

Art&Shopping :Textiles in Venice

Venice and its long history: the silks coming from the East, the splendours and luxury of the Serenissima; the precious vestments of the Doges, the Venetian ladies and the courtesans; its famous Carnival...

Between precious fabrics and the lagoon town there have always been a very close relationship. Still nowadays Venice keeps, sometimes well concealed, at times in ancient palaces and residences, some places where precious textile dominates. We are dealing with textiles which, nowadays, furnish the luxury residences located everywhere, the houses of powerful people, the most famous theatres, the churches and the Catholic basilicas scattered all over the world, the most elegant hotels and super-yachts.

RUBELLI: In St. Marc sestiere, from where our itinerary starts, Corner Spinelli Palace holds the Rubelli showroom, a firm which was founded in 1858. Such Palace, attributed to Mauro Condussi, is a wonderful example of a Renaissance residence and it can be easily reached starting from Rialto, going through Campo St. Luca, then Campo Manin, and, after arriving at the end of Calle della Mandola, turning towards the Calle of lawyers and reaching the Corte dell'Albero and the landing stage of St. Angelo.

Although, by now, the Rubelli company has become a multinational producing between Como and Pennsylvania, the quality of its damasks, brocades, silks and velvets remain unique, being, in fact, placed in the luxury area. The Rubelli's is known among the first four most prestigious companies in the world as far as its sector is concerned. The access is free and when entering the palace it is possible, besides seeing and buying wonderful textiles, to have the opportunity of admiring more than 3000 documents about textile art dating back to the period between the Fifteenth and the Twentieth centuries and if you lean out of the terrace, you can enjoy a marvellous view of Canal Grande.

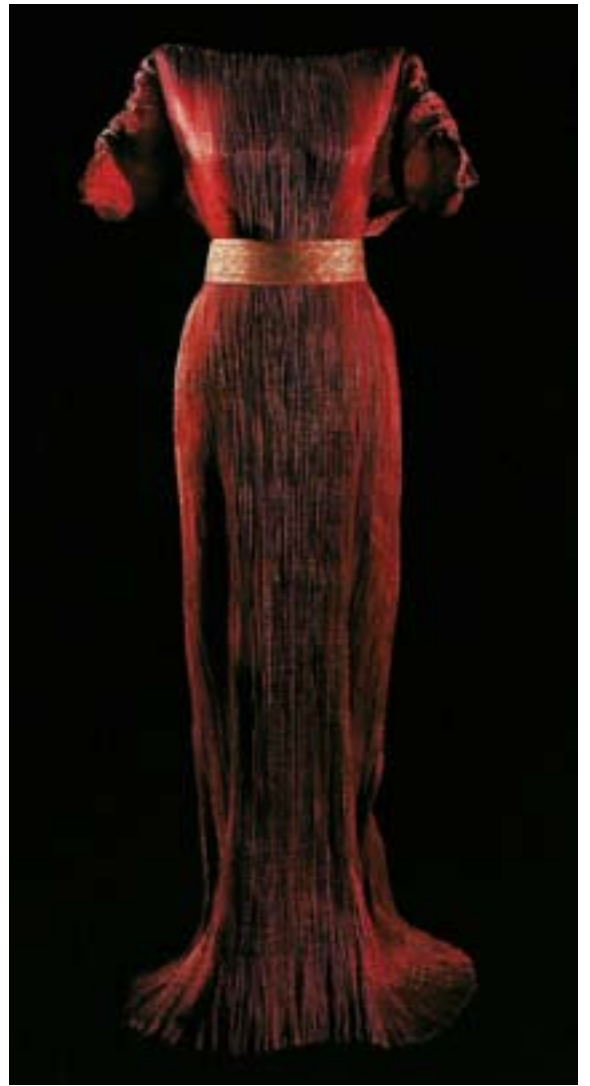


FORTUNY MUSEUM: After the visit to Corner Spinelli Palace, we suggest you to visit the Fortuny Museum. As a matter of fact, its collection of nearly four hundred examples of ancient fabrics and vestments, from the West and the East, composed during Mariano Fortuny's life, represents a precious and complete ensemble, aiming at testifying the most important technical and decorative patterns in the history of textile art. The collection starts with the Renaissance brocades from Florence, designed by artists such as Pollaiuolo or Botticelli, and the sumptuous grating shaped velvets with the thistle flower pattern engraved in the thickness of the velvet or in 'griccia' shape, gleaming with golden and 'allucciolato' brocade. The Sixteenth century is well represented by 'lampassi' with 'grottesche' decorations, as well as vegetable and floral patterns, at times displaying meanings related to heraldry, from damasks and 'soprarizzi' with flower and plants patterns made smaller and stylized, which were so in fashion in the aristocratic



vestments of that period; whereas the baroque style makes its appearance aiming at the perspective in the backgrounds. Among the several stylistic traditions of the Eighteenth century, we still find the eccentric 'bizarres', the many-coloured volumetric patterns by John Revel, the rococo compositions in 'islet' and 'meander' ways, and the chinoiserie. There are also embroideries, most of all of the Renaissance period, related to Tuscanian, Spanish and Anglican, but also Mediterranean areas.

As far as the East is concerned, the collections range from the mythical Chinese 'ke'si', to the vestments of minor and great divine emperors, from Asian tunics to Islamic overcoats (Persian, Egyptian and African); they are all manufactured articles of high quality, selected by the intellectual sensitivity as well as the refined taste of a complete artist such as Mariano Fortuny. If you want to examine the textiles now produced by the Fortuny Weaving Factory, you have to go to the Giudecca; we are going to talk about that later, towards the end of our trip through the textile tradition in Venice.

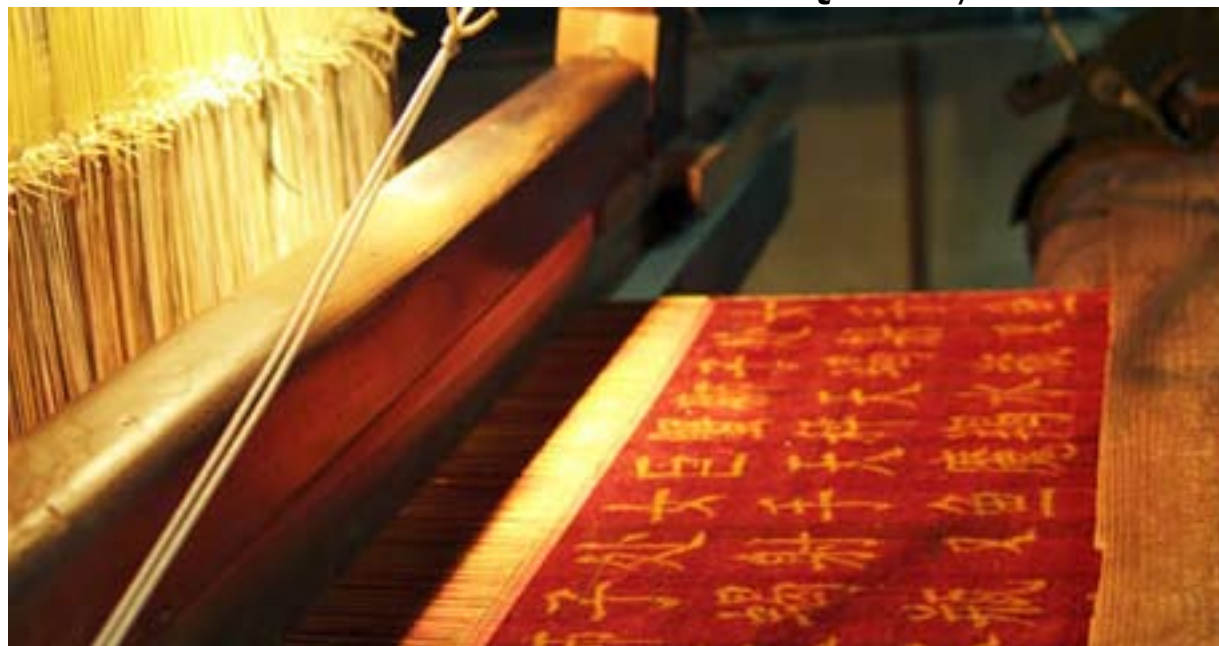


THE SCUOLE OF TEXTILES: After coming out of Corner Spinelli Palace and going back to Campo St. Angelo, it is easy to reach Campo St. Stefano and then to go towards St. Marc Square through Calle delle Botteghe. In Campo St. Maurizio, before the Church if coming from the Calle, you will run into the Scuola of Albanians which is famous for the wool trade. The traditions of textiles and fashion in Venice is nowadays represented by some 'Scuole', confraternities or associations created in order to help the have-nots and teaching them some crafts: among those dealing with textiles (they are minor scuole which have lost their original use and are often hardly noticed from outside) there are the previously mentioned one of the Albanians for the wool trade, the Scuole of Tailors, Wool Workers at St. Pantalon, of Wool Combers, of Weavers of wool cloths at Simeon Piccolo, and many others. Keeping going on to St. Marc Square, at Campo St. Maria del Giglio you have to visit the atelier of the Bevilacqua Weaving Factory. This shop conceals (and discloses!) some precious manufactured articles dating back to three or four centuries ago. From 1953 a long cooperation between Luigi Bevilacqua, the progenitor of the Company and Roberta di Camerino, has been going on. Recently, in 1999, some items of the designers Dolce and Gabbana have paraded on the catwalks all over the world: we are referring to clothing made of velvet 'soprarizzo' on a pure gold background of Venetian weaving: trousers, gilets, jackets and shoes derived from the joint of two Companies of the first importance.

WEAVING FACTORY FORTUNY AT GIUDECCA: After finishing your visit and once reached St. Marc Square, if you want to buy some fabrics you can catch the n.24 steamer to Giudecca and get off at Palanca stop: on the right along Fondamenta, in front of the petrol pump there is the entrance to the Weaving Factory Fortuny (to be sure of that please phone in advance: 041/5285078). You have to know that the weaving process is top-secret, also because still nowadays the original looms created by Mariano himself are used, but in the showroom you

will have the opportunity to choose among a wide range of very precious and unique fabric.

VISIT TO THE WEAVING FACTORY BEVILACQUA: If you want to admire the process by which



a precious fabric is created you can catch the n.1 steamer towards the station and get off at Riva di Biasio stop (about 25 minutes later). After getting off the steamer turn left and then turn

left again towards Rio Terà. Then go towards Campo St. Giovanni Decollato. Before the bridge leading to the campo, turn left towards Fondamenta Priuli: at the end of it you can find the Weaving Factory Bevilacqua at n.1320 (you can book your visit by phoning: 39.041.721566, fax 39.041.5242302, email: bevilacqua@luigi-bevilacqua.com). Inside it real textile masterpieces are created: the designs reproduce, above all, the typical thistle flowers and the pomegranate motif, which are traditionally related to the 'soprarizzo' (they were on fashion in the middle of the Sixteenth century, thanks to Eleonora da Toledo at the Medici's court) and the stylistic and decorative patterns in the very Venetian style of the Fourteenth and the Fifteenth centuries. As originally, they keep on embellishing the different and exclusive textiles derived from the weave of silk with golden and silver threads, by following the marks of a more or less complex warp.