



THE TYPICAL ATMOSPHERE OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
VILLAS OF “DELIGHTS”

**VARESE: VILLA PANZA AND ITS COLLECTION
OF CONTEMPORARY ART**

**The complex, restored by FAI and opened to the public in September 2000,
currently hosts exhibitions of international level**

VILLA PANZA

Immersed in a splendid park of 33,000 square meters, Villa Menafoglio Litta Panza overlooks the city of Varese from the hill of Biumo Superiore. Built in the first half of 1700, the mansion was widened in the second half of the eighteenth century by Marquis Paolo Antonio Menafoglio, clever man and expert banker who had many financial interests in Milano and Modena. Its "U" layout, characteristic of the baroque mansions with the courtyard facing the public spaces, was reversed: the new Court of Honour was in fact directed towards the park instead of towards the front entrance, preferring the atmosphere of intimacy and isolation, typical of the so-called "villas of delights". Marquis Menafoglio also embellished the gardens with three spectacular parterres, elegant geometric flower beds and fountains. After several changes of ownership, following the death of the Marquis (1769), in 1823 the villa was bought by Duke Pompeo Litta Visconti Arese, a descendant of one of the wealthiest and most distinguished family of Milan, who commissioned new modifications to Architect Luigi Canonica, one of Piermarini's pupils and state architect in the Napoleonic era. The illustrious master realized a new Representative Hall and the

farm wing for stables and coach-houses. The park was redesigned, according to the English landscape principles, with some large green areas and romantic places - such as the small lake and the hill with the grotto for the ice-box, dominated by a small classical temple.

After a period of disrepair, in 1935 the complex was bought by Ernesto Panza from Biumo, who began a major renovation, entrusting the project to architect Piero Portaluppi. Among the interventions there was the realization of the small courtyard towards Piazza Litta and a new parterre.

When Ernesto Panza died, the Villa of Biumo was inherited by his four children: Julia, Alexander, Joseph and Maria Luisa. Among them Joseph was the one who lived there and loved it more than others, enriching the Villa with his famous collection of contemporary art, today partially distributed among the major international museums. Giuseppe Panza has always showed a deep interest in history of art. In the early fifties, after graduation, he moved to the United States and came into contact with the first movements of Abstract Expressionism, remaining strongly affected. Back to Italy, he studied in depth the new European and American trends, and began to buy the first canvases, soon directing his research towards artistic personalities still unknown to the public. The spacious apartment on the first floor was enriched with numerous works of American art (Robert Morris, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg and James Rosenquist are just a few of the various artists), creating controversial reactions in many guests of the house. Soon the Panza collection became known throughout the world and the destination for scholars and enthusiasts, who paid homage to the forethought and extraordinary artistic sensibility of the owner.

After having occupied the whole available space on the first floor of the villa, from the late sixties Giuseppe Panza adapted the stables and the farm wing to host pieces of environmental art by the Californian artists James Turrell, Maria Nordman and Robert Irwin. Some of these works - mainly works with space and light aimed at creating new perceptual situations - have been designed and specifically realized by the artists themselves for certain settings of Biumo, between 1973 and 1976. Widely represented in this wing of Villa Panza also Dan Flavin from New York, whose largest concentration of artistic production is permanently exhibited here. Starting from the 80s, the collection has been enriched with creations by Phil Sims, David Simpson, Ruth Ann Fredenthal, Stuart Arends, Max Cole and also other artists, lesser known than the above mentioned ones but identified by Giuseppe Panza as possible custodians of art for future generations. You can see their artworks wonderfully combined with rich furnishings of the classic tradition and important pieces of African and pre-Columbian art, in the beautiful rooms of the owner's apartment.

In 1996 Giuseppe Panza decided to donate his entire property to FAI, with the aim of ensuring historical continuity not only to his mansion but also to the vast artistic collection it hosts, a European heritage of that American contemporary art still recognized as one of the highest cultural evidence of the second half of the twentieth century. The complex, opened in September 2000 after restoration works, currently also hosts exhibitions of international level.