



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.



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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 1880 – 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.