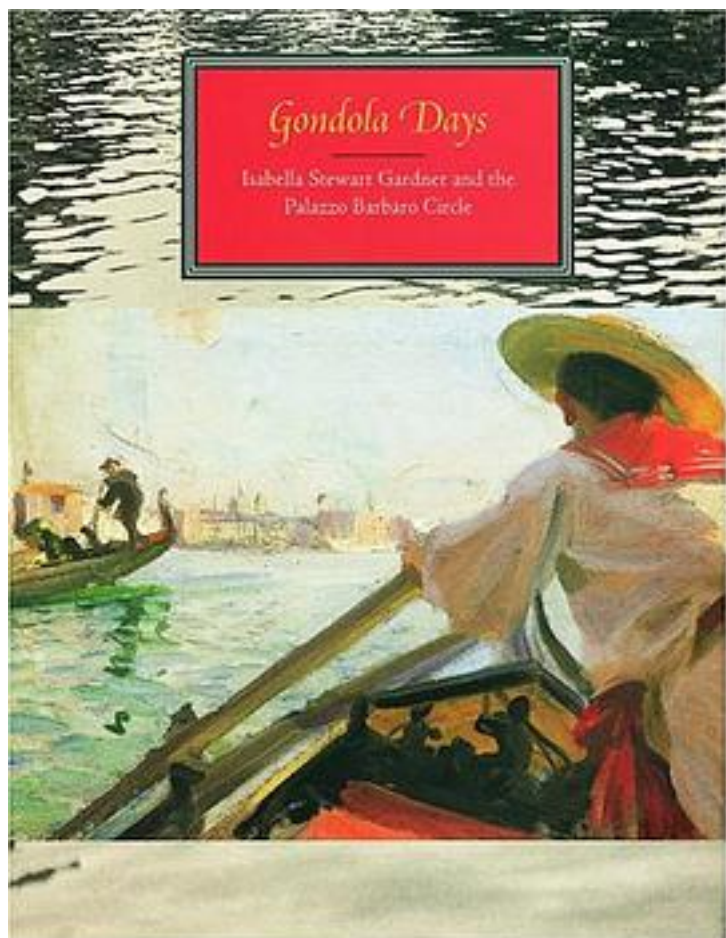


Gondola Days



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著者:Mamoli Zorzi, Rosella/ McCauley, Elizabeth Anne (EDT)

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At the end of the nineteenth century, a remarkable group of artists, writers and patrons gathered regularly at the Palazzo Barbaro in Venice. While Venice had long attracted wealthy tourists from across Europe and America, a particularly rich expatriate culture

flourished at this time. In the 1880s, Daniel and Ariana Curtis of Boston purchased and restored the Palazzo Barbaro, where they lived in self-imposed exile. The Palazzo became the centre of a fascinating circle of American and English personalities living in Venice: the poet Robert Browning; Katharine de Kay Bronson of Newport, a writer greatly interested in local Venetian craft; Sir Austen Henry Layard, an archaeologist and an important collector of Renaissance paintings. The painter, John Singer Sargent, became especially close to Ralph Curtis, himself a talented artist. Isabella and John Gardner, also of Boston, rented the Palazzo Barbaro every other year, beginning in 1884. Henry James, a friend of Sargent and of Mrs. Gardner, frequently joined the group as did a myriad of other fascinating figures such as the painters Anders Zorn, Joseph Lindon Smith, and Claude Monet, the connoisseur Bernhard Berenson, writers Paul Bourget, Vernon Lee (Violet Paget), and a galaxy of socialites. As the Gardner Museum commemorates its centennial, this book accompanies an exhibition which explores the source of inspiration for Fenway Court, which in many ways is an attempt to duplicate the Palazzo Barbaro in Boston: a Venetian Gothic structure, full of paintings and objects, but also enlivened by working artists, poets, musicians and thinkers. These Venetian sojourns were amazingly productive; Sargent, Zorn, and Curtis produced a wide range of paintings and watercolours. While staying with Mrs. Gardner at the Barbaro, Henry James wrote the Aspen Papers and began *The Wings of a Dove*, set in a fictionalised version of the Barbaro. This book explores the distinctive interaction of this small group of individuals and their special connections with Venice. The exhibition will show paintings, watercolours, drawings and sketchbooks, as well as photographs (many taken by the visitors to the Palazzo), literary manuscripts, letters, albums and other documents. This fully illustrated, scholarly catalogue explores the themes of the exhibition.

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