



FACTVM  
FOVNDATION  
FOR DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY  
IN CONSERVATION



## Peril in Venice

4-09-2016

When one goes to Venice – which for many wonderful reasons large numbers of us will this year, we think often of preservation and the peril Venice faces. That's because we all know that the land upon which the city sits is sinking. That has been slowed by the prohibition on drawing water from the aquifer but the high tide – acqua alta – levels are becoming more frequent and the lagoon is rising inexorably as well.

So we are always conscious of preservation and restoration in Venice as we are also conscious that the city still looks marvelous, floating almost and serene. Many of the buildings look worn – as they might, they've been there a long time – since the original slave trade made the city so rich. But many are copies of what was and many more are heavily restored. The Campanile in St Mark's Square is one of Venice's landmarks – built on a Roman and then C9th foundation - it has looked, as it looks now, since 1514 – except for a short interlude in 1902 when it collapsed and was carefully rebuilt over ten years. Yes, it is a copy, nearly identical, but a copy. It stands for Venice and it is in every visitor's memory and every photograph's background. It is authentically Venetian and its originality is not a question – it doesn't need to be.

Across St Mark's canal is the island upon which the Monastery of San Giorgio Maggiore stands – the glorious home of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini. Followers of the Factum story may know of the painting that hangs on the end wall of the refectory – where the building itself was designed by Palladio as its home. It is, of course, the [Wedding at Cana](#) by Paolo Veronese. Thought by many to be the greatest painting in the world – certainly that was true until colour reproduction, copies, became cheap and reliable – which is when the Mona Lisa became so well known that it became the greatest, a bye word for 'art'. We have spoken before (see [Viewed from Afar 31-05-2015](#)) of the crush to view that small, hermetically sealed, painted image – but the people in the warm, humidity controlled, dimly lit crush in the Louvre hardly notice the great painting looming behind them. It was painted by Veronese and, though heavily restored, it is the painting that hung in Palladio's refectory until 1797 when Napoleon decided it should be in the Louvre.

Adam Lowe and the Factum team, commissioned by the Fondazione Cini and with the collaboration of the Louvre, recorded the painting in high resolution 3D and colour and re-created the painting's 67m<sup>2</sup> surface perfectly. It hangs now in Palladio's bright, spacious, lofty refectory with whose perspective the painting's horizon is aligned and for which it was painted – a copy, like the campanile – but its authenticity is not in question.

This question is the core of the Foundation's being – we want to make sure we record – and help others record - in the highest possible resolution, works of cultural importance so that future generations may enjoy, analyse and understand what we inherited. We record in the highest resolution possible – sufficient to make an exact physical copy. And sometimes using that data we may do just that for a number of reasons - if the subject is in danger, as in Tutankhamun's Tomb, or has been displaced, or dispersed, or damaged or even destroyed. Digital technology in conservation can have benign results, some perils to our cultural heritage may be averted though digital preservation.

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