

PRESS RELEASE  
October 27, 2008

## Casa Vasari in Florence - An Online Exhibition by the Photo Library of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz

On October 27, 2008, the online exhibition by the photo library of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz opens at <http://expo.khi.fi.it>. It is devoted to the Florentine residence of Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), the "Father of modern writing on the history of art".

Giorgio Vasari became famous above all for his "Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Artists", published in 1550 and again in an extended edition in 1568, which has become a standard work. This work was the first attempt at a systematic portrayal of the history of art. As court artist to Duke Cosimo I. de' Medici, Vasari was one of the most influential Florentine artists of his time and was entrusted with significant works that allowed the ruling family to show off their wealth, such as the reconstruction of the Palazzo Vecchio and the construction of the Uffizi.

From 1557 until his death in 1574, Giorgio Vasari lived in a palazzo still known today as the "Casa Vasari", close to the S. Croce church in Florence. From the original residence, which was hardly-known among the public to date, only the frescoes in the *sala grande* (around 1572) on the first floor have survived; Vasari and his studio created them around 1572.

The Horne Foundation has been working for years on the conservation of the "Casa Vasari". Since 2002, the restorer Guido Botticelli has been working on the restoration of the frescoes, some of which are in a poor condition. In this context, the photo library of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz conducted a digital photo campaign in January and June 2008, which documented the current state of the frescoes. A further photo campaign is planned after completion of the restoration work.

With a total of 57 photographs, the online exhibition makes the "Casa Vasari", which is not easily accessible even today, accessible to a wider audience; after the "Casa Zuccari", this is the second Florentine artist's residence that the photo library of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz has devoted a photo campaign to.

The online exhibition takes visitors on a virtual tour of the *sala grande* in the "Casa Vasari": After a brief outline of the life of the artist and the history of the palazzo, the exhibition focuses in turn on each of the thematic aspects of the *sala grande*, the entirety of which can be considered as a visual representation of Vasari's theoretical ideas on art: On the north-west wall, the "Origins of Art" is portrayed, with Gyges sketching his shadow. In this scene, Vasari illustrates his interpretation of the origins of art and at the same time brings up the subject of his ambitious concept of the "disegno" (drawing, draft), according to which, drawing is not only the starting point for painting, but the common basis of all arts. Vasari uses the "Zeuxis and the Beautiful Maidens" on the opposite wall to pick up the discourse held since ancient times about the relationship between art and nature: For a painting of a woman, the painter Zeuxis of Heraclea chose the most beautiful maidens, so that he could merge the most beautiful feature of each one into a single ideal portrait. Finally, the portrayal of "Apelles and the Cobbler" on the south-west wall plays on the power of judgment ("giudizio"), which had a significant place in Vasari's theory of art. The words "Ne sutor ultra crepidam - Cobbler, do not

judge higher than the sandals", which Apelles spoke to punish the cobbler for criticising him, remain a proverb until today.

The upper frieze is decorated with a series of thirteen portraits of artists, for which the wood carvings from Vasari's "Lives" were used as templates. This is an impressive way to illustrate the newly earned self-assurance of the artists in the 16th century.

The photo campaign of the "Casa Vasari" arose in close cooperation with the research project by the Nova Directorate, which brought out the German annotated edition of the "Lives" published by Klaus Wagenbach Verlag, Berlin, in 2004.

The photos from the campaign can also be viewed in the digital photo library at [www.khi.fotothek.org](http://www.khi.fotothek.org).

**Casa Vasari in Florence - An Online Exhibition by the Photo Library of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz- Max-Planck-Institut**

Head of the photo library: Costanza Caraffa

Photo campaign: Marco Rabatti

Coordination: Almut Goldhahn

Online from October 27, 2008 onwards at <http://expo.khi.fi.it>

The next online exhibition by the photo library opens on February 23, 2009 and is devoted to the historical inventory of the photo library.

**More Information:**

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## Graphical material

Giorgio Vasari and workshop:  
Zeuxis in his studio (Detail from:  
Zeuxis and the Beautiful  
Maidens), fresco, around 1572,  
Florence, Casa Vasari, Sala  
Grande, south-east wall (state  
after partial cleaning of the paint  
surface)

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(Foto: Marco Rabatti)



Giorgio Vasari and workshop:  
Apelles and the Cobbler, fresco,  
around 1572, Florence, Casa  
Vasari, Sala Grande, south-west  
wall (state after partial cleaning  
of the paint surface)

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(Foto: Marco Rabatti)



Florence, Sala Grande of the Casa Vasari: North-west wall containing the Origins of Art, fresco by Giorgio Vasari and workshop, around 1572 (state after cleaning of the paint surface and fixation of the coating)

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Giorgio Vasari and workshop: Gyges of Lydia (Detail from the "Origins of Art"), fresco, around 1572, Florence, Casa Vasari, Sala Grande, north-west wall (state after cleaning of the paint surface and fixation of the coating)

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