



Guide book

THE ART GALLERY

Città di Castello



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The visit starts in the garden of Palazzo Vitelli alla Cannoniera

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Musei Umbria Altotevere

Welcome to the **Art Gallery of Città di Castello** housed in the **Palazzo Vitelli alla Cannoniera**. This easy guide will bring you through the rooms of this beautiful Renaissance Palace revealing to you all its secrets and illustrating its most important works. The Palazzo Vitelli alla Cannoniera got its name from the Vitelli family that had the palace built, and from the street 'Via della Cannoniera', the current entrance of the Art Gallery that takes its name from an old foundry of cannons. The Palace was founded by Alessandro Vitelli between 1521 and 1545 on the occasion of his marriage to Angela Rossi di San Secondo Parmense.

The visit to the museum starts in the garden from where you can admire the external grotesque decorations of the façade. These mural decorations called graffiti were made by Cristoforo Gherardi according to drawings by Vasari

Among the decorations we can notice: calves, winged putti, masks and the Vitelli's coat of arms, modified after the union with the Rossi di San Secondo family, reproduced over the windows of the ground floor. The main entrance of the Renaissance palace used to be on this side where there is a big garden formerly well-known for its botanic garden full of exotic and rare attars.

The visit proceeds inside the palace. Enter through the wooden door, pass the counter and please go up to the first floor along the monumental staircase. In the entrance there is a late Roman sarcophagus and a wooden monastic grate of the XVI century.

SARCOPHAGUS

The sarcophagus was found during the 1700's in Badia Petroia, near Città di Castello. It is a marble artifact of the first half of the third century AD, richly carved in low relief. The front is divided into symmetrical parts; the sides of the issue at the center with Castor and Love and Psyche are

interspersed with large "strigilature". The short sides instead show aniconic motifs with spears and shields stylized.

MONUMENTAL STAIRCASE



On this landing we find the bronze statue of Elia Volpi, an antiquary of Città di Castello who, after having restored this palace in 1912, gave it to the municipality in order to house the Art Gallery.

To have a better perspective of the frescoes on the vault of the stairs, we invite you to go upstairs and stop at the second floor

The female figures on the blue background are the nine muses, the protector divinities of the arts; in the oval below, Clio, the muse of history, is given prominence in comparison with the others, by one attribute: the swan she sits on, a symbol of the exploits of the Rossi family. In the center of the vault we can see the symbol of the Vitelli represented by a calf, two chess-boards and two moons as tokens of the war exploits of the Vitelli and by a lion rampant, the symbol of Angela Paola, Alessandro 's wife. In the oval above we find the representation of Apollo, protector god of the muses with an arch and a lyre in his hand.

LANDING

On this landing there are frescoes representing the **Triumph of love**. Men celebrated for their wisdom, intelligence, strength, lose their power



falling in love. The painting above the window represents the Greek philosopher Aristotle (symbol of intelligence) tempted by his courtesan Fillide. On the right above the arch, Salomon, the wise christian king, worships the pagan god Neptune to please his wife Edomite.

The last fresco represents Hercules (symbol of strength and virility) spinning wool subdued by his wife Onfale. Going upstairs through the second staircase, on the walls there are paintings representing famous couples of classical antiquity. The painted plate above the door of the forth landing, written in latin, underlines the wedding destination of the building.

VAULT OF THE ZODIAC

The frescoes of the vault represent the **Zodiac signs** and the **planetary gods**. In the triangular area above the frescoed vault there is Saturn, king of Olympus, devouring one of his children because it had been predicted that one of his sons would dethrone him. In order to avoid this fatal event, all the sons he begot with his wife Rea underwent this same fate. Only Jupiter, hidden by his mother Rea, escaped this tragic destiny, making the prophecy true and becoming king of Olympus. The dragon wrapping Saturn's legs is the symbol of the passing of time, while the sickle reminds us that Saturn, before becoming king, castrated his father. In this same fresco two zodiacal signs are represented: on the left Aquarius and on the right Capricorn. Continuing this way there is Venus sitting on a bull and handing an arrow to her son Cupid; below there is the zodiacal sign of Libra. In the next panel there is Mercury playing, oddly from the wrong side, a musical instrument called Siringa; on the right the sign of Gemini and on the left Virgo, a girl petting a unicorn, the symbol of purity.

In the last hexagon of this line there is the Moon depicted as Diana crowning a bull with a laurel branch (symbol of the Vitelli family) and next to her we can see the zodiac sign of Cancer. In the next hexagon there is Apollo playing the lyre and below we can see what remains of the sign of the Lion, Leo. In the central hexagon Mars, god of war, dominates the sign of the Ram (Aries) and of Scorpio, that is only partially visible. The last fresco represents Jupiter, seated on an eagle holding a scepter and lightning flashes in his hand, between the signs of Sagittarius and Pisces.

HALL 1

We are in the first room of the first floor where the Vitelli family lived and received their guests; in order to make these rooms more comfortable, the walls are painted with frescoes called friezes. These decorations were realized by the artist Cola Dell'Amatrice, who also painted the frescoes that you have been admiring so far. The friezes of this room as well as the majority of those in the other rooms are grotesque representations. They consist of winged sphinxes, monsters with heads of women or lions, with bodies terminating in spiral-shaped acanthus leaves. Grotesqueries are typical decorations of the Renaissance period and their name comes from the word "grotta" (cave) because in this very period some buildings covered with earth were found in Rome that were mistaken for caves and among these, the Domus Aurea of the Emperor Nero.

4) Maestro da Città di Castello - "Mary on Her Throne with the Child" (13th-14th century)



This is the oldest work in the museum. It was influenced by the style of Duccio di Boninsegna's Sienese school. It represents the Virgin Mary on her Throne with the Child in her arms and six angels. The work was originally painted for a chapel of the Dominican church of Città di Castello. The image of the Dominican kneeling monk under the throne portrays the client. The compositional pattern shows medieval influences in the use of gold in the background and in the absence of

three-dimensionality.

6) Spinello Aretino - "Mary on Her Throne with the Child" (14th century)

This painting was to be expected the central panel of a triptych or a polyptych, now lost; this work also has an outline style very close to the Middle Ages but was affected by a certain linearity of Gothic ancestry.

HALL 2

This hall with its splendid grotesque mural decorations is embellished with a wooden choir of the 15th century. Originally it was in a monastery of Città di Castello and indeed all the furniture in this palace doesn't belong to the original furnishings.

In this room there are panel-paintings with golden backgrounds, typical of the medieval period.

7) Giorgio di Andrea di Bartolo - "Mary with Child or Madonna of the milk"

The table is the central part of a triptych realized at the beginning of the 15th century and commissioned by St. Florido's canons for the chapel of the Cathedral. The work represents the Virgin Mary sitting on a cushion, not indeed on a throne and, for this reason, it is called

Madonna of Humility. The Infant Jesus holds Mary's breast with his hand, drinking the milk from it; this image underlines the humanity of Christ and the maternal spirit of Mary.

9) Antonio Alberti - "Triptych of St. Bartolomeo" (15th century)

The work was commissioned for the Church of Saint Bartolomeo of Città di Castello around 1431 and it represents Mary with Child flanked by Saint Bartolomeo and Saint Benedetto bishop.

HALL 3

In this room we find the only sacred goldsmith's work preserved in this museum.

II,58 Lorenzo Ghiberti - "The Reliquary of St. Andrea" (1420)

Previously set in the church of St. Francesco and now in the Pinacoteca, it was commissioned by the municipality **for preserving the apostle's arm**. In the central part we can see the architectural structure of a fortified town, Città di Castello, while at the base we can read the names of all the clients who collaborated in the realization of the work along with the delivery dates. Over the centuries this precious silver goldsmith's piece has undergone some alterations, it was hidden in a well during the Napoleonic invasions, in 1966 being in Florence to be restored, it was further damaged during the Arno flood though we can still appreciate its late-Gothic splendor.

HALL 4

14) Unknown painter - "The Christ blessing with the signs of the passion" (15th-century)

This little wooden table of **Flemish style** was part of the equipment of a nun of the convent of S. Chiara delle Murate in Città di Castello. Christ visibly shows the signs of the passion: the wounds on the forehead caused by the crown of thorns and the ones on his hands pierced by the nails. Both the crown and the nails are held by Christ in his hand.

The author, probably belonging to the Court of Urbino, **was influenced by Piero della Francesca's style** in the way of representing Christ and by Flemish painters that inspired him in the brocade cloth design characterized by precious pearls and stones typical of Flemish culture.

13) Neri di Bicci - "Mary with the Infant Jesus and two angels" (15th century)

The painting comes from Saint Cecily's convent. The face of the Virgin is very gentle and contains all the canons of female beauty of the period. The presence of the goldfinch hitting the Child's finger is a symbol of the Passion of Jesus.

HALL 5

22) Domenico Bigordi called "The Ghirlandaio" - "The crowning of the Virgin Mary" (At the end of 1400)



Originally the painting was placed in the church of St. Cecilia in Città di Castello. The background with concentric circles represents Heaven and the figures of the Crowned Virgin and Christ are surrounded by musical angels and cherubs. Below a group of saints, recognizable by their iconographic symbols, are attending the scene. Starting from the left one can see S. Francesco, the only francescan saint with the stigmata, then S. Giuseppe, S. Bernardino with a book in his hand, St. Elizabeth of Hungary with some roses in her bosom, St. Maddalena in a red dress, St. Caterina from Alessandria kneeling on a cog wheel, St. Chiara in Francescan clothes and with a lily in her hand, Ludovico d' Angiò in episcopal clothes, then an unrecognizable saint,

and lastly St. Antonio from Padova with a book in his hand and the fire symbol of the passion of his love for Christ.

BALCONY

The Renaissance balcony, built in 1545, includes two works from the workshop of **Andrea Della Robbia (16th century)**. The first, unfinished, depicts the "**Adoration of the shepherds**", the second is the "**Assumption of the Virgin**" that was originally in the Church of San Giovanni dei Minori Osservanti of Città di Castello.

HALL 6

This is probably Vitelli's wedding bedroom and was painted by Cristoforo Gherardi. Here the grotesqueries are different from the ones in the other rooms for the gracefulness of the represented figures. Their subjects consist of female muses playing musical instruments, winged putti and other delicate vegetable elements. This room reminds us of the artistic course of Raffaello, who actually painted four panels for Città di Castello.



Luca Signorelli - "The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian" (1497-98)

Originally the painting was above the Brozzi's altar in the church of St. Domenico in Città di Castello. It represents the martyrdom of St. Sebastian. In the foreground there are three crossbow archers and two archers; looking at the archer on the left it is possible to notice a second thought, a change of mind in the painter, brought back to the light by an overly aggressive cleaning made in the past. You can clearly see the halo of the profile of the head that was once in the place of the more evident one now visible. The medieval village in the background on the right could be Cortona, Signorelli's birth town; we can also notice the roman ruins contrasting with the rest of the landscape with a suggestive effect, a typical element of Signorelli's style.

22) Raffaello Sanzio - "Banner of the Holy Trinity" (among 1499 and 1500)



The two canvases were originally joined, forming a single work painted on both sides so as to be easily carried in processions. In the left painting we see the *Holy Trinity* with the Father, the Son in the Cross and the Holy Spirit represented by a dove. Below there are the two kneeling saints: St. Rocco and St. Sebastiano in a red cloak, traditionally invoked to protect the population from the plague.

For this reason some critics date this work in 1499 when in Città di Castello there was a terrible pestilence and many inhabitants died. As far as this supposition is concerned Raffaello would have painted it at the age of sixteen. Other critics, considering it unlikely that Raffaello could have achieved such an artistic mastery at that early age, estimate the work in 1503 when there is evidence that Raffaello already worked here in Città di Castello. The canvas on the right represents the *Creation of Eve*. We can see the figure of Adam sleeping and God taking one of his ribs to create Eve.

The pictorial skin of the painting is particularly damaged because it was brought in procession by the Holy Trinity fraternity until 1627.

HALL 7

The arms room. It was the reception hall before the broadening of the building. The frescoed decorations represent a series of arms and some war objects used during the Renaissance period. The theme of arms and the inscription engraved over the fireplace: "I live in the shadow of these ancient arms" shouldn't surprise the visitors, in fact we should remember that the fame and the wealth in land and money of the Vitelli family derived from the military profession, various members of which were in fact mercenary soldiers.

II, 64) Antonio Bencivenni - "Sacristy cupboard" (1501)

This cupboard was realized for the church of Madonna delle Grazie in Città di Castello.

81) Unknown painter- "The Mond Crucifixion" (1809)

This is the copy of the picture painted by Raffaello Sanzio in 1503 for the Gavary's chapel in the church of St. Domenico; the original picture is today in the National Gallery in London because was given to this art gallery by its last owner, the antiquary Mond.

HALL 8

It is also known as "**Sala Pompeiana**". We can see that there isn't any work exhibited. This delegation room is characterized by frescoes with grotesque decorations where fake windows that are opened on seascapes are painted.

In this room there is a copy of the *Sposalizio della Vergine* (1504), realized on the occasion of exhibition *Raffaello giovane a Città di Castello e il suo sguardo*, to remember the last work he made for the town. The original work was located in San Francesco's church in Città di Castello, before being donated, by the citizens to General Lechi in command of the Napoleonic troops. The original is preserved at the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan.

HALL 9

This room is the so-called "**studiolo**". This small room which probably served Alessandro Vitelli as a study was painted with subjects from the life of his hero: Alexander the Great.

A legend is linked to this room: it is said that Alessandro Vitelli's lover, Donna Laura used to appear at the window from which you can still see the old walls of the town. When Laura saw a beautiful boy walking along the street, she made her handkerchief fall so that the boy could go in and bring it to the lady. After having spent some hours together, the lady prayed for him to go out from a secret door that you can see here, painted as the walls.

Behind the door there wasn't any exit but a deadly trap.

HALL 10

Observing the back wall of this room you can see the graffiti decorations embellishing the external façade of the building. This is evidence of the

fact that in 1543 the Vitelli family extended their mansion so that part of the external decorations was incorporated inside the new rooms.

HALL 11

This is "**the reception hall**" of the palace. The walls are frescoed with



subjects on a grotesquery background where landscapes are represented and they were executed by Cristoforo Gherardi in 1537. The upper perimeter of the whole room is characterized by battle scenes of four important historical characters: starting from the fireplace

wall, you can admire scenes of Hannibal's life, then, on the wall above the four windows, some war events of Scipio the African, then Caesar and some scenes of his conquests and lastly Alexander the Great. These frescoes were painted by Cola Dell'Amatrice in 1543. In the center of the room there are two large tables from the 17th century. They were formerly in St. Francesco's monastery in Città di Castello.

Now the visit continues downstairs and then on your left

HALLS 19-20

This room and the next one offer the visitor several paintings made between the 17th and the 19th century. The most important one is certainly the large canvas by (75) **Francesco Mancini**. It represents Christ carrying the Cross on his shoulder and Peter kneeling in front of Him. The work originally was in the church of St. Filippo Neri in Città di Castello and it was executed at the beginning of the 18th century.

It represents the episode of "Domine quo Vadis". It is a sentence pronounced by Peter when, escaping from Rome to save himself from the persecutions against the christians, he meets Christ. Jesus appears to Peter in all His solemnity and He declares that He will constitute His church. St. Peter, listening to Christ's Words, will return and lay the foundations for the building of St. Peter's Cathedral. The landscape in the background in the classical style enhances the figures of the two characters of the scene.

HALL 18

In this last room we find works of the Mannerist period, in particular those of Niccolò Circignani called Pomarancio.

Niccolò Circignani called " Pomarancio" - "The Martyrdom of St. Stephen" (1570)

Signed and dated 1570 was realized for the church of S.Francesco in Città di Castello. In the center St. Stephen, the first Martyr Saint of christian religion, is going to be hit by stones that will kill him. High up God the Father, with two angels at His side, is appearing at the dramatic scene opening a window of peace and light.

HALL 12

In this room originally there were palace kitchens.

Two works by Luca Signorelli are on display here.

The first is the great Painting of Santa Cecilia, painted in 1516 recently attributed to Signorelli thanks to a long and careful restoration completed in December 2024. In the centre is represented the Virgin and Child and Saints.

On the opposite wall is placed San Paolo's face exhibited as a remaining fresco representing Majesty with saints, frescoed by Luca Signorelli in the external façade of Città di Castello civil tower (1474).

HALL 13

All the paintings exhibited in this room were influenced by Luca Signorelli. You can admire two standards painted both on the front and back sides and other pictures on wooden panels. These works too were formerly in churches and monasteries of Città di Castello.

Luca Signorelli's workshop - "Banner" (among 1496 and 1502)

The work comes from the church of San Giovanni Decollato of Città di Castello and was commissioned by the brotherhood that took care to give proper burial to be headed for the death penalty.

On the front it is embossed with the **Baptism of Jesus Christ**, taking place at the hands of St. John The Baptist and facing the same saint

surrounded by scenes from his life: the capture, the hermitage and the beheading.

The 14th room is closed for restoration

HALL 16

In this room we find four large paintings by a painter from Raffaello Sanzio's school, called **Raffaellino del Colle**. The actual name of the artist was Giustino called Raffaellino for his painting ability and the stylistic similarity to the master. The work in front of the windows' wall is the Annunciation. Made at the end of the 15th century, it was formerly in the church of St. Maria delle Grazie. On the top there is the figure of the blessing Father surrounded by angels, one of whom is holding an open book with the first and the last letter of the Greek alphabet written on it: the alpha and the omega symbolizing the beginning and the end, and therefore the power of God to create and destroy the whole creation. The archangel Gabriel holds a white lily in his hand, indicating Mary's purity and chastity; in the center the dove represents the Holy Spirit that will make it possible for Mary to become the Mother of God.

Raffaellino del Colle - "Deposition from the Cross of the Dead Christ" (16th century)

Formerly this painting was in the church of Madonna delle Grazie. The realistic moment represents the deposition of Christ from the cross, below in the center there is the Virgin fainting, helped by two women while the Maddalena holds out the sheet to wrap Christ's body.

The mannerist style and the drama are respectively brought out in the anatomic description and in the expressions on the characters' faces. The work is completed by lateral little tables forming two plaster strips whereon six angels with the tools of the passion of Christ and two heads of cherubs are represented.

HALL 17

In this room Mannerist paintings are exhibited. The Mannerist artistic movement starts by the imitation and exaltation of the Renaissance great painters, that is by grasping their 'manner' in painting; this is where the name Mannerism comes from.

In these works we can see the careful anatomic description and the strong expressiveness of the figures' faces.

The visit continues back to visit the Stufetta and the Modern Collection

“Stufetta”

The “stufetta” (bath), is one of the few rooms which were mentioned by Giorgio Vasari on the matter of the artistic works carried out by Cristoforo Gherardi (known as Doceno) in the Palazzo Vitelli alla Cannoniera.

The “stufetta” are rooms which can be found inside the noble mansion (some examples of such particular baths in Italy can be found in the Palazzi Vaticani are in Castel Sant’Angelo), places where to enjoy some resting time, and are equivalent to today’s spa and thermae. These special rooms, which were considered a place of delight and peace, demonstrate the link between the Renaissance culture and the recovery of the classical erudition and traditions. The frescoes decorate the walls and the barrel vault. Cristoforo Gherardi for the creation of this work was inspired by Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, one of the most widespread books in the Renaissance time and inexhaustible source of iconography. In this literary work the loves of the olympian gods are narrated, which originated the transformation of nature. The decorations are connected to the Myth of Water. The sea god Neptune is depicted in the middle of the vault, while on the walls stands out we can admire the representation of “Leda and the swan”, “Diana and Actaeon”, and another image which is yet to be identified and could coincide with Diana and her nymphs bathing. The most important scenes are surrounded by grotesque decorations. Over the front door Alessandro Vitelli and Angela Paola Rossi’s coat of arms framed by a garland is represented.

The next room, the fifteenth hall, has decoration extending on the walls and vaulting, articulated around a central space within which a canvas must have found its place. The decoration features heraldic figures such

as putti, female figures, the crowned double-headed eagle topped by the papal tiara, and two hands clasping. The latter depiction celebrates the new alliance made by Alessandro Vitelli with the Farnese family for whom he entered service in 1538.

Three stone lions, dating back to the 14th century and from the city's Palazzo del Comune, are displayed here.

Out of the Sufetta go down the steps to the left, to continue the view

MODERN COLLECTION

HALL 1

BRUNO BARTOCCINI COLLECTION

The collection of bronzes by Bruno Bartoccini was donated to the town of Città di Castello directly from the artist in a gesture intended to underline his affection for the town in which he had taught before moving to Florence. The important group of bronzes dated from 1962 to 1983, consists of 35 works, some of which have been exhibited in this hall.

HALL 2

PLASTER CAST GALLERY

This collection of plaster casts was made by the sculptor Elmo Palazzi (1871-1915) and comes almost entirely from Scuola Operaia Bufalini. In 1969, the council settled the acquisition of the entire collection.

"Bust of Giuseppe Garibaldi": it is one of the few dental stones not inventoried from plaster casts of Scuola Bufalini and so it is assumed that it comes directly from the study of the writer.

"The Monument to Luigi Cerboni": it portrays the musician and poet who disappeared in 1912; the original one is in the monumental cemetery of Città di Castello.

"Allegory of Umbria ": a thoughtful and imposing figure who holds in his left hand a paten and a sword in his right hand. The sculpture represents Umbria and the original one is in the "*Altare della Patria*" in Rome.

HALL 3

NUVOLO'S COLLECTION

The donation is the result of numerous works by the artist Giorgio Ascani (1926-2008), called **Nuvolo**, donated to the town of Città di Castello by his family in 2012. He began his career after the war as an aid in the study of Alberto Burri in Via Margutta (Rome), but also Colla, Mannucci and Cagli. Soon, he finds his way into artistic experimentation screen and with "*Serotipia*" grafting occurs between the screen printing technique and the pictorial, beginning to exhibit alongside artists such as Burri, Turcato, Accardi, Capogrossi, Mirko, Fontana and Manzoni.

In the 70s, his artistic activity was accompanied by the commitment to teaching in the institutes of art and, in 1977-1978, he won the chair of painting "Academy of Fine Arts" in Perugia and from 1979 to 1984 it will also be the director.

HALL 4

EVENT ROOM

Room dedicated to temporary art exhibitions

HALLS 5-6

ETTORE RUGGIERI COLLECTION

This collection belonged to surgeon Ettore Ruggieri, whose mother was born in Città di Castello. In 1986, after his death, his wife donated the works to the town of Città di Castello.

Leading the "*Ettore e Andromaca*" and "*Piazza Italia*" by **Giorgio de Chirico**: he revisited the subjects of metaphysics made after his participation in the war.

Carlo Carrà: "*Marina*" (1953) - rough view of Versilia deserted beaches, iridescent sea, boats and isolated huts, "ordinary things" transfigured and abstracted from the context.

Mario Mafai: "*Paesaggio romano*" (1938-1940) - view of the Church of Saints John and Paul portrayed from the slopes of the Palatine Hill.

"*Gruppo in osteria*" (1950) - built using his typical "palette" made of shrill green and purple and contrasting colors.

Filippo De Pisis: "*Una strada di Parigi*" (1929) - Impressionism accelerated by the sudden spaces, buildings and people. Despite these objects shorthand the artist makes the image effective and dramatic.

Gerardo Dottori: "Il Lago Trasimeno" (1955) - Gerardo Dottori is the signatory of the "*Manifesto dell'Aeropittura*" and will remain tied to entities and arrangements late futurists until the end of his life.

***The visit to the collection of the Art Gallery ends here;
go up the stairs and go left to exit into the garden and then proceed to
the ticket office where you will find the exit of the museum***