

In the residence of the Lady with an Ermine

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She stole the heart of **Ludovico Moro** and **Leonardo Da Vinci**. Leonardo choose her as the subject of one of his most famous portraits, making her eternal.

In the year that celebrates the five hundred years anniversary since the death of Leonardo, **Cecilia Gallerani**, “**The Lady with an Ermine**”, became, today, the subject of **a path** dedicated to her, which is located at Villa Medici del Vascello, in **San Giovanni in Croce**, in the Province of Cremona.

A BEAUTIFUL, INTELLIGENT AND WELL-EDUCATED LADY

Cecilia Gallerani was **Countess of Saronno** and wife of the Count **Ludovico Carminati de' Brambilla**, known as “the Bergiamino”, lord of the San Giovanni in Croce's castle. She is one of the most fascinating female figures of the Renaissance of Milan, not only for her extraordinary beauty: “She was known to be an intelligent and well-educated woman”, explains Laura Nardi, the person in charge of the activities at Villa Medici del Vascello, “ and the portrait of her is today one the most famous paintings that identify Leonardo Da Vinci, as much as the Gioconda. ‘My dearly beloved diva’ was the epithet used by Leonardo to call Cecilia, which demonstrates the love and the friendship between them.”

SHE TRANSFORMED THE DWELLING INTO A REFINED RESIDENCE

Since she was Ludovico il Moro's lover, and for a long time one of his favourites, she was chased out of the court in Milan after the marriage of the duke with Beatrice d'Este: “Ludovico really cared of Gallerani and he was probably still in love with her, that's why he **looked for a good marriage prospect for her**, offering Cecilia in marriage to the lord of san giovanni in Croce. She received in gift (in addition to the estate of Saronno and other

properties, footnote) the castle, today known as Villa Medici del Vascello, which became her residence during the summer months, when she was away from Milan. Gallerani's touch was evident: she was the one who transformed the dwelling, originally for military use, into a stately residence, refining and decorating the structure. Her villa became also the centre of interest of the lady who, because of her passion for culture, gathered artists, poets and intellectuals. Besides, it was not far from Mantua and this allowed her to maintain her relations with the Gonzaga's and the D'Este family”.

THE BOTANIC GARDEN

In the nineteenth century, the villa was enriched with a large park of twelve hectares: an English-style garden that houses a pond and various buildings of different styles. The park is a real jewel for lovers of botany and much more: in fact, there are many species of trees and shrubs, including some exotic plants, among the first imported into Europe, which had been able to create the ideal habitat for a diverse fauna including badgers, foxes and herons.

THE RECOVERY OF THE VILLA AND THE PATH DEDICATED TO THE LADY WITH AK ERMINE

Like many private historical residences, also the Villa in Cremona experienced moments of splendour and others of decline. “In the twentieth century, the house went through a period of decline and in the second half of the century it even risked collapsing. **However, in 2005 it was purchased by the town hall**, which began a long and important restoration and recovery work that will lead to its reopening to the public in 2014”, underlines Laura Nardi. Today the proposal offered to visitors brings together all the different souls of the place, but the life of Cecilia Gallerani is undoubtedly the main one. “The history of the villa is above all the story of Cecilia Gallerani, and for this reason we have created **the new multimedia path dedicated to the Lady with an Ermine**, an itinerary that also wants to investigate her life, passions, loves, attention to fashion, and her great culture.

THE DREAM OF HOSTING THE MASTERPIECE OF LEONARDO

The Lady with an Ermine is today exposed in Krakow, at the National Museum, and to see her returning “home” is just a dream: “We know what it means in terms of cost and commitment to host a painting like that, it would be wonderful though; they say that dreams, to be such, must be big”, concludes Nardi.

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