

(TO BE RETURNED)

THE CARLO GRASSI COLLECTION



ITALIAN AND EUROPEAN MASTERPIECES OF 19TH- AND 20TH- CENTURY ART

This important art collection unit is the outcome of Carlo Grassi's passion for art as well as of his widow Nedda Mieli's generous donation to the City of Milan in 1956, on condition that the works are exhibited in memory of their son Gino, a volunteer killed in the battle of El Alamein (1942) at the age of just eighteen. Carlo Grassi (1886-1950) was an entrepreneur of Italian origins born in Greece who had moved to Cairo, Egypt, at the end of the XIXth century. There he became one of the best known tobacco producers and dealers. He would spend periods in Italy where, besides homes in Rome and Milan, he owned a large villa at Lora, near Como. After he moved back to Italy with his wife towards the end of the 1930s, it is right the Lora house that became the main seat of his by then massive art collections.

After collecting a valuable nucleus of Egyptian antiquities, today donated to the Vatican Museums, C. Grassi devoted himself to paintings, with a predilection for the XIXth and XXth centuries, and gradually built up a wide ambitious collection: the Galleria d'Arte Moderna (Gallery of Modern Art) has chosen and exhibited the most relevant pieces from it since 1958. The collection is inspired by C. Grassi's great openness to different languages and traditions, by his unprejudiced curiosity ranging from ancient to contemporary art, from East to West, and by his keen attention to the quality and the value of the single pieces. Besides some refined objects of Asian art and some paintings from the XIV to the XVIII century, the Grassi Collection boasts a meaningful nucleus of Italian XIXth century artists -Fattori, De Nittis, Boldini, the Milanese "Scapigliati" (literally meaning 'ruffled'), just to mention a few of them- and of "Divisionismo": from this art movement two large watercolours by Previati and selected works by Segantini in his 'naturalist' and 'pre-divisionist' phases.

However, the collection includes a wide range of international art too, in contrast to the conservative taste of most Italian critics and of the market in C. Grassi's age. The works by Manet, Van Gogh and Cézanne purchased by the collector actually are the only pieces by these celebrated masters present in Milan museums. C. Grassi's interest in the XIXth century was followed by a passion he developed after getting back to Italy, for the evolution of contemporary Italian painting. This is why we can find works by the "Avanguardie"/Vanguards protagonists -mainly Boccioni and Balla- as well as by masters of the years between the two world wars -Morandi, De Pisis, Tosi and many more.

Also a rich selection of graphic works -many of which under restoration, therefore not on permanent display- together with a rare collection of manuscripts (diaries and letters) by Italian XIXth century artists and a small clever collection of art books make the Grassi Collection a heterogeneous and multifaceted one indeed.



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Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot (Paris 1796 – Ville-d'Avray 1875)

A Gust of Wind, post 1853-54, Oil on canvas

Corot, considered one of the "en plein air" painting forerunners, depicts a lonely horseman at a gallop; clouds in the sky are heralding a storm. On the left majestic trees bent by the fury of the wind -where from the title of the picture- become the protagonists of the scene, while the horseman's figure just plays the role of a simple detail. The dramatic tone of the narration is enhanced by the theme of man resisting the strength of nature, with references to the "theory of the sublime".



Giuseppe De Nittis (Barletta 1846 – Saint-Germain-en-Laye 1884)

Lunch at Posillipo, about 1879, Oil on canvas

After the great success of Paris Universal Exhibition in 1878, De Nittis, who has been living in the French capital for ten years, goes back to Naples for some months in one of his more and more frequent returns home and rents a house on the seaside, at Posillipo. There he depicts a cheerful lunch in the open air at sunset, with music and a lot of guests, namely one of the meetings quoted by the artist in his *Taccuini (Diaries)*: "We would gather on the terrace in the lovely full moon evenings. Some artists would come from Naples and sing ancient tunes with a guitar accompaniment; others would dance 'tarantella'..."



Gaetano Previati (Ferrara 1852 – Lavagna, Genova, 1920)

Quiete, about 1901, Pastel on linen cardboard

This large pastel is an autograph replica painted by Previati from a previous smaller oil painting. The subject, a pleasant episode of everyday family life, is a common one for the artists of the "Scapigliatura" movement where Previati had taken his first steps as an artist. Like in the oil original, the scene is enriched by modern artistic ideas, as if projected towards the next century. Colour breaks down into tiny filamentary fragments, "a technique giving the impression of a larger amount of light" as the painter himself explains.



Vincent Van Gogh (Zundert 1853 – Auvers-sur-Oise 1890)

Breton Women in the Meadow (The Pardon of Pont Aven), 1888, Pencil and watercolour on paper

In 1888 Van Gogh moved to Arles (Provence) where he was joined by Paul Gauguin: this was the start of a short intense period of artistic fellowship between the two. 1888 is also the date of this watercolour, a copy of an oil painting ('Le Pardon de Pont d'Aven', private collection) belonging to Gauguin and painted by French artist Emile Bernard. The female figures wearing their traditional Breton costumes are in contrast to the young girl wearing modern clothes and the two elegant ladies with parasols in the background who show that subject is contemporary.



Henri De Toulouse-Lautrec (Paris 1864 – 1901)

The Chap Book, Irish American Bar, 1896, Poster

Henri De Toulouse-Lautrec, a great lover of wines and spirits, was fond of preparing cocktails for his friends. His night 'pilgrimages' to cabarets and ballrooms also included bars, of course. Among his favourites: Weber, near La Madeleine, then the Cosmopolitan American Bar and the Irish and American Bar, both in Rue Royale. This poster was meant for the Anglo-American magazine "The Chap Book": the scene shows two customers and, behind the bar, a barman identified as Chinese-American Ralph, who had come to Paris from San Francisco.



Giacomo Balla, (Torino 1871 – Roma 1958)

Dynamic Expansion and Speed, 1913, Oil on cardboard

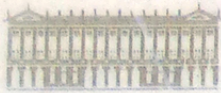
The painting dates back to the years of Balla's research on movement and on the representation of speed, when he was a member of the Futurist movement. We can notice how the silhouette car and driver have the function of vanishing point and originate the whole composition. Balla expresses the dynamism of movement by means of a system of planes intersecting according to precise directions. The perception of depth is conveyed by slanting directrices while the perspective lines, vanishing towards the driving wheel, define the planes where the car shape gets fragmented by speed.



Fausto Pirandello (Rome 1899 – 1975)

Self-portrait, 1940-1943, Oil on canvas

Son to renowned playwright Luigi, Fausto Pirandello repeatedly ventures upon self-portraits. In this work he uses colours to convey violent clashes, between the darkness of the clothes gloomy hues and the brightness of the red scarf and the face that stands out against the background. All is concentrated in the face close-up: space as if compressed, viewers come face to face with the magnetic power of the eyes, with the aggressiveness of matter and colour. It is thanks to his powerfully concentrated gaze that this group of self-portraits by Pirandello, though small, look 'loaded' with the past and with suffering.



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THE VISMARA COLLECTION



ITALIAN AND EUROPEAN MASTERPIECES OF 19TH- AND 20TH- CENTURY ART

The collection was donated to the City of Milan in 1975, shortly after collector Vismara's death, according to his wife's wishes.

Giuseppe Vismara (1903-1975) was one of the many Milanese professionals who resumed and carried on -after World War II- the tradition of collecting modern art, a tradition shared by Milan so called "enlightened upper class" between the two world wars. Today, such collections enrich some of the main city museums thanks to legacies or donations. Vismara's passion for art started soon, while visiting more European museums during his business trips. A key event for his collector's drive was meeting Gino Ghiringhelli in 1939, an art dealer who had taken over renowned Galleria del Milione with his brother Peppino. The gallery, in Milan central Brera art district, was a hub for both art vanguard research and fruitful exchanges among European artists. Not only did Vismara find an expert advisor and a dealer in Ghiringhelli, but also a link to make friends with many of the major artists of the time and to be able to purchase their works directly from their studios. The collection, though not particularly wide, includes never banal pieces chosen with the utmost care. It stands out for some international works, such as a drawing by Amedeo Modigliani, a small refined still nature by Renoir and pieces by Rouault, Vuillard, Dufy, Matisse and Picasso. The last-mentioned is present with specimens of the many techniques he experimented, from oil paintings to graphic works or drawings and eventually ceramics.

As to the works by Italian artists, Vismara's choices follow the same criteria of modernity and international mood. Unusually for a Milanese collection, special consideration is given to the so called "Ca' Pesaro" group, namely the artists who used to take part in the annual exhibitions curated by critic Nino Barbantini at the International Gallery of Modern Art in Ca' Pesaro, Venice. Among them, some painters seldom present in collections in those years, such as Gino Rossi or Pio Semeghini, whose works echo a sophisticated European culture affected by the Secession movements, as well as by the Pont Aven school.

More choices by Vismara are in this trend, often in clash with much Italian art of that age, rooted in tradition and Italianism. This may be the key to interpret the art of Filippo de Pisis with his synthetic nervous strokes and apparently precarious compositions, or that of Giorgio Morandi in the three works of his late production, today considered innovative and forerunning. Not to mention the three late canvases by Sironi with their archaizing compositions and dense gloomy impasto.

The works by another "irregular" artist eventually completes the selection of Italian artists: Arturo Tosi, a personal friend of Vismara's.





Amedeo Modigliani (Livorno 1884 – Parigi 1920)

Madame Hastings Seated, 1915-1916, pencil on paper

A. Modigliani moved to Paris in 1906. Acquainted with and deeply influenced by Cézanne's art, he develops a unique very personal style, in a way parallel to Cézanne's, by means of exclusive procedures based on the formal simplification and synthetic use of line. As a matter of fact, line is the absolute protagonist of this pencil drawing, where the painter portrays English poetess and writer Béatrice Hastings, his partner between 1914 and 1916. We can see Modigliani's unmistakable style characteristics both in her neck and in her face features, absolutely synthetic and stylized.



Gino Rossi (Venice 1884 – Sant'Artemio di Treviso 1947)

The Fisherman, 1912, Oil on cardboard over canvas

The travel with Arturo Martini to Paris and Brittany led Gino Rossi, an artist from Venice, to unexpectedly acquire an international dimension, with particular references to Gauguin's and Pont-Aven school post-impressionism. This fisherman's portrait reveals Rossi's fondness of humble people, of those left on the fringe of urban society in the first decades of the XXth century, even though the pictorial effect of the fisherman's face and expression on the canvas is not conventional at all.



Arturo Tosi (Busto Arsizio, Varese 1871 – Milan 1956)

Tea Rose, 1945, Oil on wood (on the back: sketch of a portrait of Giuseppe Vismara)

Giuseppe Vismara, old friend with painter Arturo Tosi, buys various of his works directly in the artist's studio. One of them is this still nature of 1945 which literally bears a precious mark of the fidelity and mutual exchange relationship between artist and collector. As a matter of fact, a portrait of the latter is outlined on the back of the wood board, with an easy lively technique. On the contrary, the actual subject of the work, a still life element painted almost with the fullness of a sculpture, reveals Cézanne's teaching as well as Margherita Sarfatti's involvement in the 'Novecento / XXth Century' movement.



Pablo Picasso (Malaga 1881 – Mougins 1973)

Head of a Woman (Mediterranean), 1957, Oil on canvas

The work, dated 1957, belongs to a period of studies by Picasso on Velasquez's Las Meninas. At the same time the artist was also working at a group of engravings on bullfight as well as at a series of sculptures where he 'translated' his collage cubist synthesis into metal shapes. It is within this research that we may place *Tête de Femme*.

The "woman's head" appears to be shown both frontally and in profile, like in the folded and painted metal sheet sculptures of the same period. Besides, the lower part of the painting seems to recall a pedestal shape.



Giorgio Morandi (Bologna 1890 – Milano 1964)

Still Life with Yellow Cloth, 1952, Oil on Canvas

Critics have recently acknowledged the particular relevance of Giorgio Morandi's late works, those from the 1950s to his death in 1964, even though at a glance the artist may appear more and more secluded in his studio with his favourite objects. In 1952 Morandi works at a series of ten still lives characterized by the presence of a yellow cloth, a colour mark standing out within a context of greys and whites, as well as the only presence of a "shapeless" element beside common everyday life objects. The result is bare silent poetry, recreating a lost dimension of heroic austere solitude.

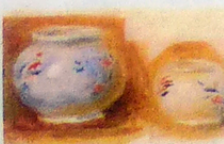


Mario Sironi (Sassari 1885 – Milan 1961)

The Oracle, 1952, Oil on canvas

After boosting, together with critic Margherita Sarfatti, the 'Novecento' painters' group and after vigorously celebrating the grandness of the fascist regime, Mario Sironi withdraws into a tragic disillusioned vision of the present. He creates gloomy dramatic works like this one in the years following World War II, after the collapse of the ideals his art had identified with.

As if to suggest a fragmented impenetrable reality, the composition is divided into sections with undefined identity figures within, the title as well hinting at a sense of obscure mystery.



Pierre-Auguste Renoir (Limoges 1841- Cagnes-sur-Mer 1919)

Bowl Vases, 1905, Oil on canvas

The small painting, that had belonged to great art dealer Ambrose Vollard, is part of the series of still lives that were among the artist's favourite subjects, together with women's portraits. The two vases recall Renoir's youth experiences, when, as a teenager, he was taken on as an apprentice in the workshop of the Levys, painters specialized in porcelain decoration.

The work is to be attributed to the painter's final activity years and was probably created in southern France, where he had moved due to health problems, and purchased by Vollard during one of his visits to the artist.