 1997), 115–183; Beatrice Marconi, “Jessie Boswell e Cesarina Gualino. Affinità elettive,” in *Jessie Boswell*, ed. Ivana Mulatero (Torino: Bolaffi editore, 2009), 74–78; Diari di Cesarina Gualino 1923–1929, in Fondo Riccardo Gualino, Archivio centrale dello Stato, Roma; rancesca Ponzetti ed., *Il caso Gualino*, [http://www.teatroestoria.it/materiali/Il\\_caso\\_GUALINO](http://www.teatroestoria.it/materiali/Il_caso_GUALINO).

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18 Johanna Vakkari, “Alcuni contemporanei finlandesi di Lionello Venturi: Osvald Sirén, Tancred Borenius, Onni Okkonen,” *Storia dell’arte, Nuova serie*, 1, no. 101 (January–April 2002), 108–117; Osvald Sirén, “Di alcuni pittori fiorentini che subirono l’influenza di Lorenzo Monaco,” *L’Arte. Rivista di storia dell’arte medievale e moderna* 7 (1904): 337–355; Osvald Sirén, “Alcune opere sconosciute di Bernardo Daddi,” *L’Arte. Rivista di storia dell’arte medievale e moderna* 8 (1905): 280–281; Osvald Sirén, “Notizie di alcuni minori fiorentini,” *L’Arte. Rivista di storia dell’arte medievale e moderna* 8 (1905): 48–119; Osvald Sirén, “Studi di musei e gallerie. Notizie critiche sui quadri sconosciuti nel museo cristiano Vaticano,” *L’Arte. Rivista di storia dell’arte medievale e moderna* 9 (1906): 321–335; Osvald Sirén, “Quattrocento. Gli affreschi del Paradiso degli Alberti (Lorenzo di Niccolò e Mariotto di Nardo),” *L’Arte. Rivista di storia dell’arte medievale e moderna* 11 (1908): 179–196; Osvald Sirén “Alcune note aggiuntive a quadri primitivi nella galleria Vaticana,” *L’Arte. Rivista di storia dell’arte medievale e moderna* 24 (1921) 24–28, 97–102; Osvald Sirén, “Come vediamo l’arte cinese,” *L’Arte. Rivista di storia dell’arte medievale e moderna* 34, no. 4 (1931): 295–311.

19 Osvald Sirén, *Toskanische Maler im XIII Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Cassirer, 1922).

20 Lionello Venturi, *La critica e l’arte di Leonardo da Vinci* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1919). L’esemplare con la

firma e la dedica di Venturi a Sirén (*A Osvaldo (sic!) Sirén amichevole omaggio di Lionello Venturi Torino 12 VII 1920*) si trova nella biblioteca dell’Università di Helsinki e fa parte del fondo donato dallo studioso finno-svedese.

21 Maestro della Madonna di Rovazzano (ex Berlinghiero), *Madonna con bambino*, ca. 1250, tempera su tavola (Collezione d’arte della Banca d’Italia) e Duccio di Buoninsegna (ex Cimabue), *Madonna con bambino*, ca. 1280, tempera su tavola (Torino, Musei Reali, Galleria Sabauda). Osvald Sirén, “Considerations sur l’ouvre de Cimabue. A propos de la Madone de la collection Gualino, à Turin,” *Revue de l’art ancien et moderne* 49 (1926): 73–88; Perna, “Riccardo Gualino e Osvald Sirén,” 197–205.

22 Perna, “Riccardo Gualino e Osvald Sirén,” 197–205; Törmä, *Enchanted by Lohans*, 57.

23 Lettera di Lionello Venturi a Osvald Sirén, 21 December 1925, in the Sirén Archive, Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm (“Buon lavoro in America. Mi avverta del suo ritorno perché possa venire a Parigi a sentire le novità dei due mondi”); lettera di Lionello ad Adolfo Venturi, 28 May 1926 (VT V1 b45 19), in Fondo Adolfo Venturi, Centro Archivistico della Scuola Normale di Pisa (“Sto studiando quanto posso arte cinese. Ho veduto Sirén di ritorno dall’America, pieno di fotografie di pitture cinesi molto belle, come in Europa non si vedono. E ce ne sono alcune veramente insorpassabili”); lettera di Lionello ad Adolfo Venturi, 1 June 1926 (VT V1 b45 20), in Fondo Adolfo Venturi, Centro Archivistico della Scuola Normale di Pisa (“Qui si studia bene l’arte orientale, e comincio a capirci qualche cosa”); lettera di Lionello Venturi ad Adolfo Venturi, s.d.ma ante September 1926 (VT V1 b44 86) (“...farei il mio solito viaggio 15 giugno–15 luglio a Parigi e Londra”), in Fondo Adolfo Venturi, Centro Archivistico della Scuola Normale di Pisa.

24 Perna, “Riccardo Gualino e Osvald Sirén,” 197–205; import documents, no. 52, 27 December



1925 (duplicata no. 47, 12 January 1923); no. 6, 8 July 1927; no. 25, 29 September 1928; no. 20, 19 March 1928; no. 36, 2 December 1928, no. 37, 10 December 1928, in Fondo Riccardo Gualino, Archivio centrale dello Stato, Roma.

25 Sirén's expertise, 29 April 1926, Fondo Riccardo Gualino, Archivio centrale dello Stato, Roma; Sirén, "A Reconstruction of a Great Collection of Chinese Sculpture," 75.

26 Lionello Venturi, "Il valore attuale dei primitivi," *L'Araldo dell'istituto d'arte e alta cultura* 1, no.

2 (1924) ("Onde può essere oggi opportuno di riesaminare il gusto dei Primitivi, per determinarne i tratti essenziali e dedurne il valore attuale...È opportuno riconoscere il valore dei Primitivi e dei loro epigoni a noi vicini, oggi che per idolatrare l'arte classica si costituisce un'arte neoclassica, fatta assai più di volontà e di intelligenza, che di sensibilità. Contro il neoclassicismo, antico e moderno, dissanguatesi nella pura Accademia, serve come antidoto appunto lo studio dei Primitivi, i più spontanei, i più sensibili, i più umili fra gli artisti di tutti i tempi"); Lionello Venturi, "Un problema della mostra del Novecento," in *Pretesti di critica* (Milano: Hoepli, 1929), 191–196.

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**PhD Antonella Perna is an Italian art historian living in Finland. She is specialized in the Art History from the 1920s. Among her interests are the History of Art History and the History of Art Collecting. She has been involved in several exhibition and cultural projects in Italy and in Finland.**

