

**Palimpsests #1
Globes and Visions**

EN

curated by Luca Cena

**Cerruti Collection
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Crossing the threshold of the house-museum of Francesco Federico Cerruti means entering a mental landscape, a system of rooms that reflect as many configurations of the inner self. Cerruti, a reserved man deeply attached to the domestic sphere, shunned physical travel. For him, the world unfolded elsewhere: in the typographic composure of pages, in the order of maps, and in the remarkable capacity to contain the most adventurous explorations within the calm of ancient volumes.

His Villa thus becomes an inhabitable geography, a place where collecting assumes the value of a cognitive and almost spiritual practice. The invitation is clear and intimate: to retrace this process along a path that is at once spatial and inward. The exhibition unfolds across seven rooms, each centred on an editorial work of extraordinary beauty and rarity. It is the collector himself who seems to welcome us, revealing with passion and enthusiasm those ancient texts that, room after room, construct a true inner world map.

The journey begins in the Study, the operational core of the house, where knowledge takes shape through research and strategy. Here stands the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1601) by Abraham Ortelius, one of the cornerstones of modern cartography. Once owned by Cosimo II de' Medici, the work later entered the collection of Henry Richard Vassall-Fox in the late eighteenth century, likely acquired during a journey to France or Italy, and formed part of the celebrated library of Holland House in Kensington, London. On the night of 27 September 1940, the building was struck and largely destroyed by German bombing; only the east wing survived, including the library, whose rare books – this copy among them – suffered only minor water damage from efforts to extinguish the fire. With its finely coloured maps, the atlas represents an early, ambitious synthesis of the known world. Its presence in the Study is not incidental: this is the space of decision and acquisition, testified by annotated auction catalogues and correspondence that reveal the collector's intellectual and emotional intensity. Here, the world appears as a conquest.

Ascending towards more intimate spaces, one enters the Mother's Bedroom, a contained and ordinary space where knowledge be-

comes personal experience. Here is the *Geographicae enarrationis libri octo* (1535) by Claudius Ptolemy, in the celebrated edition edited by Michael Servetus. Enriched with fifty maps – including some of the earliest representations of parts of Asia and the Americas – this “Editio Prima Serveti” carries a dramatic aura linked to its commentator, who was burned at the stake for heresy along with many copies of the work. A foundational text of Western geography, it represents a point of origin, a matrix. In this room, the book assumes an almost genealogical value, rooted in a space of beginnings, as if knowledge of the world drew from a primordial, affective dimension.

The Rose Bedroom offers a space for quiet and introspection. Here the journey takes on a more intimate tone, embodied by the *Peregrinus affectuose per terram Sanctam et Jerusalem* (1713) by Conrad Hietling. Bound in an elegant cover with floral arabesques and bearing the coat of arms of Ettal Abbey, the volume guides the reader through engraved plates that evoke the mystical atmosphere of devotion. It is a detailed account of the author’s pilgrimage to the Holy Land, conceived both as a guide for the devout pilgrim and for the curious traveller (“a devotionem et curiositatem conductus”). The work introduces a devotional dimension: travel as an inner search, a tension towards an elsewhere that is both geographical and spiritual. Here, collecting becomes meditation.

In the Circular Salon, governed by rigorous formal harmony, one encounters the *Atlas Novus* (c. 1735) by Matthaeus Seutter, one of the most renowned map publishers of Central Europe. This is among the most fascinating atlases of Baroque cartography, not so much for its geographical precision – limited by today’s standards – but for its artistic and historical value. The maps are richly adorned with cartouches, allegorical figures, deities and exotic scenes, often resembling works of art more than scientific instruments. In this masterpiece of print, cartography emerges as an ordering system, an attempt to reduce the complexity of reality to a readable structure. The symmetrical arrangement of the room echoes the logic of the maps: both respond to a deep need for balance. Here, the collector seems to seek a form of control over the world, a geometry capable of containing it.

The Music Room introduces a more rarefied dimension, where time and listening become central. It hosts the *Hercules Siculus sive studium geographicum* (1670–71) by Giovanni Battista Nicolosi. The two volumes, bound in sumptuous Roman red morocco bearing the arms of the Borghese prince, unfold into twenty-two evocative double-page plates, hand-coloured at the time. In this work, Nicolosi was the first to employ a particular cartographic projection – known as ‘globular projection’ – characterised by meridians and parallels drawn as arcs. Representing one hemisphere at a time in circular form, this method proved highly influential, eventually replacing Mercator’s stereographic projection. Also known as ‘Nicolosi projection’, it has earlier origins in the work of the Persian scholar al-Biruni. Its distinctive quality lies in maintaining a regular distribution of distances, making the representation more balanced and legible. The maps offer themselves as visual scores: reading them approaches a musical experience, an immobile journey of rhythm, pause and contemplation. The world is no longer merely represented, but listened to.

Descending to the lower floor, in the Billiard Room, one encounters the grandeur of the *Atlas Maior* (1662–65) by Willem Blaeu and Joan Blaeu. Still preserved in its original Dutch walnut cabinet, this unsurpassed masterpiece contains around six hundred hand-coloured maps, forming one of the most astonishing encyclopaedic syntheses of the Dutch Golden Age. Monumental in scale and composed of eleven volumes, it represents a pinnacle of seventeenth-century cartographic publishing – a fusion of science, art and power. More than an atlas, it is a portrait of the world as imagined and dominated by European elites of the time. Its placement in a space devoted to play creates a striking contrast: the lightness of entertainment meets the weight of accumulated knowledge. Here emerges the vertigo of bibliophilic possession, the desire to contain the world in its entirety.

The journey culminates in the Tower Room, the highest and most secluded point of the house. In this suspended, almost timeless space is displayed the *Harmonia macrocosmica* (1661) by Andreas Cellarius, in a splendid contemporary Dutch vellum binding with gilt decoration. The most spectacular astronomical work of the

seventeenth century, it overflows with astronomical, mathematical, historical, philosophical and mythological knowledge. Its extraordinary maps illustrate the solar system and known constellations, accompanied by mathematical descriptions and refined depictions of celestial bodies. More than an atlas, the *Harmonia Macrocosmica* is a work of art celebrating the inseparable bond between humankind and the heavens, and the enduring ambition to map the infinite. With its celestial charts, the atlas opens the gaze beyond the limits of the earth. It marks the culmination of the journey: from geography to cosmology, from the finite to the infinite. Here, the collector seems to seek a form of transcendence, an ultimate order capable of giving meaning to the entire path – and perhaps to his life as a gatherer of rarities.

To pass through these seven rooms is to traverse the many dimensions of Francesco Federico Cerruti's inner world. Each book is a precious object, but also a threshold: a device that grants access to a specific way of relating to the world. The Villa thus reveals itself as a complex self-portrait, in which the act of collecting discloses its deepest purpose: to gather scattered fragments, give them form, and construct a coherent universe within reach of the eye. The exhibition opens a rare passage into this intimate dimension, inviting the visitor to become, in turn, a traveller – not through space, but through the trajectories traced by a man who, without ever truly departing, managed to welcome the entire world within the walls of his home.

fig. 1,2



fig. 3

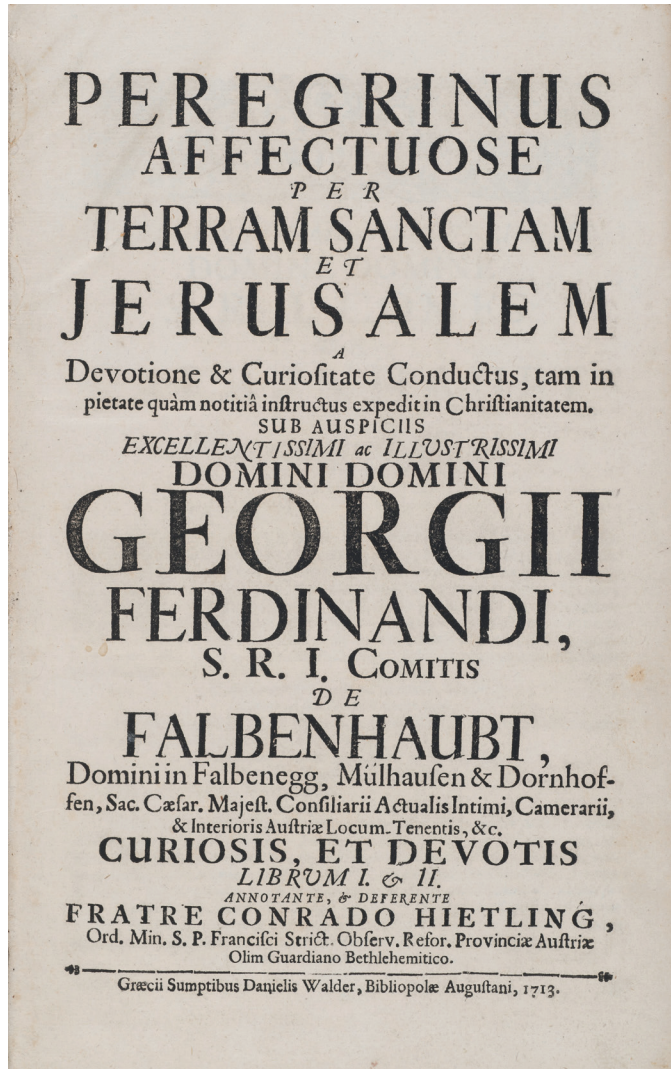


fig. 4



fig. 5



fig. 6,7



1. Abraham Ortelius, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum – Parergon – Nomenclator Ptolemaicus*, Joannes Moretus Officina Plantina, Antwerp, 1601
3 parts in one volume, folio, 555 × 345 mm
[The Study]
2. Claudius Ptolemaeus, *Geographicae enarrationis libri octo*, translated by Wilibald Pirckheimer, edited by Michael Villanovanus [Servetus], Melchior e Gaspar Trechsel, Lyon, 1535
folio, 426 × 303 × 55 mm
[The Mother's Bedroom]
3. Conrad Hietling, *Peregrinus affectuose per terram Sanctam et Jerusalem a devotione et curiositate conductus*, D. Walder, Augusta, 1713
folio, 340 × 210 × 50 mm
[The Rose Bedroom]
4. Matthaeus Seutter, *Atlas Novus*, Augusta, [1735 c.]
3 parts in one volume, folio, 625 × 405 × 135 mm
[The Circular Salon]
5. Giovanni Battista Nicolosi, *Hercules Siculus sive studium geographicum tomus primus–tomus secundus*, Michele Ercoli, Rome, 1670–1671
2 vols., folio, vol. I: 432 × 296 × 63 mm; vol. II: 432 × 296 × 20 mm
[The Music Room]
6. Willem e Joan Blaeu, *Grooten Atlas (Atlas Maior)*, Blaeu Toonneel der Steden (?), Amsterdam, 1642–1644, 1662–1665
11 vols., folio, 570 × 375 mm
[The Billiard Room]
7. Andreas Cellarius, *Harmonia macrocosmica seu atlas universalis et novus, totius universi creati cosmographiam generalem, et novam exhibens*, J. Jansson, Amsterdam, 1661
folio, 530 × 357 × 69 mm
[The Tower Room]

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