

## A personal ft. note on Dali ➔ Salvador Dali & Peggy Guggenheim

excerpted from chap. 1 – Venice, *Western Trek*, part II, pp 29-33, December 20, 2007 – January 8, 2008; a 237-page, 372 illustrations **Report** on our traditional annual holiday's excursion to Barcelona, Spain, across the spectrum of 7 continental sovereign western states.

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[See, *Profile of Time*, in Addenda.]



Fig. 47. We passed to the right the **Peggy Guggenheim Collection** on the Grand Canal. It contains the personal art collection of Peggy Guggenheim (1898–1979), a former wife of artist Max Ernst and a niece of mining magnate Solomon R. Guggenheim; this museum houses a somewhat smaller and more idiosyncratic collection than the other Guggenheim Foundation museums, such as the conch-shell edifice on Fifth Avenue at 89<sup>th</sup> St. in New York City. However, the works on display include those of prominent American modernists and Italian futurists. Pieces in the collection embrace Cubism, Surrealism, and Abstract Expressionism. These include notable works by Picasso, Dali, Magritte, Brancusi (including a sculpture from the *Bird in Space* series) and Pollock.



Fig. 48. Peggy, left, in the old days with her beloved cats on the terrace of her villa on the Grand Canal.

"Peggy" is by name of Marguerite **Guggenheim**, an American art collector who was an important patron of the *abstract expressionist* school of artists in New York City. Peggy's father was Benjamin Guggenheim, and son of the wealthy mining magnate Meyer Guggenheim, and one of her uncles was Solomon R. Guggenheim, who founded the **Guggenheim Museum** in New York. Surprisingly, Peggy's other siblings garnered much more inheritance, but it was enough to get her started in promoting artists and acquiring important works of modern art. I remember this from our many discussions at the villa.

Biographically speaking, Peggy was often a pivotal figure in the arts of the day, and this short detour of mine surely of interest to the ladies in my company on the stop in San Paul-de-Vance, the art colony in France, where in fact Gordana had arranged for our visit there and, of course, for Ljena becoming a major art gallery organizer in Old Town of Budva, Montenegro, hence a few words about another women who blazed the trail in modern art back in the 1930-60s: Peggy Guggenheim.

Peggy was a clerk initially in an *avant-garde* bookstore in Paris, when she first became enamored with the members of the **bohemian** artistic community on the Seine, then inherited a small fortune from her uncle, Solomon R. Guggenheim, becoming a serious patron of the arts, pivotal for many major figures. In 1920 she went to live in Paris, France. Once there, she rubbed elbows with the avant-garde community of writers and artists, many of whom were living in poverty in the Montparnasse Quarter of the city. Along with Constantine Brancusi and Marcel Duchamp, who were friends, she promoted many other greats of the time.

The collection is housed in the Palazzo Venier dei Leoni, an unfinished 18th century palazzo which was never built past the ground floor level. In one room, the museum also exhibits a few paintings by her daughter Pegeen Vail. In the courtyards between the main buildings is sculpture gardens containing an extensive collection of works, where the gracious lady threw best cocktail parties in Water City; this was long before the villa was turned into the official museum (1980), it had been Peggy's private residence.



Fig. 49-50. The gofer look-alike creature is a promotional sketch of Venice, Peggy's villa is located at the very entrance to the Grand Canal (note: the Guggenheim Foundation in Italian), when the city is approached from the sea. Right, above, is the NYC Guggenheim museum, and next to it the controversial phallic sculpture, just up the steps between the shrubby 'manicured' clumps.

A point of interest for the prissy Catholic Church is an episode around the canal's famous 1948 bronze sculpture, "The Angel of the City" by Marino Marini, positioned at the front of the bldg. facing the Grand Canal. This nude and clearly excited horse rider originally possessed of a screw-in (sic) demountable penis so that it could be removed in order to avoid offending passing VIPs on the major waterway. In fact, the bronze phalluses were sometimes stolen; now, the rumor has it, that the current member has been welded to the Angel's body. I have not visited the villa since before Peggy passed away, however, back in the 1960s we called on the gracious lady at the private villa. I met her through Dr. Francesco Malia, professor of art at the University of Rome. He was in a way my "creative act" mentor, the first individual to introduce me in Moscow to the dissident movement there developing under the more liberal Khrushchev regime. We presented her with a copy of my book on *unofficial art* in 1967, when she threw a major party for the young author (yours truly), attended by 250 profiled guests, such people as Alfred Bar (Director of the Museum of Modern Art, NYC), Salvador **Dali**; and, Max Ernest, her former husband, and other VIPs. ... The Peggy Guggenheim Collection is the most important museum in Italy for European and American art of the second quarter of the 20th century.



Fig. 51-52. Peggy Guggenheim's art collection grounds and museum in the villa where she lived. The photo above was taken in 1964.

Retracing the past, I now recall how Peggy's villa was a real gallery which showcased works by established European artists, while the Art of This Century Gallery, which she operated in New York during the war years (she went back home in 1941), exhibited many works of lesser known American artists, often for the first time. Some of the European artists that were exhibited in NYC included Jean Arp, Georges Braque, Giorgio de Chirico, Salvador Dalí, Max Ernst, Alberto Giacometti, Vasily Kandinsky, Fernand Leger, Andre Masson, Roberto Matta, Joan Miro, Pablo Picasso, Yves Tanguy and several others. Some of the American artists shown at the gallery included: William Baziotes, Alexander Calder, Joseph Cornell, David Hare, Hans Hofmann, Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell, Jackson Pollock, Richard Pousette-Dart, Ad Reinhardt, Mark Rothko, Charles Seliger, and Clyfford Still among others. By the early 1960s, when we met in Venice, Peggy had stopped collecting art and began to concentrate on presenting what she already owned. She loaned out her collection to museums throughout Europe and America, including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City, which was named after her uncle. Eventually, she decided to donate her large home and her collection to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation on her death, just before she died in Padua in 1979; she's interred in the garden of the villa next to her beloved dogs. The museum on the Grand Canal opened officially in 1980.

Peggy and I were discussing once the "virtuosity" with the pen of Sir Herbert Edward Read (1893–1968), the English anarchist poet, and critic of art and literature. She related to me in earnest, in direct tone how in 1939, after she had returned to the continent to open an art gallery in Paris, then abandoned the idea when the Germans invaded Poland, then and there she "decided now to buy paintings by all the painters who were on Herbert Read's list. Having plenty of time and all the museum's funds at my disposal, I put myself on a regime to buy one picture a day." She had acquired ten Picassos, forty Ernsts, eight Mirós, four Magrittes, three Man Rays, three Dalís, one Klee, one Wolfgang Paalen and one Chagall among others. In the meantime, she had also made new plans and in April 1940 had rented a large space in the Place Vendôme as a new home for her museum. However, a few days before the Germans entered Paris; she had to abandon her plans for a Paris museum, and fled to the south of France, from where, after months of safeguarding her collection and artist friends, she left Europe for New York in the summer of 1941. That's when Max Ernst joined her, on the trek back to the States, abandoned his hover, Leonora Carrington, who suffered a major mental breakdown, and married Peggy.

As a result of her interest in new artists she was instrumental in advancing the careers of many important modern artists, including the American painter Jackson Pollock, the Austrian surrealist Wolfgang Paalen, the sound poet Ada Verdun Howell and the German painter Max Ernst, whom she married in 1942.



Fig. 53. "Baby Max" by Marx Ernst, Peggy's lover and husband; Herbert Read would have liked this one, a combination of Allan Poe and Antonio Gaudi, bridging the organic gap in creative art.

Following World War II — and her 1946 divorce from Max Ernst — she closed *The Art of This Century Gallery* in New York in 1947, and returned to Europe; deciding to live in Venice, Italy. In 1948, she was invited to exhibit her collection in the disused Greek Pavilion of the **Venice Biennale** and eventually established herself in Palazzo Venier dei Leoni on the Grand Canal.

Of course, you will recall that our Montenegrin Impresario, Ms Gordana Stevovich, years later took notes on the Venice Biennale, and was the General Secretary and Director of the Cetinje Biennale, held in the Old Capital of Montenegro, of course, which operated under the auspices of Prince Nicolas Petrovich-Njegosh, a Paris (FR) architect, the heir apparent of the millennial nation-state royal throne, and the Cabinet of the President of now again sovereign Montenegro (His

great grandfather, Nicholas-II of Montenegro was one of the 29 founders of modern Europe at the Berlin Congress of 1878). After a decade-long successful Cetinje Biennale it was discontinued due to the raging Civil War in nearby Bosnia, and American sanctions against former Yugoslavia, at the time including Montenegro.



Fig. 54. The gondolier and the Rialto, the Grand Bridge over the Grand Canal, the two perhaps most important functional, operational symbols in Venice: (a) the pilot, with a single ore on duty on the major transportation artery, and (b) the bridge of love, desire, and beauty there as attraction icons of the Middle Ages on duty around the clock. Could a Westerns guest or tourist ask for more?



~~~~~a Venetian gondolier tradition dictates that couples must kiss under every bridge they pass by for Eternal Love.

Fig. 55. A gondola is a traditional Venetian *sculling boat*. Gondolas were for centuries the chief means of transportation in watertight Venice, and still have a crucial role in public transport, especially tourism, serving as *traghetti* (ferries) over major canals. A gondola is long and narrow wooden boat, with an asymmetrical outline to facilitate propulsion with a single oar, and lengthwise curvature in the configuration to minimize the area of contact with the water. The oar or *rèmo* is held in an oar lock known as a *fòrcola*. The *forcola* is of a complicated shape, allowing several positions of the oar for slow forward rowing, powerful forward rowing, turning, slowing down and rowing backwards. The iron ornament on the front of the boat is called the *fèrro*. It serves to protect the prow from accidental damage, as decoration and as counterweight for the gondolier standing near the stern. The gondola is propelled by an oarsman (the gondolier) who stands facing the bow and pushes, rather than pulls, a single oar. Contrary to popular belief the gondola is never poled like a punt as the waters of Venice are too deep. A gondola for passengers may have a small open cabin, for their protection against sun or rain. A sumptuary law of

Venice required that gondolas should be painted black, and they are customarily so painted now. A gondolier, under Venetian law, must have been born in Venice to practice this profession. Historically, the gondola goes back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century; in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it is said that 10 thousand gondolas were operating on the city canals network.

Fig. 56. Yours truly, end of June 2006 on Lake Scutari, Montenegro, near the cascading milling hamlet of Podsoljane, where 16 grain mills, one above the other, were once in business grinding corn, wheat, and rye; just before I left for the year-long research stint in continental Russia & Siberia, to work on my Cold War Trilogy.

Our own *chun* is very much similar to the Venetian *gondola*; however our vessel was historically powered by two—if not more—oars, while now usually a 4 hp Thomas gas engine is used on the lake. Historically it goes back to the time of the Greeks, perhaps 800 BC.



This is the coat of arms of the Crnojević family (1396-1706), their capital of Obod, Rijeka Crnojevicha is just over that saddle behind me.

