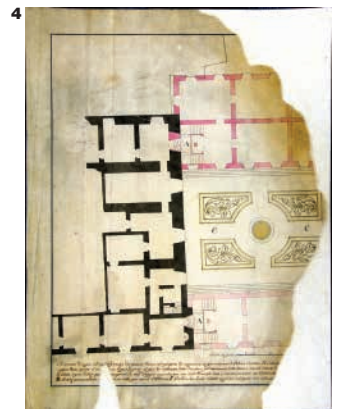
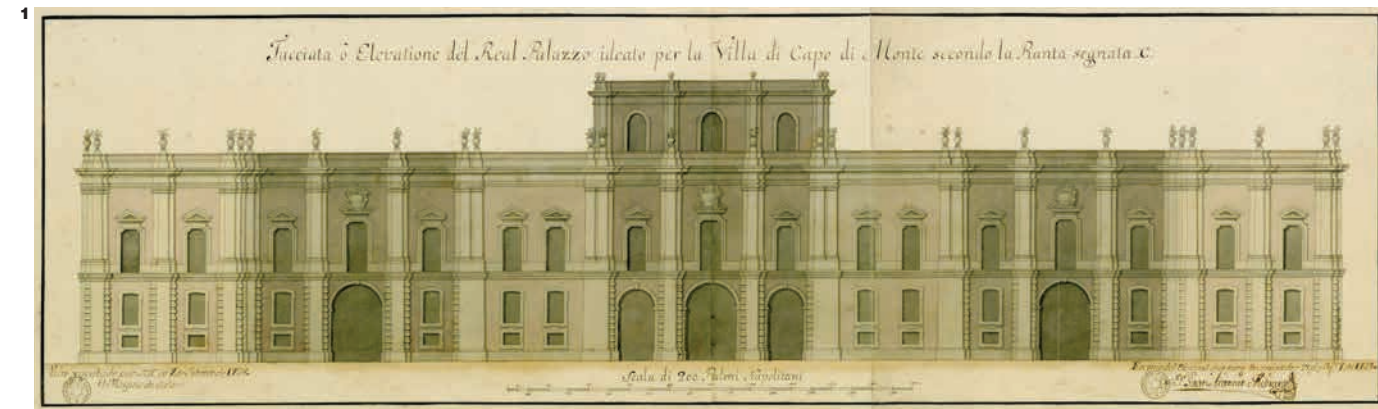
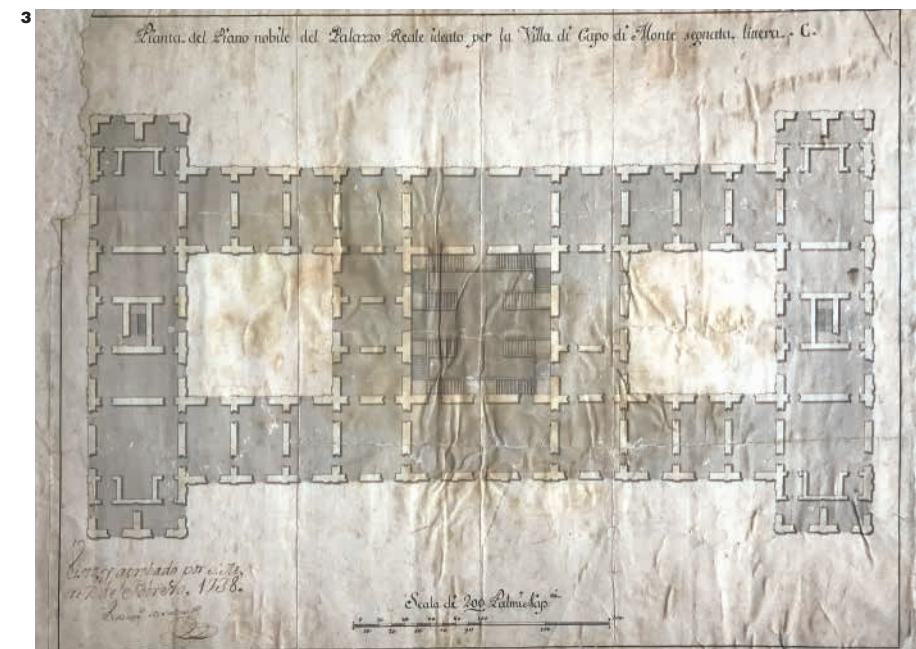
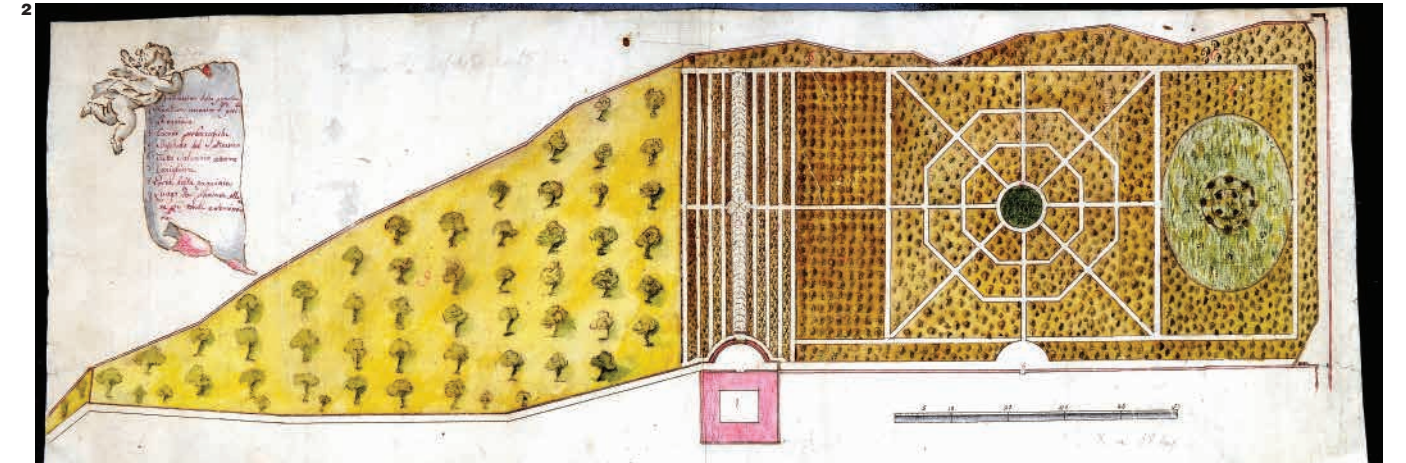


Capodimonte, 1737-2017

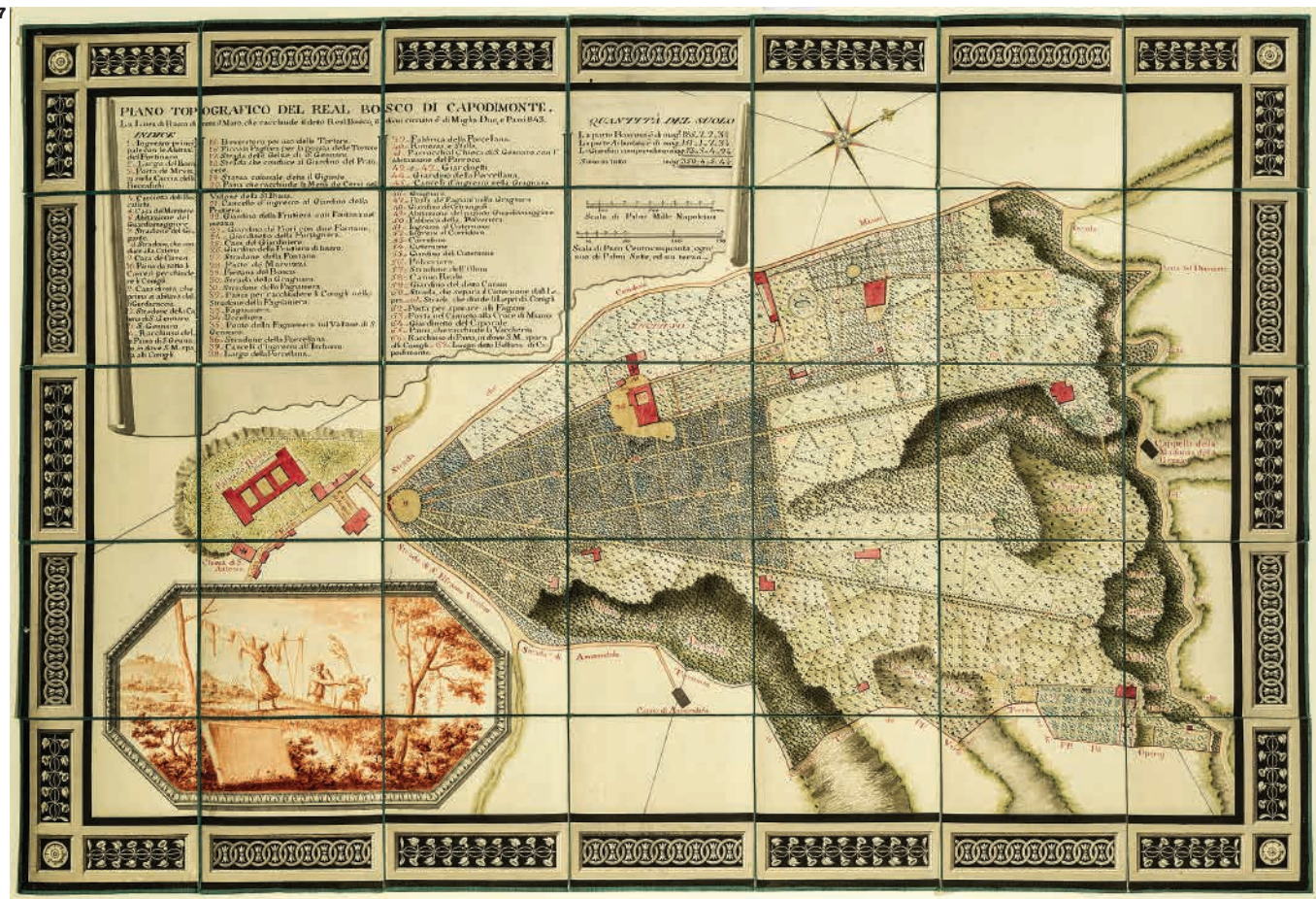
From king's house to "museum in the museum"



Capodimonte Royal Site was the first Royal Palace desired by Charles of Bourbon (1716-1788); the young king was crowned on the throne of the Kingdom of Naples in 1734. As soon as he arrived in Naples, he searched for a hunting site – his favourite passion – in the large town that was urbanized during the 18th century; he chose *Capo di Monte* (Top of the Mountain), afterwards Capodimonte, to create woods for hunting. That was a suburban, rural region on the hill with a panoramic view on the city and the gulf. After buying various country houses to form the large royal estate (1735), the king decided to build his first royal palace (1737). Giovanni Antonio Medrano, the king's engineer, transformed the forest and built the palace. The architect-engineer, born in Sicily (1703-1760), was a royal engineer in Spain at the court of Philip V and Elisabeth Farnese¹, Charles's parents. Medrano had a great opportunity in Naples, where he designed the San Carlo Royal Theatre and worked at all the royal construction sites. In the construction of Capodimonte Royal Palace, Medrano was supported by Giacomo Antonio Canevari (1681-1764). The old Roman architect had a curriculum as a court architect, he had worked between Spain and Portugal and then returned to Italy². In 1738 the palace construction began but was ended almost one hundred years later; the finished palace respects the original project yet with simplifications and



variations, that were imposed by the royal architects who came in succession during the long construction. As soon as the project was approved, Canevari was expelled from the construction site due to the jealousy of Medrano, who continued to be the only director of the palace building until 1741, when he was also sent away of Capodimonte because of legal problems. The Medrano-Canevari project featured a large rectangular building with two symmetrical courtyards at the sides and a large central hall, as big as the courtyards, to host a grand royal stairway, perhaps impossible to build. The façade drawing, signed only by Medrano (1737), was only recently found; it proposed two levels for the long building with only one attic in the centre. The design was more articulated and more Baroque than the façades



that were finally built³. In 1742 Ferdinando Sanfelice (1675-1748)⁴, a senior and famous Neapolitan architect, was appointed director of Capodimonte. During this period, the building of the palace went on slowly, instead the project of the park continued with new impulses. Indeed, Sanfelice was the inventor of the central core of the park, organized around large fan-shaped avenues; he created an original contamination between art and nature. Sanfelice designed the Royal Porcelain Manufactory (transforming a pre-existing building), commissioned by Charles and Queen Maria Amalia, inspired by the famous factories of Meissen and Sèvres.

Some drawings of the garden date back to the 18th century; these, probably never made, hold a great value within the study of royal gardens. Sanfelice designed a garden with groves near the Royal Manifatture and a project of a garden with exhibition pavilions still existing by an anonymous author. After the death of Sanfelice, followed Giuseppe Astarita (1707-1775) and Ferdinando Fuga (1699-1782); the former was a Neapolitan architect little-known outside the kingdom, while Ferdinando Fuga was a famous Tuscan architect, who had worked in Rome and who directed the construction of the site from 1760 until 1780. Fuga worked mainly for the park, started by Sanfelice; he was responsible for the construction of the elliptical plaza with the *Teatro di Verzura* (Green Theatre), recesses and statues at the beginning of the large avenues. A beautiful drawing by an anonymous author, kept at Capodimonte Museum, illustrates the Royal Site at the end of the 18th century. The Palace was separated from the park by other private estates and by the public road. The plan shows the origin of the

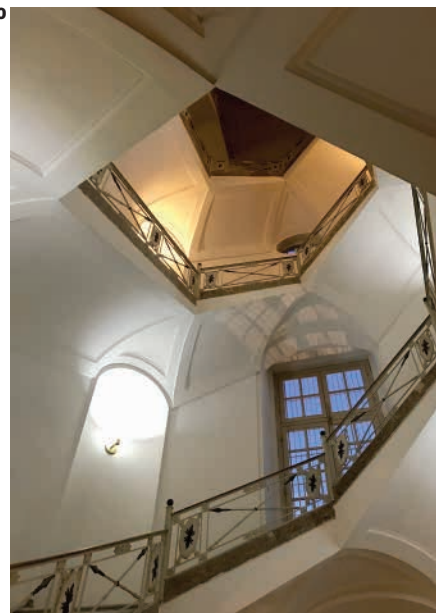
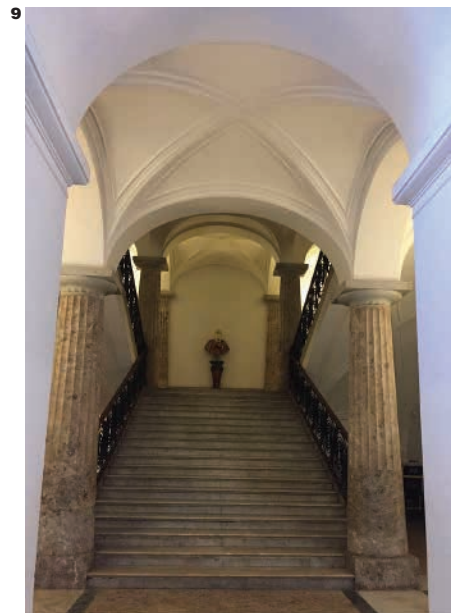
5 The elliptical plaza and the fan-shaped avenues
6 The eastern main façade
7 Plan of the Capodimonte Royal Woods, around 1790, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte

Royal Site, born as a hunting reserve and then transformed into a park that included the Royal Palace. During the reign of Charles and his son Ferdinand IV (1759-1805), the palace wasn't completed and almost no one of the Bourbon Family had lived there. When Napoleon's kings conquered the kingdom (1805-1815), Joseph Bonaparte and Joachim Murat instead decided to live in Capodimonte. The palace was not finished: only three

levels of the first southern court were built and the central was incomplete. The great royal staircase had never been started, but the place was nice, with a large park and far from the Neapolitan people, who never really accepted the French kings. The French impulse, however, was fundamental: the French kings acquired neighbouring properties and built a single joint border wall for the palace and the park. Moreover, works for a new road

network began: the new roads made Capodimonte more accessible and therefore more integrated with the city. After the French defeat, Ferdinand returned to the Neapolitan throne and the works at the palace went on little by little. Antonio Niccolini (1772-1850) was appointed new director; the Tuscan artist had arrived in Naples as a scenographer of the San Carlo and became a Royal Architect thanks to his abilities⁵. His first designs for

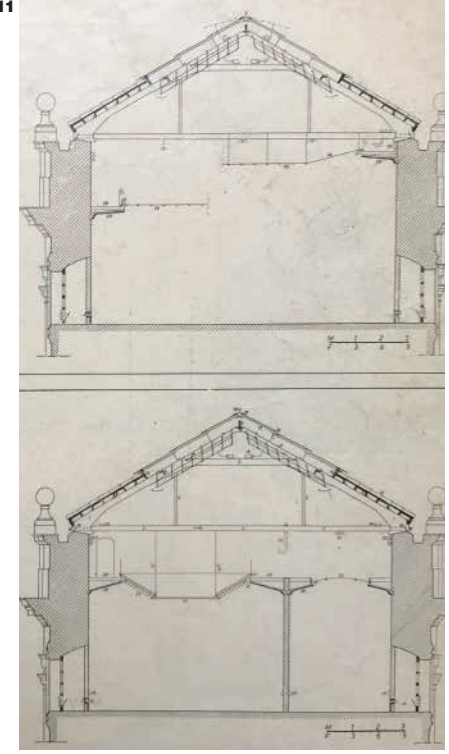
8 The party hall after De Felice's restoration (B.E. De Felice 1966, p. 34)
9 The royal stairway of the northern side
10 The hexagonal staircase of the southern side
11 De Felice's design of the new roof (B.E. De Felice 1966, p. 43)



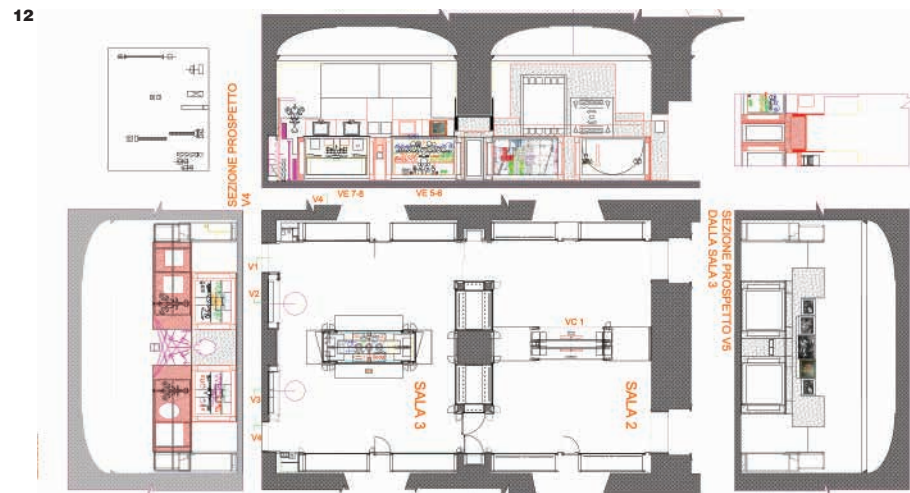
Capodimonte were focused on the renovation of King Francis I's royal apartment. At the death of Francis, Ferdinand II became King. During his long reign the Royal Site – both the palace and the park – was finished and developed as we see it today. The palace was completed after several difficulties during the direction of Tommaso Giordano, an architect unknown out of Naples⁶. Niccolini's designs like the Nineteenth-century projects were put aside. The royal stairway – designed by Giordano – a sumptuous but banal neoclassical stair, was built in the northern side of building. The staircase of the southern part, instead, is quite remarkable and links all the floors; it is formed by two parallel wings that have a hexagonal design. The structure is very interesting, it combines material, structural, and cultural knowledge of Neapolitan architecture of the 18th century, which typically includes open stairs, while the decorations

are neoclassical. During the Bourbon Restoration, the park was turned into a romantic garden; Niccolini began this transformation but it was completed by Friedrich Dehnhardt (1787-1870), Gardening Director of the Royal Botanical Garden⁷. Capodimonte Royal Site was completed in approximately one hundred years but the Royal Palace was immediately relegated to the back burner by other more famous Bourbon palaces in Portici – near Ercolano and Pompei – and Caserta. The great era of the Museum of Capodimonte began in 1948, when the *Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione* (Ministry of Education) decided to convert the palace into a National Gallery⁸. The palace had originally had a museum's "vocation" and had indeed hosted the Farnese collection, which was Elisabetta Farnese's precious legacy. The palace had continued to be enriched by French works, during Joseph and Joachim reign⁹, and by Neapolitan modern pictures, during

the Bourbon Restoration. After the Italian Unification the Bourbon Palace passed to the Savoy's House and Capodimonte hosted the gallery of contemporary Neapolitan artists. New purchases, donations and celebrating paintings increased the collection. Saverio Altamura directed the cultural project; since 1864 Annibale Sacco was responsible for the organization and acquisitions, supported by Domenico Morelli and Federico Maldarelli. Twenty years later the collection increased further, counting 605 paintings and 95 sculptures¹⁰. The royal private apartments were located in the southern side: the public and party hall were on the noble floor while the private apartments on the mezzanine floor. The rooms around the northern court hosted the gallery together with the



Armeria and the Queen Maria Amalia's Porcelain Cabinet. The Capodimonte Porcelain Manufactory had produced the Cabinet for the Portici Royal Palace, which was transported to Capodimonte in 1866. In this way the royal residence and the private museum-gallery had been organized; in fact the plan was meant to host the public access at least once a week¹¹. Since 1906, the residence belonged to Aosta Dukes, an Italian minor branch Royal Family, then it became National Estate property (1920); but the State obtained the Royal Site only in 1948. A year later the Ministry also approved Ezio Bruno De Felice's museum design¹²; the design followed the directives of Artistic Galleries Superintendent, Bruno Molajoli¹³. The architect restored the royal floor, respecting the original rooms, while he reconstructed the attic floor, which did not display architectural qualities as it originally hosted servants' quarters. In addition, as the roofs were almost destroyed, De Felice built a new one with pre-compressed reinforced concrete. The new roofs allowed a correct and modern natural lighting for the gallery. Light didn't reflect directly on the masterpieces¹⁴. Even the vertical connections changed: three wings were added to the royal stairway to connect the attic floor. The mezzanine floor housed the offices of the Artistic and Historical Superintendence in the southern side. The work lasted for 5 years (1952-1957); the *Galleria Museo di Capodimonte* opened with an important inauguration on the 5th of May. The modern museum occupied approximately one hundred rooms, it had a library, archives, restoration and photographic workshops. The project of the palace was linked to the restoration of the park: De Felice restored the avenues, the fountains, the ancient statues and the pavilions and also took



12 E. Guida, Design of De Ciccio Collection exhibition
 13 E. Guida, Design to illuminate a wall (E. Guida 1995, p. 70)
 14 'Ottocento Privato' exhibition



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care of reorganizing the gardens¹⁵. A happy season began, especially in the 1980s during which many exhibits were organized at the museum, attracting many visitors and giving the Museum of Capodimonte an international fame. In 1994, the new Designs and Prints Section, designed by De Felice, opened in the mezzanine floor¹⁶, meanwhile renovations of the showrooms and building installations continued and the noble floor was closed. In 1994 Nicola Spinosa, Superintendent at the time, started a new renovation. The architect Ermanno Guida was the designer and the coordinator of this renovation, he was the responsible of the new signage project¹⁷. Valerio Mangoni di Santo Stefano designed the building installations and Liliانا Marra was Superintendent Office responsible. The work was divided into different phases due to administrative and economic reasons to avoid the complete closing of the Museum. The Auditorium, organized in the Palace Chapel, was again transformed by Guida; the foyer was restored as well as all the first floor. Between 1996 and 1999, the second and third floor were refurbished (Maurizio Bufalotto project)¹⁸. The new organization highlighted the dual function that the palace had always had, as a residence and a gallery. The palace's structure was always evolving with flexible rooms where the two functions were together. The first floor opened matching with the inauguration of the Farnese exhibition (September 28 - December 17, 1996): the European tour of this exhibit

ended in Capodimonte. In Naples, however, the display was enriched with the Neapolitan masterpieces that hadn't been provided for the tour due to security reasons, becoming the core of the first floor collection. The temporal dimension became another component of the arrangement of the collection, highlighting the different origins of the artworks. Neapolitan art (13th - 18th century) was on the second floor. A small part of the second and third floor hosted the contemporary gallery; the collection was born from donations of the artists to whom the exhibitions were dedicated (the first on Alberto Burri, 1978) and with the help of Neapolitan gallerists¹⁹. This long project, divided into different phases, ended recently (2012) with the opening of the Nineteenth Century Gallery in the royal private apartments on the mezzanine floor, previously occupied by the Superintendence. This section shows paintings, sculptures and furniture from the late 18th and 19th centuries, to recreate the atmosphere of a royal and patrician palace. The transformation of the mezzanine floor began when Nicola Spinosa was Superintendent and ended during Fabrizio Vona's direction. Linda Martino and Mariaserena Mormone were responsible for the setting and Lilianna Marra of the architecture²⁰. Today the palace of Capodimonte is itself a "museum of the museum"