

THE TREASURES OF VILLA ARCONATI-FAR

#3 – la Sala della Caccia

While waiting to open the doors of our little Versailles to welcome visitors who love it so much, we take this opportunity to let you know better the "treasures" that Villa Arconati-FAR guards and that few still know.

This beautiful room is one of the still little-known treasures of Villa Arconati-FAR, since it was opened for the first time to the public only in 2019 on the occasion of the exhibition on Leonardo's Atlantic Codex. The only room truly dedicated to men among the seventy of the building, since it was probably a day and evening lounge used as a smoking room. The hall has another peculiarity: it is the only one with two fireplaces. The fireplaces are certainly not one of the elements most present in the Villa, after all we find ourselves in a "delightful" residence used mainly in summer. But also in the first part of autumn, for the hunting season, in fact!

Hunting was one of the aristocracy's favorite pastimes, which however did not have to make "too much effort" in having fun. For this reason, but not only, the Seraglio dei Cervi was present in the Arconati estate, where the animals were raised. This not only for hunting trips, of course, but also and above all for the food needs of the Lords. In a letter dated 13 June 1765, an emissary from Casa Arconati complained to the Fattore di Castellazzo, since the estate's hinds do not want to breastfeed their puppies and this fact is very serious, since the risk is that in a short time the menagerie «will be empty»; therefore the Guardian of the Seraglio is ordered to take particular care of the newborn puppies, giving them all the cow's milk necessary for their sustenance.



The room was probably built at the beginning of the eighteenth century by the will of Count Giuseppe Maria Arconati, defined *antiquitatis illustrator* for his great passion for classical art. The elegant decoration is made with very fine stuccos and gilding, which depict griffins, small putti playing with birds and hunting scenes linked to the goddess Diana.

The decoration is completed by the beautiful paintings by Angelo Maria Crivelli, called the *Crivellone*, which to date are the only evidence of the vast collection of paintings on canvas by the Arconati family.

The twelve paintings were made specifically for the room and integrate perfectly with the rest of the decoration: the dark colors of the paintings contrast with the light of the stucco, and this contrast focuses the Guest's attention even more on the details of the scenes of hunting.

Of the twelve paintings, the main four depict four hunting scenes: bull hunting, bear hunting, wild boar hunting and lion hunting. The latter canvas has a particularity: on the collar of the dog

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protagonist of the scene there is the writing "Arconati", as a tribute by the artist to the family who commissioned the painting. The canvases are signed and dated 1705.

Eight other more modest sized paintings complete the decoration of the room: four ovals representing fish and four rectangular representing poultry.

After the auction sales of the Arconati collection, carried out on behalf of the previous owner, in the 90s of the twentieth century, only the four great hunting scenes remained in the room, which suffered an attempted theft in the early 2000s. Fortunately they were promptly found on the border with Switzerland and returned to their place.

The traces of the other eight minor paintings were lost: Fondazione Augusto Rancilio bought them in December 2018, so that the room returned to its complete and elegant eighteenth-century layout, in all its refined elegance.



In the center of the room, for the whole last century, there was a display case containing a stuffed ostrich. It seems that ostriches were among the most admired "exotic" animals present in the garden of the Villa in the eighteenth century, so much so that they were also cited (and drawn) by Marc'Antonio Dal Re in his engravings for the volume "Delightful villas or they are palaces of the State of Milan".

The actual presence of these birds seems to be evidenced by the ostrich eggs still present to decorate the tops of the libraries of the Arconati Library, on the ground floor of the Villa.

Finally, there are those who say that in addition to the ostrich in the room there were numerous stuffed birds and even a crocodile.

But this is lost in the mists of the legends of a time that was ... that every place with a secular history like our Villa must have.