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Objects on the Move.

Unpacking the Narratives of Circulating Exhibitions 1900 -1953

Edited by: Paola Cordera

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Exhibition *Made in Italy. Destinazione America 1945–1954* (Lucca, Fondazione Ragghianti, 2025). Detail of the section *Viaggio in Italia (The Italian Journey)*. Foto Alcide.

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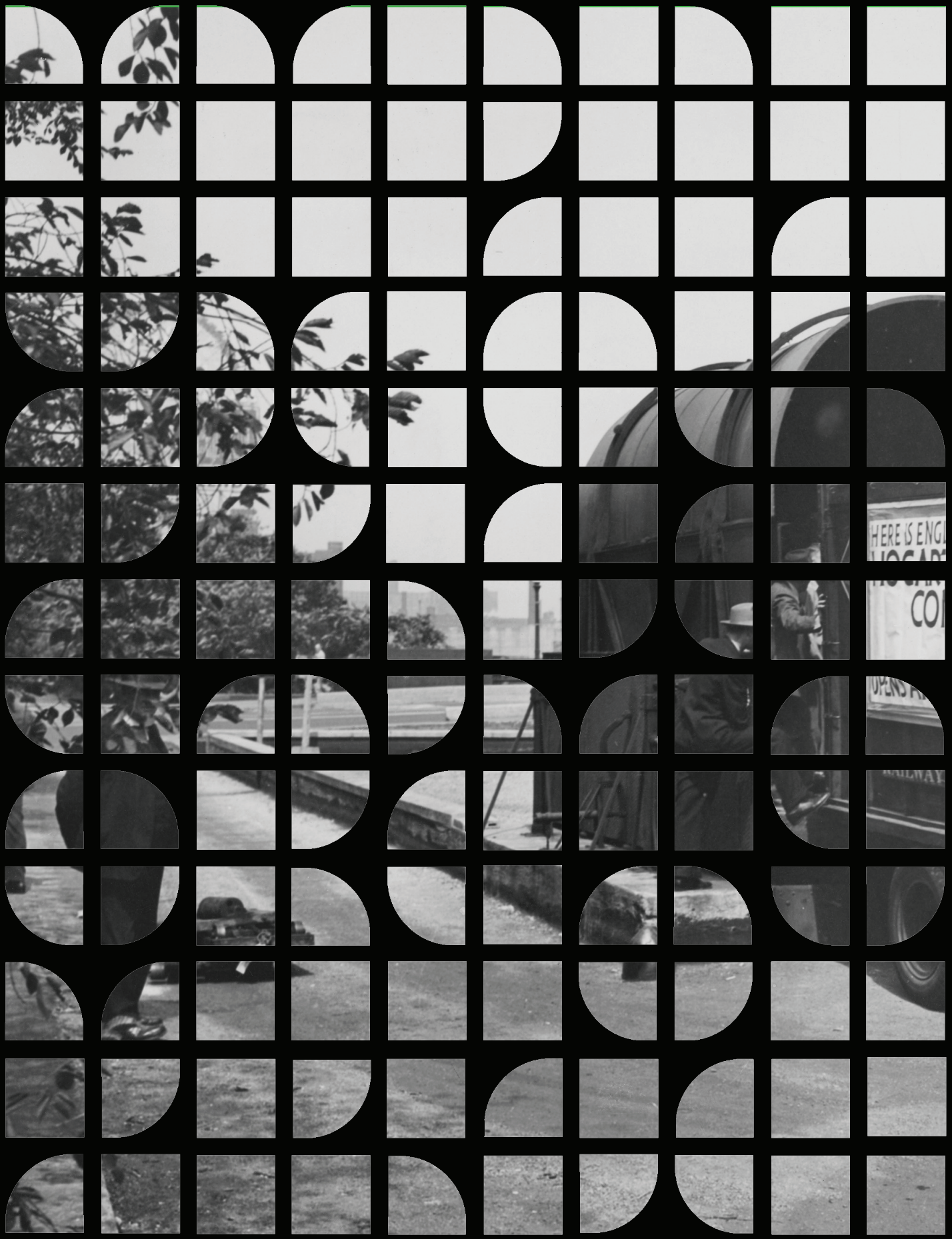
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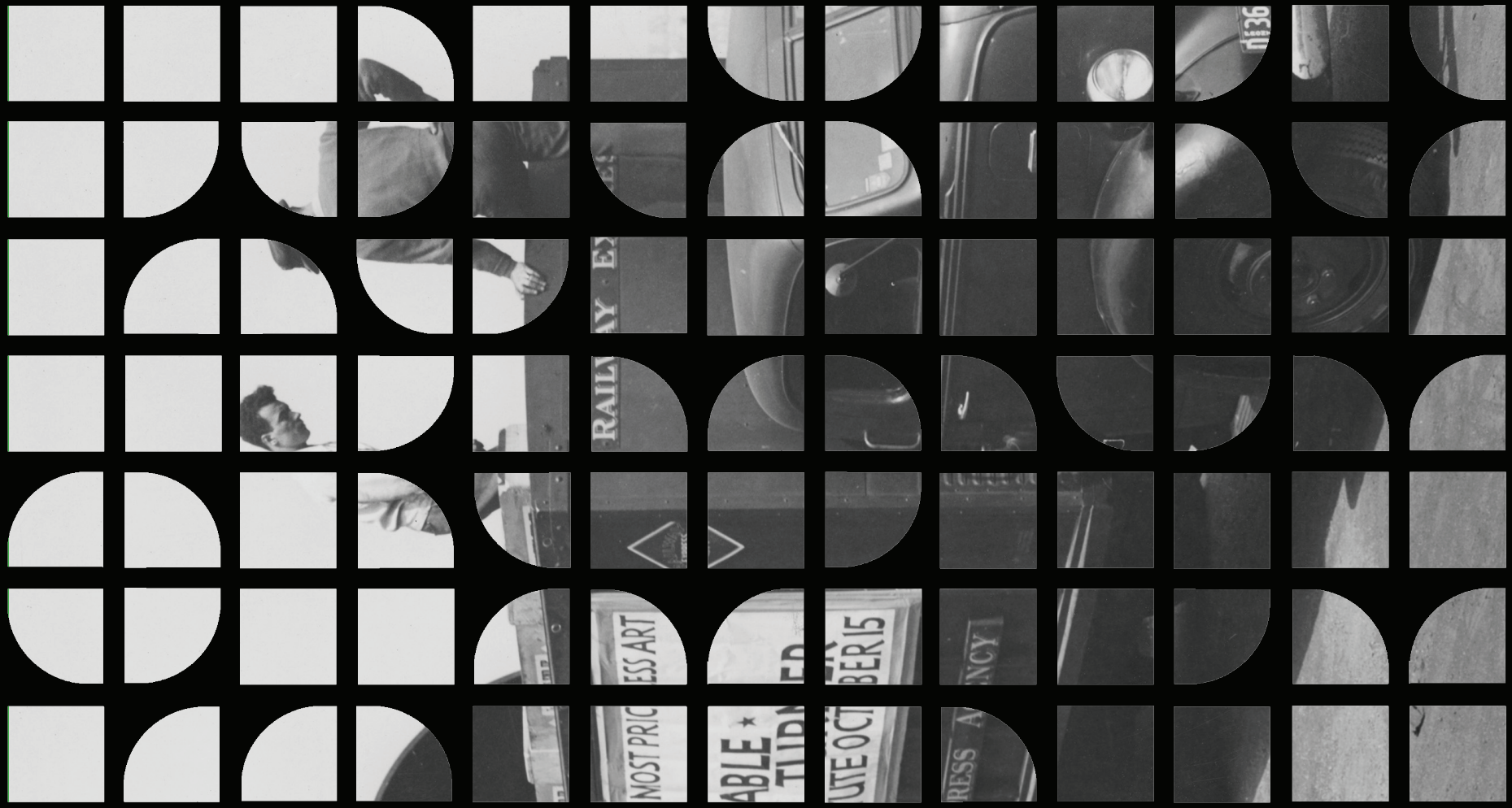

Circulating Knowledge. Reassessing the Narratives of Traveling Exhibitions

Paola Cordera

Keywords:
20th-Century Traveling Exhibitions; Display Format; Cultural Transfer; Exhibition Strategies; Networks of Circulation

ABSTRACT:

This article examines debates on the genesis and evolution of traveling exhibitions, tracing how they came to be legitimized as an exhibition format starting in the mid-20th century. Long considered peripheral, these shows acquired significance both formally – through modular and standardized design solutions – and curatorially, as arenas for testing new modes of interpretation and communication. Publications and discussions of the 1950s framed them as experimental models, while acknowledging their practical limitations and outlining best practices. As these analyses evolved, the focus gradually shifted from questions of design, curatorial choices, and the safeguarding of objects toward a broader concern with the exhibitions' social role and their accountability to audiences. Given the challenges and limitations of fragmented documentation and scholarship focused on case studies, the article argues for the potential of transdisciplinary approaches to reposition traveling exhibitions within the broader history of exhibition practices and museology.

L'articolo ricostruisce il dibattito sulle esposizioni itineranti, mostrando come esse siano state riconosciute quale formato espositivo a metà del XX secolo. A lungo considerate marginali, queste mostre acquisirono rilievo tanto sul piano formale – attraverso soluzioni modulari e standardizzate – quanto su quello curatoriale, come luoghi di sperimentazione di modalità interpretative e comunicative. Le pubblicazioni e i dibattiti degli anni Cinquanta inquadrarono tali rassegne come modelli sperimentali, pur rilevandone criticità e proponendo pratiche per superarle. Con l'avanzare del dibattito, l'attenzione si spostò dalle questioni di allestimento, dalle scelte curatoriali e dalla tutela degli oggetti verso una più ampia riflessione sul ruolo sociale delle mostre e sulla responsabilità che esse assumevano nei confronti di pubblici. Alla luce delle criticità di una documentazione frammentaria e una storiografia per lo più limitata a studi di caso, l'articolo evidenzia le possibilità offerte da approcci transdisciplinari per inquadrare le mostre itineranti nel novero di una più ampia storia delle esposizioni e della museologia.

Opening Picture:

Exhibition *Made in Italy. Destinazione America 1945–1954* (Lucca, Fondazione Ragghianti, 2025). Detail of the section *Viaggio in Italia (The Italian Journey)*. Foto Alcide

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Although traveling exhibitions hold considerable historical and cultural importance in the dissemination of visual culture, they have received relatively little scholarly attention within museum studies and within the field of *expographie* as defined by French museologist André Desvallées.[1] Their ephemeral nature, consistent with the impermanence of exhibition practices, does not fully explain their omission from studies of what Tony Bennett – writing at the intersection of cultural sociology and museum studies – has termed the "exhibitionary complex".[2] Rather, this absence points to deeper structural biases in museological discourse, particularly in the ways forms of display are categorized and valued.

For the purposes of this essay, the term "traveling exhibitions" refers to exhibitions conceived from the outset to circulate between venues – initiated by larger institutions or agencies with an explicit agenda of cultural dissemination, diplomacy, or education – and designed for presentation in smaller or geographically dispersed locations.

Certain logistical and design traits of traveling exhibitions have likely contributed to their marginal status within prevailing narratives. These traits include their itinerant nature, demountable and repeatable formats, and the frequent use of hybrid materials – replicas, models, and visual reproductions in place of "originals".[3] Such qualities were often perceived as undermining the aura of authority associated with permanent or site-bound exhibitions, replacing the singularity of a one-time occasion with the predictability of a format designed for repetition. These very features may have reinforced perceptions of such exhibitions as capitulations to mass culture: their "popular" dimension, ephemeral character, and reproducible formats seemed incompatible with the scholarly rigor and aesthetic discernment expected of the field, rendering them difficult to classify and easy to dismiss.

Furthermore, the dispersal of documentation – scattered among different institutions, and even across national boundaries – has compounded this invisibility. Because archival records are invariably fragmentary, the surviving material offers only partial glimpses. Yet it still holds ample potential to uncover unpublished sources and open new avenues of research. In many cases, photographic documentation is either extremely limited or absent; where it survives, it frequently depicts only the installation: a static arrangement of objects in an empty gallery (fig. 1), like a stage set awaiting its actors, giving little sense of the dynamic interplay between displays and audiences that animated the event. Such images can be invaluable, yet they are also incomplete, leaving researchers to imagine the "performance" without its participants. What substitutes for this gap is often equally problematic: traveling exhibitions were chiefly recorded in contemporary press accounts, which frequently reproduced material supplied by press offices with minimal alteration. This coverage rarely addressed local particularities and often omitted images, perhaps assuming that written narratives could stand in for visual representation. These constraints pose considerable challenges for scholars, who must rely on critical

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Fig. 01: Exhibition *Knife/Fork/Spoon*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (Minnesota), 1949–1951. Lohse, R. P., *Neue Ausstellungsgestaltung: 75 Beispiele neuer Ausstellungsform*, Zurich: Verlag für Architektur, [1953].

interpretation and unconventional research strategies. Beyond exhibition catalogs, which primarily list objects on view, academic engagement with these programs has remained sparse. It has typically been confined to isolated case studies that focus on objects on display, rather than broader analyses of traveling exhibitions as a distinct format.

Despite limited scholarly attention, traveling exhibitions have played a vital role in museum practice: reaching larger and smaller cities and towns, they have facilitated the circulation of taste and knowledge, bridged cultural divides, fostered forms of cultural exchange and understanding, and brought audiences beyond the traditional confines of museums – offering modes of access and visibility that conventional displays could not consistently achieve. They also offered opportunities for curatorial research and publication that would otherwise have been impossible within the funding climates of their time, and contributed to the gradual de-hierarchization of exhibition genres, opening space for displays that moved beyond strictly art-historical paradigms and incorporated materials and approaches from a broader cultural field.

Today, as the International Council of Museums (ICOM) reaffirms the museum's responsibility to address broader social mandates, these initiatives warrant renewed attention as experimental arenas. Reconsidered from this vantage point, traveling exhibitions emerge as key sites for disseminating culture and spaces where the museum's social role is tested and reimagined. Examining them clarifies how and why artefacts, people, and ideas were displaced from their original contexts, the networks that supported these events, the routes through which items traveled, and the shifting meanings they acquired along the way. They also show how traveling exhibitions influenced collecting practices, shaped museum acquisitions, and stimulated interest among private collectors well beyond the time and spaces occupied

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by their itineraries. Equally important is to consider where the funding for traveling exhibitions came from, since financial backing often shaped their content and priorities, aligning curatorial narratives – sometimes subtly, sometimes overtly – with the agendas of sponsoring institutions, governments, or corporations. Recognizing this trajectory is vital to understanding how traveling exhibitions, once seen as marginal to museological discourse, developed as a focus for innovation in exhibition design and continue to shape the cultural dynamics of our present.

From Margins to Model: The Traveling Exhibition Format

In the 1950s, traveling exhibitions became a central concern for museum professionals and designers, who had to rethink the organization, interpretation, and communication of exhibitions amid limited financial resources. Their growing prominence mirrored broader political, societal, and cultural shifts, as institutions recognized the potential of mobile displays to strengthen cultural and political ties, foster economic exchange, and engage new publics through more inclusive and dynamic forms of communication.

Notably, the volumes edited by British architect and designer Misha Black (1951),[4] American industrial designer George Nelson (1953),[5] and Swiss painter and graphic artist Richard Paul Lohse (1953)[6] offered frameworks of best practices that supported designers and architects in addressing these challenges, with a particular emphasis on traveling exhibitions as an emerging exhibition format. These publications served not only as guides to exhibition design but also as platforms for disseminating visual strategies through the photographs they included – images that still stand as testimony to postwar display solutions (fig. 2). Moreover, they reflected the emergence – and growing acceptance – of a certain degree of standardization, regarded as necessary and perhaps as an inevitable precondition for modern exhibition practices.

At the same time, they captured what Nelson described as "a change in our feelings about space,"[7] which highlighted a shift in spatial thinking and formal experimentation. Modular structures, flexible layouts, and immersive environments – strategies widely inspired by the visual language of Austrian American designer Herbert Bayer[8] – responded not only to logistical needs, but also to evolving ideas of perception, experience, and public engagement. Bayer would later reflect on these tendencies, and in 1961, characterized traveling exhibitions as modern displays designed to disseminate information beyond permanent museum spaces. Drawing on his own experience, he stressed that such exhibitions should be on a human scale, straightforward to assemble, and focused on the clarity of the displays rather than the prominence of their supporting structures.[9]

Parallel to design approaches, museum practitioners were working to develop and share practical methods and standards to guide curatorial exhibition planning and implementation. Perhaps unsurprisingly, some of the earliest overviews of the subject came from women

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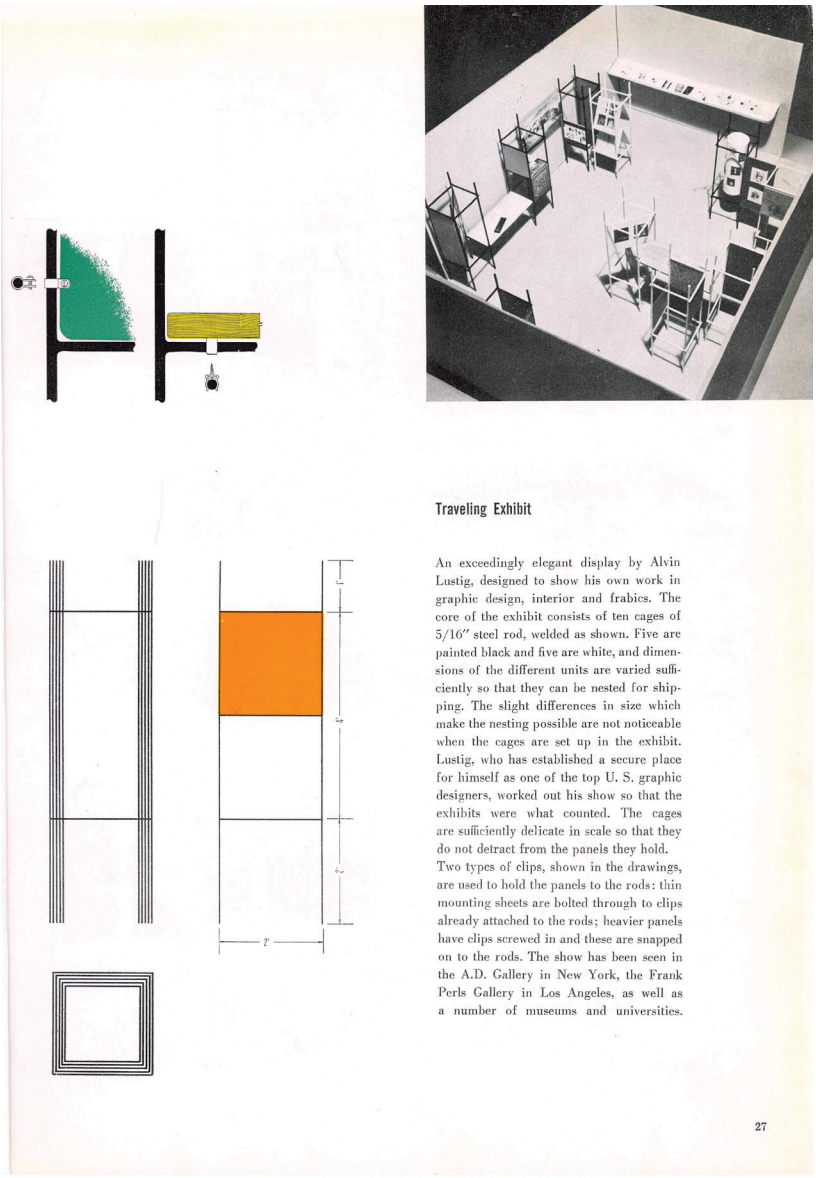

Traveling Exhibit

An exceedingly elegant display by Alvin Lustig, designed to show his own work in graphic design, interior and frabics. The core of the exhibit consists of ten cages of 5/16″ steel rod, welded as shown. Five are painted black and five are white, and dimensions of the different units are varied sufficiently so that they can be nested for shipping. The slight differences in size which make the nesting possible are not noticeable when the cages are set up in the exhibit. Lustig, who has established a secure place for himself as one of the top U. S. graphic designers, worked out his show so that the exhibits were what counted. The cages are sufficiently delicate in scale so that they do not detract from the panels they hold. Two types of clips, shown in the drawings, are used to hold the panels to the rods: thin mounting sheets are bolted through to clips already attached to the rods; heavier panels have clips screwed in and these are snapped on to the rods. The show has been seen in the A.D. Gallery in New York, the Frank Perls Gallery in Los Angeles, as well as a number of museums and universities.

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Fig. 02: *Traveling Exhibit*: images and construction details are from an exhibition designed by Alvin Lustig, displayed at the A.D. Gallery in New York, the Frank Perls Gallery in Los Angeles, and other venues. Nelson G., *Display*, New York, Whitney Publications, 1953.

working in the field – indicating a readiness to embrace change and to identify latent possibilities in areas often considered peripheral within the broader hierarchy of museological concerns.[10] Their contributions were analytical and strategic, producing case-based frameworks that could serve as adaptable models across diverse contexts.[11]

These matters were given comprehensive treatment in the 1950 issue of the ICOM journal *Museum* (then *Museum International*), that brought together accounts from leading figures in various countries to offer a systematic account of the state of circulating exhibitions at mid-century. These authors presented a range of examples – drawing on Polish,[12] Italian,[13] Mexican,[14] English,[15] and Scottish[16] experiences – accompanied by technical data, practical recommendations, and reflections on challenges encountered locally but relevant to the broader international community.

Grace L. McCann Morley, director of the San Francisco Museum of Art,[17] contributed the keynote article, setting the tone for the volume by situating her discussion within the broader history of museum lending services.[18] She described these as a relatively recent practice in many parts of the world, highlighting the century-old lending program of the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) as a key early precedent.[19] In examining the international development of these services, she observed how they spread progressively from Britain[20] to the United States,[21] and in Canada, where a dedicated service was created in the 1920s, followed by South Africa and Australia during the 1930s. She also considered recent undertakings in Poland, Mexico, Australia, Israel, and Pakistan, and explored *exhibitions in trailers* at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History and the Polish National Museum's *museobus*. Absent from her survey – perhaps owing to the Cold War climate – were Soviet-era examples such as the agitprop trains and ships of the October Revolution, whose outreach pursued more overtly political and markedly different aims than their Western counterparts.[22]

Furthermore, Morley noted significant variation in the adoption of

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circulating exhibitions across disciplinary domains. She found them most developed in the visual arts – painting, graphic arts, popular and industrial arts, and architectural illustration – whereas domains such as science, technology, natural history, archaeology, and ethnology had only recently begun to experiment with temporary and traveling formats, often on a smaller scale (fig. 3).[23] She attributed this slower uptake to the later introduction of temporary exhibition practices in these fields and the absence of specialized circulation agencies comparable to those in the art world.[24] In Latin America, this issue came into sharper focus after UNESCO's 1958 Regional Seminar on the Educational Role of Museums in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where museologist Georges-Henri Rivière, Director-General of ICOM, stressed itinerancy as a means of extending access to remote regions – underscoring both the promise and the logistical challenges of circulating scientific and technical collections.

Such logistical challenges had been central to Morley's analysis as well, particularly the safeguarding of artworks. While traveling exhibitions had the advantage of placing minimal demands on host-museum staff, they posed significant technical and operational challenges – from secure packing and reliable transport to adaptable installations. For unique and valuable works, particularly in the fine and decorative arts, rigorous planning and expert handling were essential to minimizing potential damage.[25]

Similar concerns were also voiced at an institutional level. Questions about its vulnerabilities gained prominence as the traveling exhibition format became more clearly defined and associated with specific features. They were openly debated in UNESCO's programs for 1950 and 1951, leading to a recommendation to reduce the number of circulating art exhibitions, while also underscoring the need for sound, experienced methods to ensure safe circulation.

Within three years, however, the response shifted from transnational debates, with their interplay of common ground and contention, to a distinctly national orientation: in 1953, Elodie Courter Osborn – a former director of circulating exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York[26] – based her UNESCO *Manual of Travelling Exhibitions* primarily on US methods and, above all, on MoMA practice, regarded as exemplary in its inclusion of a wide range of media, from painting and sculpture to the graphic and industrial arts, as well as architectural models (fig. 4).[27] Framed as a manual for international use – covering packing, transport, and insurance – the handbook presented the American approach as the standard for all. This was no neutral choice: it dovetailed with the era's ideological contests, with UNESCO functioning as a platform for advancing Western cultural priorities. Agencies such as the United States Information Agency (USIA) actively promoted the supposed superiority of the American system, making traveling exhibitions one of their preferred instruments of influence abroad.[28]

The vibrant postwar and Cold War context in which traveling exhibitions were conceived and circulated

Fig. 03: Exhibition S*tories in Hair and Fur*, Cranbrook Institute of Science, Bloomfield Hills (Michigan), 1950. Osborn Courter E., *Manual of Travelling Exhibitions*, Paris, UNESCO, 1953.

Fig. 04: Exhibition *You and Your Neighbourhood*: a school exhibition by the Educational Programme of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, comprising charts, photo panels, labels, and a modular model packed in a fitted case that also served as its display unit. Osborn Courter E., *Manual of Travelling Exhibitions*, Paris, UNESCO, 1953.

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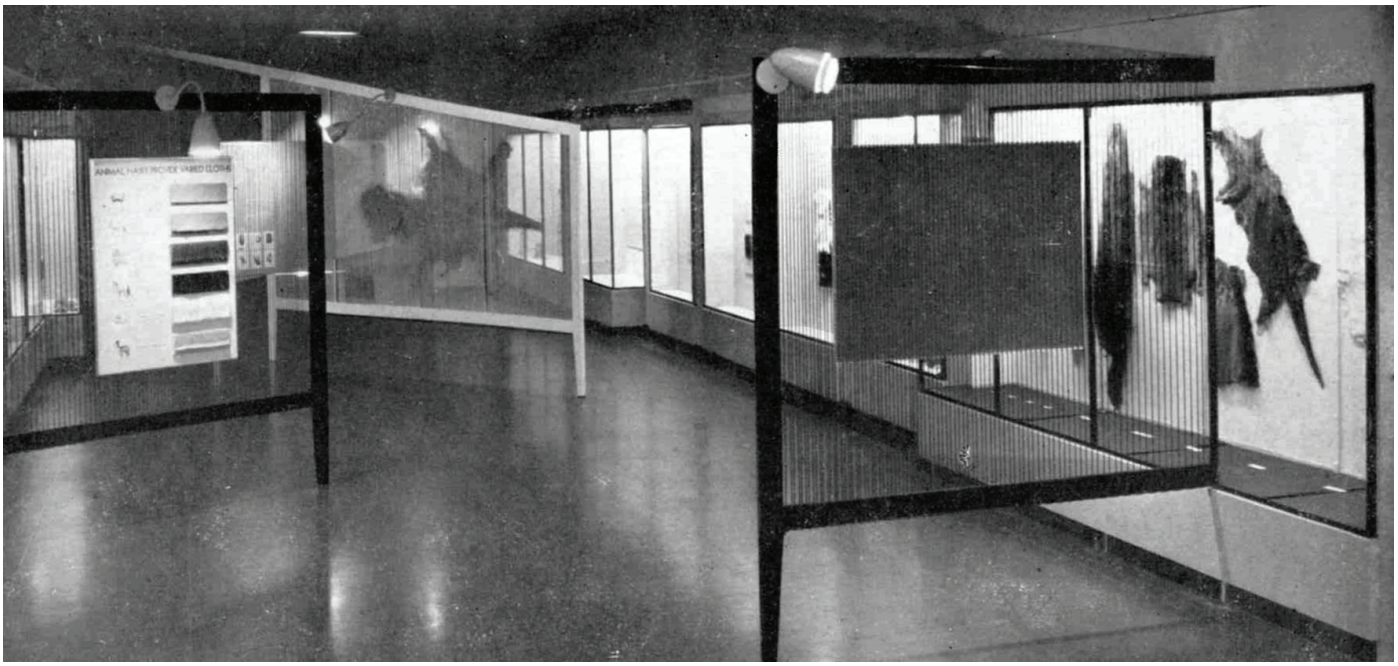

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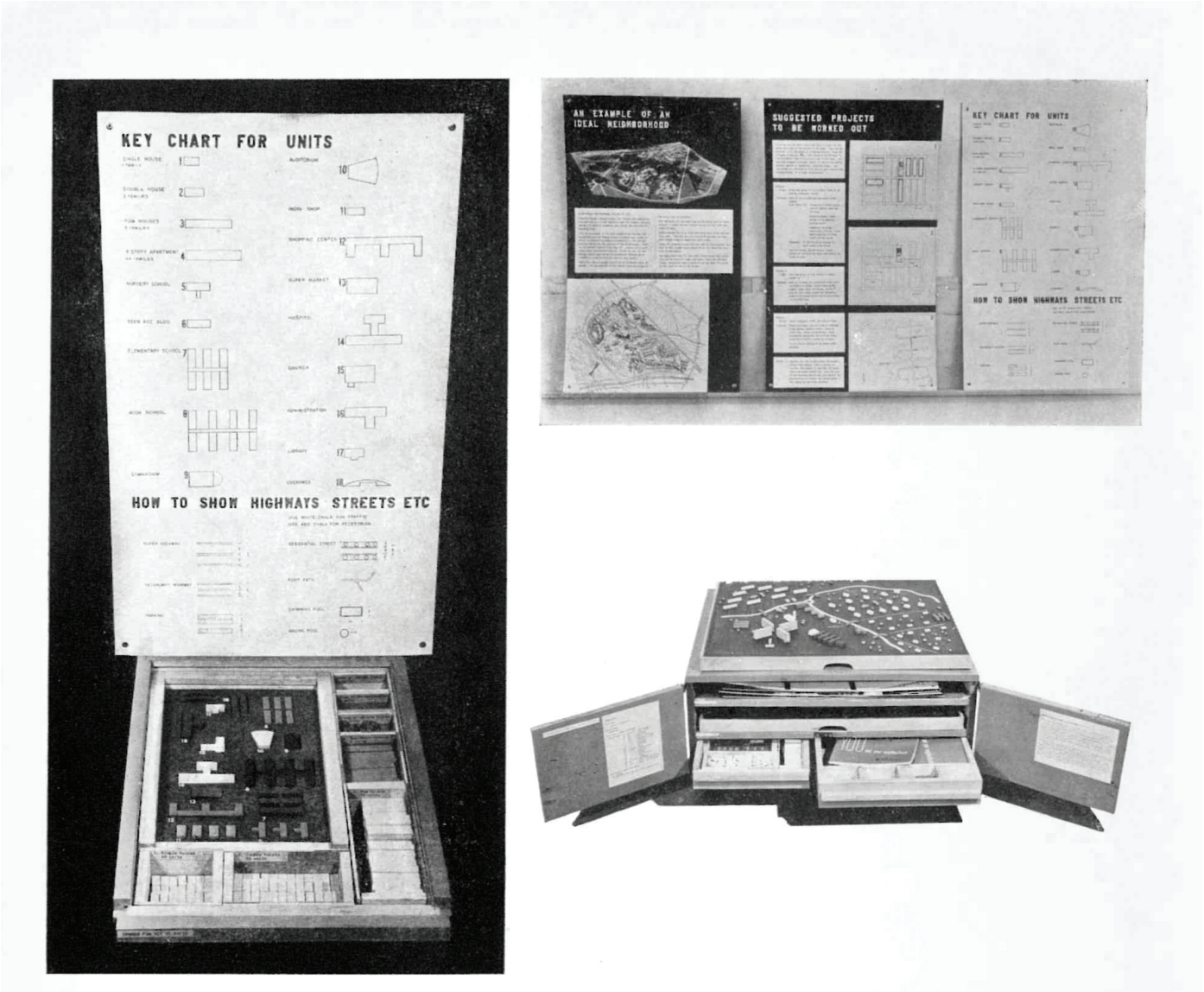

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– and in which the format became firmly established – goes a long way toward explaining why this period has remained such a fertile ground for recent scholarship and curatorial practice. It was a moment when artistic experimentation, exhibition design, and political agendas were deeply intertwined, creating a field as complex as it was dynamic. This richness continues to attract attention in different ways: doctoral research[29] and academic publications[30] have re-examined the diplomatic, ideological, and artistic stakes of mid-century programs. Research projects[31] and scholarly forums[32] have investigated the institutional networks and strategies behind them; and museums and research centers – drawing on these studies – have staged reconstructions and reinterpretations of landmark displays.[33] Exhibitions such as *Art Interrupted: Advancing American Art and the Politics of Cultural Diplomacy* (United States, 2012-2014),[34] *A Designed Life: Contemporary American Textiles, Wallpapers and Containers & Packaging, 1951-54* (United States, 2018-2021),[35] and *Made in Italy. Destinazione America 1945-1954* (Lucca, 2025)[36] (fig. 5) are not merely undertakings of historical recovery, but efforts that revisit pivotal moments in cultural history as living legacies that continue to shape our present. Conceived with the aim of engaging a non-specialized audience, these exhibitions articulate the enduring relevance of such episodes, framing the forms of consolidation achieved not as definitive endpoints, but as foundations for the new cultural trajectories that unfolded within the shifting geopolitical landscape of the following decades.

New Directions in a Changing World

In the early 1960s, the wave of decolonization across Africa and Asia prompted UNESCO and ICOM to reconsider the role of museums in newly sovereign states, positioning them within broader agendas of nation-building and international cultural diplomacy.[37] It was in this climate of institutional redefinition that *Temporary and Travelling Exhibitions* appeared in 1963.[38]

The volume addressed both temporary exhibitions – with essays on science museums (Lothar P. Witteborg, American Museum of Natural History), art museums (H.L.C. Jaffé, University of Amsterdam), and museums in so-called "technically underdeveloped countries" (Hiroshi Daifuku, UNESCO) – and the organization of traveling exhibitions. It underscored how both formats were tied to the period's political, economic, and cultural agendas, where exhibitions functioned as instruments of diplomacy, development, and national self-representation. The growing prominence of such topics reflected several converging factors: innovations in materials, exhibition design, and curatorial practice, together with the need for museums – often reliant on public support – to demonstrate their value by reaching larger and more diverse audiences. Temporary displays provided fresh content that encouraged repeat visits and renewed engagement with permanent collections.[39] Traveling exhibitions – produced by museums, agencies, or governments – broadened this role beyond individual institutions, serving as cultural exchange instruments and vehicles for projecting institutional

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Fig. 05: Exhibition *Made in Italy. Destinazione America 1945–1954*, Fondazione Ragghianti, Lucca Iitaly) 2025. Detail of the section *Viaggio in Italia (The Italian Journey)*, with the Garden Vase for the Società Ceramica by Angelo Biancini. In the background, a detail of a photograph shows its display in the *Italy at Work* exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 1950. Foto Alcide.

and national ambitions.

The section on traveling exhibitions was a revised version of Osborn's 1953 *Manual of Travelling Exhibitions*, a reference work that quickly went out of print. The new edition was prepared under the supervision of Grace McCann Morley, who had also contributed the foreword to the first edition, thereby bridging the two publications. The update maintained the manual's original focus on standardizing the practical aspects of circulation, while also enriching it with additional case studies and new materials, display techniques, and professional practices that had emerged since the mid-1950s. Although it drew on examples beyond the United States, the American model remained the underlying reference point.

This drive toward procedural uniformity marked an intensification of earlier efforts to systematize museum and exhibition practices – finding its design counterpart in James H. Carmel's volume[40] – while at the same time exposing its limits: standardized criteria often overlooked geographical, economic, and social differences, as well as the varied missions and capacities of host institutions. Normalization thus embodied both the ambition of professional consolidation at the expense of local specificities and interpretive diversity.

The resulting tension between efficiency and local responsiveness shaped subsequent discussions. From the early 1970s, attention shifted from purely technical concerns toward the relationship between

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exhibitions and their audiences, increasingly framed by questions of cultural identity. In 1973, zoologist Kjell Engström – director of the Swedish Museum of Natural History – argued that temporary and traveling exhibitions could play a key role in public education on urgent environmental issues, such as pollution and nature conservation.[41] Drawing on Swedish examples, he demonstrated how these formats could combine scientific accuracy with accessible presentation, using clear communication and striking visuals to engage diverse audiences.

Such concerns echoed the broader museological debates of the period, which emphasized the "new" museum's embeddedness in society and its accountability to communities. In 1979, French museologist Hugues de Varine situated exhibitions within this renovated conception: no longer neutral displays of objects, they became tools of communication through which researchers – naturalists, archaeologists, curators, and ethnologists – could share their findings with local communities, fostering awareness of cultural heritage and environment.[42] In line with Rivière's notion of the museum as "a mirror in which the local population views itself to discover its image,"[43] De Varine advanced a model of traveling exhibitions in collaboration with host communities and rooted in their specific histories, resources, and needs.

This audience-centered turn is further exemplified by the work of Canadian scholars D.I. Greenglass (Research Department, Ministry of Labour, Government of Ontario) and D.S. Abbey (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education), whose research on the traveling exhibition *Steuben: Seventy Years of American Glassmaking* (Toronto, 1976) shifted the focus to the ways people engaged with the objects on view.[44] Their study examined how factors such as prior knowledge, cultural background, and object interpretation influenced visitors' experiences, underscoring the value of integrating audience research into exhibition planning. This emphasis on the visitor would remain central to some subsequent studies,[45] and persist in academic studies – mainly associated with science and natural history – where the museum's communicative and educational roles were foregrounded.[46]

Object on the Move

In the first half of the 20th century, traveling exhibitions occupied an open space of remarkable possibility – experimental in form, diverse in purpose, and unbound by the institutional orthodoxies that, from the 1950s, would come to codify the field, crystallizing in Osborn's 1953 manual. They could function simultaneously as platforms for artistic exchange, diplomatic tools, pedagogical vehicles, and instruments of ideological persuasion. Recent scholarship has increasingly approached this period through case studies that span a wide spectrum: from modern movements (Impressionism[47] in 1907-1908), the avant-garde (Futurism[48] of 1912; *Entartete Kunst*[49] in 1938-41), and monographic shows devoted to individual artists (Ivan Meštrović[50] in 1924-1926 and the Raphael centenary exhibition in 1930),[51] to architecture and design (the Bauhaus[52] in 1929-1930, Giuseppe Pagano[53] in

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1938-1939 and *The Beautiful Town*[54] in 1940-1942), along with other initiatives – notably the Virginia Museum's program[55] – that contributed to defining key chapters in the history of art.

While these studies have shed valuable light on specific episodes, they also reveal how traveling exhibitions, whether conceived to affirm avant-garde networks, consolidate canon formation, or mobilise heritage for educational and commemorative purposes, can only be fully understood when considered in relation to the broader currents of circulation and exchange that shaped them.

It is against this backdrop – of early experimentation and growing scholarly attention – that the contributions gathered in the present issue map this relatively underexamined terrain, reconstructing the circuits of art exhibitions as they circulated across cities, nations, and empires. In doing so, they bring European and North American perspectives into dialogue, highlighting the historical, political, and institutional forces that shaped exhibitionary practices. Set in motion under different political regimes and institutional contexts, these case studies reveal traveling exhibitions as dynamic agents of cultural circulation: conduits for transmitting knowledge, arenas for political negotiation, laboratories for curatorial experimentation, and catalysts for forging connections between institutions, audiences, and practitioners. Placed in dialogue, they form a network of relations akin to a Warburgian atlas: connections emerge through juxtaposition, as affinities and dissonances surface across geographies and decades, linking institutions, publics, and individual actors in shifting constellations.

The issue opens with an article by Ulrike Müller, who addresses the circulation of modern art, eschewing the conventional narrative that privileges the hegemonic role of the Museum of Modern Art. Her analysis traces the emergence, between 1900 and 1929, of a dynamic network of American museums engaged in organizing traveling exhibitions of modern art – a development propelled principally by smaller, recently founded institutions such as the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, the Detroit Museum of Art, and the City Art Museum of Saint Louis. Centering her inquiry on the Albright Art Gallery under the directorship of Cornelia B. Sage (1876-1936), Müller draws upon extensive archival holdings to elucidate the strategic deployment of traveling exhibitions as a means of advancing institutional professionalization and aligning museum practice with modern exhibitionary paradigms. Through a nuanced examination of Sage's activities, objectives, and professional networks, she demonstrates the formative role of these early initiatives in shaping the operational and curatorial identities of American art museums, thereby establishing the infrastructural and conceptual foundations upon which MoMA would subsequently construct its influential exhibition strategies.

Shifting from the United States to Central Europe, Samuel D. Albert examines Hungarian traveling art exhibitions of the 1920s and 1930s, framing them as instruments of cultural diplomacy in the turbulent dec-

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ades following the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Under the Horthy regime, the newly created Hungarian National Fine Arts Council organized Hungarian Representative Exhibitions, first shown in Budapest and then circulated to European capitals. Early iterations (1920-1925) were accompanied by catalogues advancing an explicit revisionist agenda in response to the Treaty of Trianon. By the late 1920s, rhetoric softened, exhibitions were integrated into larger international events, and modernist and abstract works gained prominence. In the 1930s, the circuit expanded to the United States, notably with the *Contemporary Hungarian Art* exhibition at the Smithsonian. Albert argues that this evolution from overt propaganda to more nuanced cultural engagement reflected the refinement of Hungarian foreign policy and the emergence of a distinct national modernism.

Extending the focus on politically inflected exhibition practices, Priscilla Manfren turns to a case in which the propagandistic function was neither incidental nor moderated over time: *La Somalia pittoresca* by Giorgio Grazia (1934-1940). Emerging within the broader fascist campaign to instil a "colonial consciousness" among Italians – in the wake of military ventures in East Africa – Grazia's extensive pictorial corpus was swiftly appropriated for political ends. Over several years, the exhibition toured fifteen Italian cities, functioning as a pedagogical tool to familiarise local audiences with the empire's overseas territories and reinforce the regime's expansionist ideology. Drawing on materials from several archives, Manfren reconstructs the exhibition's itinerary, reception, and visual strategies. Her analysis situates *La Somalia pittoresca* within a dense network of institutional actors – including the Fascist Colonial Institute and the Fascist Institute of Culture – whose coordinated efforts bridged centre and periphery, elite discourse and mass mobilisation, revealing how traveling exhibitions could merge artistic production with the rhetorical imperatives of imperial propaganda.

Moving from the nationalist frames explored by Albert and Manfren, Christine E. Brennan turns to a socially progressive, community-oriented model of exhibition outreach. In *A Museum on the March: Neighborhood Circulating Exhibitions at The Met, Their Evolution, Reception, and Influence*, she reconstructs the Metropolitan Museum of Art's pioneering program (1933-1942) that brought original works into schools, settlement houses, libraries, and civic buildings across New York's poorest districts. Drawing on rich archival evidence, Brennan situates the initiative within the Depression-era drive to democratize cultural access, while tracing its operational structures, thematic range, and strategies for embedding displays within the fabric of neighborhood life. Her analysis foregrounds Richard F. Bach's role in shaping the program as a *museum without walls*, one that reached more than two million viewers and redefined the museum's civic mandate. By examining contemporary reception and postwar legacies, including later adaptations and eventual decline, Brennan illuminates how the Neighborhood Circulating Exhibitions served as a model for socially responsive museum practice, expanding the bounda-

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ries of what a metropolitan art institution could be.

From Brennan's account of community-based engagement in Depression-era New York, Laura Elliott turns to the collaborative, transatlantic circuits that paralleled and informed such initiatives. Her essay recovers the Victoria and Albert Museum's role in three major US loan exhibitions staged between 1945 and 1947 – *English Domestic Needlework*, *Masterpieces of English Painting: Hogarth, Constable and Turner*, and MoMA's Henry Moore retrospective – each positioned at the intersection of curatorial innovation and Anglo-American cultural diplomacy in the early Cold War. Drawing on extensive primary sources, Elliott challenges the view of the V&A as insular, recasting these ventures as testing grounds for postwar display strategies, gallery reorganization, and the projection of British cultural identity abroad. Under Leigh Ashton's directorship, the museum leveraged curatorial expertise, strategic object selection, and institutional prestige to shape the reception of British art in the United States, while absorbing elements of American modernist display. Situating these collaborations within broader histories of transnational museum exchange, she traces continuities from the South Kensington model to mid-century soft power, illuminating the asymmetries of an Anglo-American partnership that was mutually advantageous yet structured within US-led frameworks of cultural authority. As with the other contributions, this analysis is deeply rooted in archival and documentary sources.

Tracing Paths, Opening Routes

A comprehensive account of traveling exhibitions in the first half of the 20th century has yet to be written. What exists is largely pieced together from fragments dispersed across archives, disciplines, and geographies - traces unevenly preserved by the contingencies of archival survival and the shifting attentions of scholarship.

By setting fragments recovered from disparate contexts into dialogue, the contributions gathered in this issue open up a reconsideration of the historiographical image of the field, foregrounding the entanglement of circulation, political agency, and curatorial experimentation.

Their analytical acuity is grounded in their sustained engagement with primary sources and archival holdings – ranging from institutional correspondence and exhibition catalogues to press coverage and visual documentation. This documentary substratum anchors the reconstructions in the material contingencies of curatorial practice and brings back into view actors, negotiations, and tactical manoeuvres often effaced from authorized accounts. In this respect, the articles demonstrate how archival inquiry can elucidate the operational logics of circulation, situate it within broader political and cultural currents, and furnish a critical apparatus for rethinking both the historiography and the prospective trajectories of museum and exhibition practices.

Writing from different angles of their scholarly and professional trajectories, and from vantage points inside and outside museums, the issue's contributors bring a plurality of perspectives that combine embed-

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ded expertise with critical distance. Placed in dialogue, these studies generate a dynamic network of associations across geographies and decades, linking institutions, actors, and audiences in constellations of meaning that resist a single, linear account. On the strength of their archival grounding, they open fertile terrain for interrogating the entanglements of exhibitionary form, political agency, and social transformation, underscoring the necessity of transdisciplinary methodologies attentive to multiple viewpoints, capable of apprehending both the material infrastructures that enable the movement of objects and the delicate strands through which ideas, narratives, and cultural exchanges circulate.

They also point to the need to look beyond museums, acknowledging the roles of other actors – politicians, diplomats, collectors, architects, designers, businesspeople, critics, and journalists – whose contributions shaped the planning and reception of these events. As Gabriela Świtek observed, the geography of art exhibitions entails not only the physical movement of objects across national borders but also the negotiation of interpretive borders, where phenomena may appear politically proximate yet are embedded in cultural and historical contexts that differ markedly from those of their point of origin.[56] These crossings shape how exhibitions are framed, received, and repurposed in each locality, revealing circulation as a process in which meaning is constantly refracted rather than transferred.

The traces of these differing receptions are often preserved in disparate sources held across various archives. Research drawing on archives from different institutional, national, or scholarly fields could open up new perspectives, providing a broader and more nuanced understanding of traveling exhibitions and the networks that generated and sustained them. Looking ahead, network analysis offers a promising way to map connections, recover strategies and documents at their core, and reveal the layered benefits perceived by different actors – opening new paths for understanding not only how and why exhibitions traveled, but also how and why they shaped, and were shaped by the worlds they moved through.

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Endnotes:

1 In 1993, Desvallées introduced the term *expographie* in order to "designate the *mise en exposition* and all that concerns not only the spatial arrangement, but everything that revolves around the exhibitions [...]. It aims at developing a language and a mode of expression that faithfully translate the scientific program of an exhibition" [translated from the French by the author. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's]. Desvallées 1998, p. 221.

2 Bennett 1995, p. 333.

3 In 1950, museologist Grace L. McCann Morley noted: "Interesting examples of the use of reproduction in traveling exhibitions: Canada has long used reproductions for small exhibitions; in France, though circulating exhibitions are not much used, les Amis de l'Art have sent sets of reproductions of art to small centres in the provinces and North Africa, and the Musée des beaux□arts at Rheims has organized exhibitions of reproductions for schools of the region; in Pakistan the North□west Frontier Province Museum of Peshawar sends replicas of its archeological exhibits to towns in the provinces: the Tel Aviv Museum in Israel has in use 70 exhibitions of reproductions on various subjects and periods of art history which travel, often accompanied by a lecturer, to the villages, settlements, schools, army camps and military hospitals where they are always in demand. As described in the articles here, Italy's new educational service and the National Museum of Mexico's circulating exhibitions to museums outside the capital both employ reproductions to supplement the originals used". McCann Morley 1950, p. 266, footnote 1.

4 British painter and designer James Sylvester Holland (1905-1996) authored the chapter on traveling exhibitions included in Black's book. Black 1951, pp. 82-91; pp. 122-125.

5 *Conceived by Nelson as an introduction to modern exhibition and interior design strategies for an American audience, the volume featured photographs from the archives of Interiors magazine, which sponsored its publication*. Nelson 1953, pp. 27-28.

6 Lohse 1953.

7 Nelson 1953, p. 9.

8 Bayer 1939-1940.

9 Bayer noted how traveling exhibitions – shaped by De Stijl and constructivist ideas – employed lightweight, demountable, and flexible structural systems, citing early milestones such as architect Frederick Kiesler's Austrian Pavilion at the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris (1925) and the prefabricated tubular frameworks used in Milan's Triennale (1934 and 1951). According to him, postwar designs – like the Container Corporation of America's wooden structures of 1945 – further advanced portability and adaptability, yet despite the proliferation of connector systems, most remained too cumbersome to assemble and dismantle. Bayer 1961, pp. 281-283.

10 See, for instance, McCann Morley 1950 and Osborn Courter 1953.

11 For further discussion of this topic, see Hill 2016 and Temkin, Silver-Kohn 2024.

12 In 1950, Polish contributions to *Museum International* included essays by Kazimierz Michałowski (1901-1981), a classical archaeologist and assistant director of the National Museum in Warsaw, celebrated for his excavations in Egypt and work on Greco-Roman portraiture, and Stanisław Lorentz (1899-1991), an art historian and the museum's long-time director, known for his leadership in conservation and scholarship on classical and baroque Polish art. For their contributions, see Michalowski 1950; Lorentz 1950. Recent studies have examined specific instances of traveling exhibitions within their political and aesthetic contexts. For example, architect and designer Stanisław Zamecznik's communist-era projects – which blended modernist spatial strategies with state cultural policy, balancing aesthetic innovation with ideological demands – have been discussed in

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detail by Mamo, Wrobron 2018. For an overview on traveling exhibitions in the context of relations between Indian and Polish cultures in the 1970s, see Świtek 2024.

13 Italian art historian and former director of the Galleria Estense in Modena, Giulio Carlo Argan (1909–1992) promoted educational and traveling exhibitions in the 1950s, notably through the newly established Centre for the Educational Function of Museums in Rome. See Argan 1950.

14 Mexican anthropologist Daniel Ferdinando Rubin de la Borbolla (1903–1990), founder of the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia and Director of the National Museum of Anthropology from 1946, outlined in *Museum International* (1950) described the museum's new two-fold program of temporary exhibitions and loans of collections. Rubin de la Borbolla 1950.

15 Peter Castle Floud (1911–1960), Keeper of the Department of Circulation at the Victoria and Albert Museum, reported on its traveling loan service. See Floud 1950. Matthew B. Hodge, Director of the Leicester Museum and Art Gallery, outlined his museum's approach to temporary exhibitions in the same issue. See Hodge 1950.

16 Douglas A. Allan (1896-1967), a geologist and former lecturer at the Universities of Edinburgh and Durham, served as Director of Liverpool City Museums (1929-1944), President of the Museums Association (1942-1946), and Director of the Royal Scottish Museum from 1945. In *Museum International*, he discussed the organization of circulating exhibitions in Scottish museums. Allan 1950.

17 Grace L. McCann Morley (1900-1985) was a pioneering advocate for modern art and broad public access. Following her founding directorship in San Francisco (1935-1958), she held senior posts at the Cincinnati Art Museum (1930-1933), the Guggenheim Museum, and UNESCO, and later directed the National Museum in New Delhi, where she contributed to India's postcolonial cultural development. Through her work with international museum organizations – including the American Association of Museums, the Association of Art Museum Directors, and the American Federation of Arts, and ICOM – she advanced professional standards and advised museums across developing nations. For a biographical profile in the context of art museums, see Kirk 2009 and Potter 2015.

18 McCann Morley 1950.

19 Wainwright, Gere 2002, p. 19. On the significance of traveling exhibitions within the museological discourse of the United Kingdom, see also Wakefield 1971. Wakefield was Keeper of the Department of Circulation at the V&A between 1960 and 1975.

20 In the United Kingdom, the Art Exhibitions Bureau (1919), the Empire Art Loan Exhibitions Society (1931), and the Arts Council of Great Britain (1946) became key organizers of circulating exhibitions, promoting the work of living British artists at home and abroad, introducing contemporary art from other countries, and supporting regional museums and galleries.

21 In the United States, the American Federation of Arts (AFA, 1909) emerged as the first and most influential agency for circulating exhibitions. From 1913 to 1927, it also coordinated United States participation in international expositions held in Rome, Buenos Aires, Paris, London, and Amsterdam. The Western Association of Art Museum Directors (1916) also played a significant role in organizing exhibition exchanges. During the 1920s, the College Art Association (CAA, 1911) launched a program of traveling exhibitions for colleges, universities, and smaller museums, advancing its mission to promote excellence in scholarship and to teach the history and criticism of the visual arts. By the 1930s, demand for traveling art exhibitions exceeded what the AFA and CAA could supply. In response, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) inaugurated its own cost-effective and widely popular program in 1933, offering exhibitions of "modern art" to schools and small museums. This trajectory culminated in 1952 with the establishment of the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) whose international activity focused primarily on importing foreign exhibitions for domestic circulation. On the MoMA program, see *Circulating Exhibitions*… 1954; on the service's role in bringing Smithsonian exhibitions to communities across the United States, see Burnham 1961.

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22 "'Agit-prop' (agitation-propaganda) trains and 'agit-prop ships' traveled to the farthest corners of the country and to the front lines of the Civil War, bringing art to places where people had never seen it or where heavy battles had recently been fought. The walls of these trains and the decks of these ships displayed monumental posters, designed to serve many functions: to create a festive atmosphere, to provide information, and to give the first lessons in art appreciation. People walking alongside the trains reacted with delight, laughing and talking animatedly. Both narrative and allegorical forms of expression were used, and whether the pictures were detailed or stylised, the overall effect was never lost. Notable examples include the 'Red Cossack' train. Such agit-prop trains and ships were also used for meetings with government officials and lecturers, earning the nickname 'All-Union Central Executive Committees on wheels.'" Guerman 1979, p. 22. A related topic – the development of Ukrainian mobile museums – was examined by Ševčuk in 1966, in a special issue of *Museum International* devoted to museums in Ukraine. See Ševčuk 1966.

23 Morley cited examples ranging from the Cranbrook Institute of Science, the Tekniska Museet in Stockholm, and the Palais de la Découverte in Paris – institutions that used temporary exhibitions, some later circulated nationally or internationally. She mentioned the American Laboratory of Anthropology at Santa Fé and the ethnographic museums in Neuchâtel and Geneva, which cooperated on traveling displays. She also noted wartime topical exhibitions in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States, whose popularity encouraged museums to increase the number of temporary shows in their annual programs. McCann Morley 1950, p. 265. For a broad historical overview of science and traveling exhibitions, see Rocha, Marandino 2017, pp. 2-8.

24 Robert T. Hatt (1902–1989) – American zoologist and Director of the Cranbrook Institute of Science (Bloomfield Hills, MI) – was noted for his research on mammals and his development of didactic, serially arranged museum displays, an approach he examined in an article in the 1950 issue of *Museum International*, underscoring the potential of traveling natural science exhibitions to allow more museums to present a wider variety of temporary displays at low cost and with minimal effort. See Hatt 1950, p. 316. From 1944 to 1948, Harriet Dyer Adams (1910–2005) served as the first female curator of the Cranbrook Art Museum, where she organized numerous traveling exhibitions. In 1983, UNESCO published *Mobile Science Exhibition*, forwarded by Morley, documenting several experiences and emphasizing the importance of traveling exhibitions in popularizing science and fostering social and economic development in remote communities. See Bose 1983.

25 According to Morley, reproductions proved especially effective for settings such as schools, clubs, small exhibition centers, and workers' meeting rooms, where the display of large or fragile objects would have been impracticable. McCann Morley 1950, p. 265.

26 Elodie Courter Osborn (1911-1994) joined the staff of the MoMA in 1933, serving first as Secretary of Traveling Exhibitions and later as Director of the Traveling Exhibitions Service (1939-1947). Beyond her museum activities, Osborn played an active role in educational and cultural initiatives: she served as Secretary of the School Building Committee for Salisbury Central School (1950-1954), founded and presided over the Salisbury Film Society (1951), was vice-president of the American Federation of Film Societies (1957-1958), and vice-president of the Salisbury Health Center (1961-1962). For her professional role within the MoMA context, see Tobias 2018 and Silver-Kohn 2024.

27 Osborn Courter 1953. For a critical discussion of Osborn groundbreaking volume, see Mueller, Werbick, Kahny 2018.

28 On this, see Eisenbrand 2018. For an historical overview of US Cultural Exhibition out of the United States, see Wulf 2015, pp. 1-49.

29 Pane 2016, Weddell 2018.

30 Castillo 2005, Eisenbrand 2018, Winton 2018, Kühne 2019, Berrin 2021, Quarantini, Damiani 2021, Bassi 2021, Dubé-Sénécal 2022, Koskinen 2022, Zeller 2023, Gamble 2024, Bohnenblust 2025, Cordera, Turrini 2025.

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31 Among the projects that may be cited are *Voices of Objects. The Italian Design from Museum to Home* (Politecnico di Milano, 2021-2023), directed by P. Cordera, which examined the *Italy at Work (1950-1953)* exhibition and how Italian production was promoted in the United States during the 1950s, and J. Kühne's ongoing project *Promoting the West: The Expositions of the US Exhibition Section in Germany, 1945-1960* (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), which investigates how American exhibitions in postwar Germany fostered a capitalist consumer society and integrated the Federal Republic into the transatlantic West, with case studies including the American Information Centers (1947-1949), the Marshall Plan shows (1950-1952), and Berlin displays such as *ATOM* (1954), *Kleider machen Leute* (1955), and *Unbegrenzter Raum* (1956).

32 See, for instance, the international conference *Italy at Work: The Italian Lifestyle on Display* (Politecnico di Milano, 2022) on the eponymous exhibition and discussed in Cordera, Faggella 2023; or the College Art Association panel *The Global Rise of Traveling Exhibitions at Mid-Century* (Chicago, 2022), illustrating the multiplicity of narratives and approaches to mid-century traveling exhibitions.

33 Among exhibitions relating to the prewar period, one may quote *Art for the Community: The Met's Circulating Textile Exhibitions, 1933–42* (New York, 2020–2021). On this, see Christine Brennan's contribution in this issue.

34 *Art Interrupted* revisited *Advancing American Art*, the 1946 State Department exhibition of contemporary painting intended for an international tour. While initially well received abroad, the project was cancelled after conservative backlash in the US, and in 1948 the works were sold off as government surplus. On this exhibition, see *Art Interrupted* [2012].

35 On this see interview by Federico Maria Giorgi in this issue.

36 On this, see the interview by Alessandro Paolo Lena in this issue.

37 The significance of exhibitions as instruments for disseminating knowledge of foreign cultures received formal international recognition in 1975, when the 18th General Conference of UNESCO adopted the *Recommendation on the International Exchange of Cultural Property*, which urged member states and museums to promote such exchanges in a responsible and mutually beneficial manner.

38 *Temporary and Travelling…* 1963.

39 For early voices championing the enduring centrality of the museum as against the transient over the transient allure of temporary exhibitions, see Gombrich 1968 and Longhi 1969.

40 James H. Carmel (1919-2016) was an American exhibition designer who began his career creating dioramas at the American Museum of Natural History and the Cranbrook Institute of Science. After serving in World War II, he earned an M.A. in Fine Arts from the University of Nebraska and spent two years in London on a Fulbright scholarship. In 1957, he joined Bernard Rudofsky's team for the American Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair. See Carmel 1963.

41 Engström 1973. For the Swedish experiences in a contemporary perspective, see Oloffson 1986, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2002, Arnell 2007 and Bergdahl, Houltz 2016.

42 De Varine 1979.

43 Rivière 1985, p. 183.

44 Greenglass, Abbey 1981.

45 Candito 2001 and Raguet-Candito 2001.

46 Xavier 2012, Zwang 2013, Harker, Badger 2015, Patroclo 2020.

47 Hendren 2019.

48 zu Eltz 1991.

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49 Conceived by the Nazi regime to denounce modern art as corrupt and degenerate, the *Entartete Kunst* (or Degeberate Art) exhibition became one of the most visited exhibitions of its time, attracting millions of visitors. Its sensational presentation and concentration of avant-garde works inadvertently increased public exposure to these movements, ultimately reinforcing the significance of the very art it aimed to discredit. This unintended visibility contributed to the later recognition and canonization of many of the artists it sought to suppress. Zuschlag 1991.

50 Cilia 2016.

51 Carletti, Giometti 2016.

52 The traveling exhibition *10 Years of the Bauhaus* (1929-30) was conceived as a means to promote the Bauhaus to the public, attract new students, and establish contacts with companies and industry. Touring for approximately a year, the exhibition was shown in Basel, Zurich, Dessau, Essen, Breslau, and Mannheim. For different aspects of this show, see Kiese 2015, Zuschlag 2013, Efrussi 2018.

53 Bassi 2020.

54 The traveling exhibition *The Beautiful Town-Entschandelung and Design* (1938-1942) promoted the "cleansing" of urban façades (Entschandelung) and the dissemination of design principles, aligning itself with Nazi cultural policy. Touring across the Reich and into the "German East," it functioned as an architectural counterpart to *Entartete Kunst*, intertwining aesthetic reform, monument protection, and Himmler's *Volks-tumspolitik*. Wiese 2021.

55 Mott 1993.

56 Świtek 2024, p. 56.

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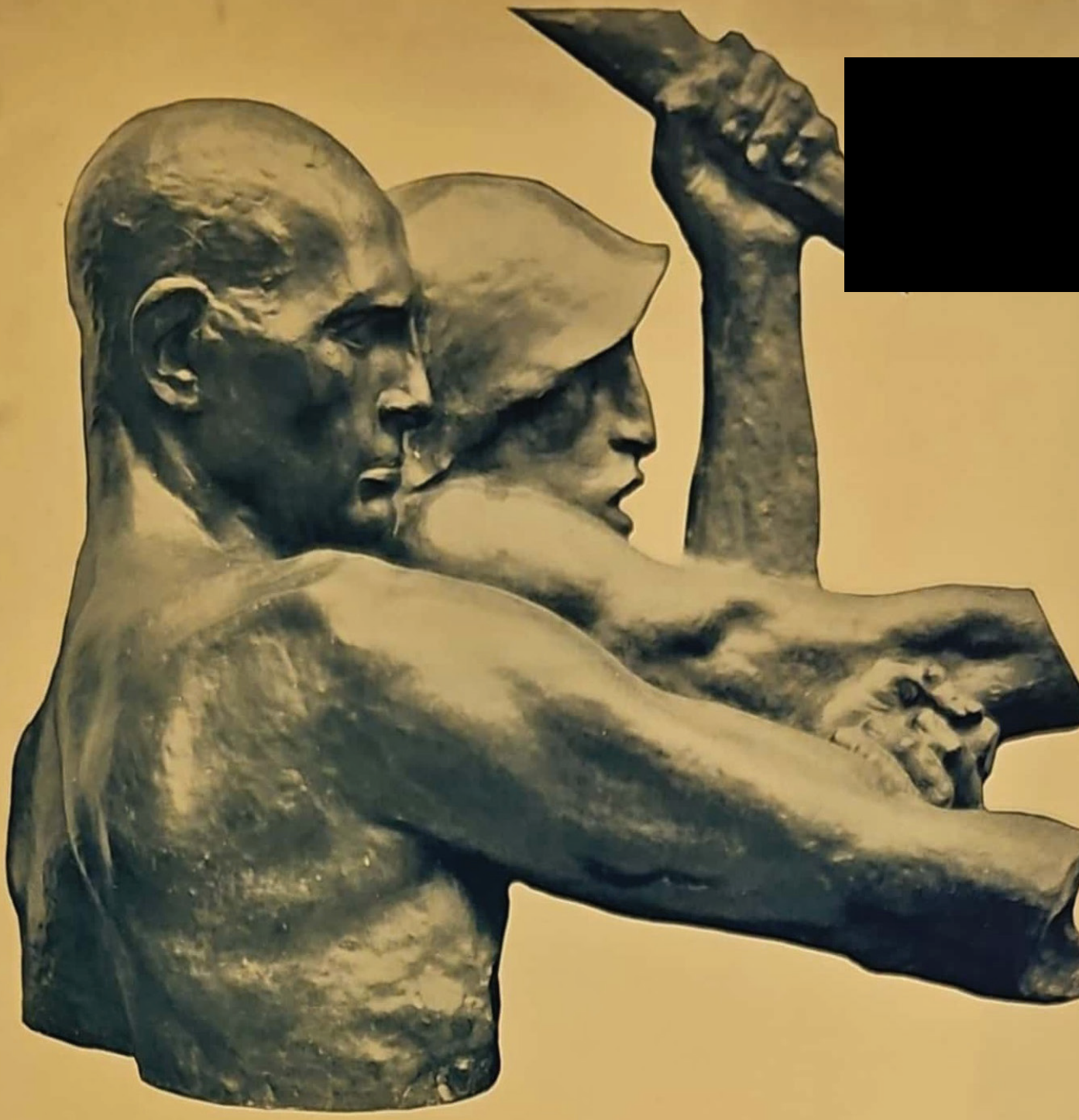

Constantin MEUNIER

Modern Masters on the Move: The Professionalisation of American Art Museums Through Travelling Exhibitions Before MoMA, ca. 1900-1929

Ulrike Müller

Keywords:
Travelling Exhibitions; American Art Museums; Modern Art; Cornelia B. Sage; Exhibition History.

ABSTRACT:

Between 1900 and 1929, a dynamic network of American museums emerged to organize travelling exhibitions of modern art. This development was driven primarily by smaller, recently-established institutions such as the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo (now the Buffalo AKG Art Museum), the Detroit Museum of Art, and the City Art Museum of Saint Louis. This article focuses on the Albright Art Gallery under the directorship of Cornelia B. Sage (1876-1936, director 1910-1924) to shed light on the rapid professionalisation of museums and art exhibitions in early twentieth-century America. Drawing on extensive archival records from the Buffalo AKG Art Museum, the study examines how travelling exhibitions were strategically employed to transform museums into modern, professional institutions. Through an analysis of Sage's activities, objectives, and networks, it highlights the role of travelling exhibitions in shaping the profiles and operations of American art museums during this period – and demonstrates how these earlier initiatives created the groundwork on which The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) would later build its influential exhibition strategies.

Tra il 1900 e il 1929 emerse una rete dinamica di musei americani per organizzare mostre itineranti di arte moderna. Questo sviluppo è stato guidato principalmente da istituzioni più piccole e di recente costituzione come la Albright Art Gallery di Buffalo (ora Buffalo AKG Art Museum), il Detroit Museum of Art e il City Art Museum di Saint Louis. Questo articolo si concentra sulla Albright Art Gallery sotto la direzione di Cornelia B. Sage (1876-1936, direttrice 1910-1924) per far luce sulla rapida professionalizzazione dei musei e delle mostre d'arte nell'America dell'inizio del XX secolo. Attingendo a vasti documenti d'archivio del Buffalo AKG Art Museum, lo studio esamina come le mostre itineranti siano state strategicamente utilizzate per trasformare i musei in istituzioni moderne e professionali. Attraverso un'analisi delle attività, degli obiettivi e delle reti di Sage, si evidenzia il ruolo delle mostre itineranti nel plasmare i profili e le operazioni dei musei d'arte americani durante questo periodo – e mostra come tali iniziative abbiano creato le basi su cui il Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) avrebbe successivamente costruito le proprie influenti strategie espositive.

Opening Picture:

Poster announcing the *Constantin Meunier* Exhibition at Columbia University's Avery Library, New York City, 1914. Columbia University Archives.

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Introduction

In 1953, UNESCO published the *Manual of Travelling Exhibitions*, a comprehensive handbook on organising touring exhibitions authored by Elodie Courter Osborn (1911-1994).[1] Osborn, the first director of the Department for Circulating Exhibitions at The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City from 1933 to 1947, provided practical, technical, administrative, and managerial guidance that established the manual as the "most complete survey of all aspects of travelling exhibitions" of the time.[2] Her work, rooted in extensive practical experience – MoMA organised no less than 461 touring exhibitions between 1931 and 1954[3] – has been credited with playing a pivotal role in professionalising the field of museum exhibitions, particularly travelling exhibitions.[4] The significance of Osborn's contribution is often viewed in conjunction with MoMA's modernist ethos and activities. Reflecting its mission to bring modern art to audiences across the United States, "travelling exhibitions were central to the Museum's educational goals from the start."[5] Thus, the department under Osborn's leadership held an almost "missionary" responsibility.[6]

While the narrative of modernity surrounding MoMA often emphasises innovation and a break from tradition in artistic styles, display modes and communication strategies,[7] it can obscure the museum's reliance on earlier methods that contributed to the professionalisation of museum work. Notably, Osborn's *Manual* remains remarkably silent about the earlier wave of travelling exhibitions that occurred in the United States between approximately 1900 and MoMA's founding in 1929.[8] During this period, a significant number of temporary, often travelling, modern art exhibitions took place in American museums. These efforts – largely initiated by smaller institutions in so-called "peripheral" cities – created foundational structures of exhibition practice, networking, and logistics upon which MoMA would later build.

This phenomenon remains underexplored, with existing studies focusing primarily on fragmented case studies of individual artists, curators and art critics. For example, recent research on the Spanish painter Joaquín Sorolla (1863-1923) has revealed that temporary exhibitions of his work in New York, Chicago, Buffalo, and Saint Louis in 1909 and 1911 greatly influenced the dissemination, popularity and collection (both private and public) of his art in the United States.[9] Similarly, the "scholar-agent" Martin Birnbaum (1878-1970) has been recognized as "one of the foremost innovators" in the exhibition of prints in America before 1920 through the exhibitions of graphic art he arranged for various museums.[10] Additionally, Andrew Walker's research highlights how the proliferation of circuit exhibitions during the 1920s helped establish modern art and criticism in America before MoMA institutionalised modernism.[11] These studies make clear that the modern art exhibitions resulted from extensive networks and collaborative efforts among museum curators, directors, and other agents, yet the precise nature and impact of these strengthening networks on the professionalisation of emerging art museums remains understudied.

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This article seeks to address this gap by examining the professionalisation of American art museums and exhibitions in the early twentieth century through the lens of travelling exhibitions. While scholarship on museum professionalisation often focuses on collection formation and museum management,[12] the design and display of permanent presentations,[13] or the profiles of museum workers and their emerging professional associations,[14] less attention has been paid to the organisation of temporary travelling exhibitions and related curatorial practices.[15] By examining the travelling exhibitions of modern art organised by a network of emerging American art museums, this study contributes to ongoing debates about the processes of professionalisation in art museums. Specifically, it explores how these exhibitions helped shape museums into modern and professional organisations prior to MoMA's emergence as central institution for Classical Modernity – and how MoMA's later dominance built upon infrastructures and relationships developed in this earlier period.

This study benefits from a recent shift in museum history towards an increased focus on network analysis, means of exchange, and the introduction of the concept of the "relational museum", which draws attention to the "relationships between objects and people within an institution".[16] These approaches have allowed, among others, the examination of the personal relationships that often underlie the formation of museum collections,[17] and the extent to which evolving national and international networks "facilitated an exchange of materials and ideas among museum specialists and administrators as they established increasingly similar standards of museum practice".[18] Additionally, the networks museum professionals developed significantly influenced these institutions' role as "knowledge enterprise", shaping knowledge, taste, and public benefit.[19] With regard to specific professional activities such as museum exhibition design, a rigorous theoretical focus on deconstruction and decentralisation has further broadened our understanding of museum work as a collaborative and creative practice.[20]

Further building on these research trends and frameworks, this article examines the professionalisation of art museums through travelling exhibitions of contemporary art, with a focus on the role of professional exchange. It delves into practices such as networking, project coordination, and the standardisation of processes related to insuring, packing, shipping, and publicising artworks. Moving beyond canonical modern art centres like Paris, Vienna, Munich, and New York City,[21] this research draws on the well-documented case of the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo (now the Buffalo AKG Art Museum), which opened in 1905, and featured an active programme of temporary circulating exhibitions from its inception.

The study is grounded in the extensive archival records of Cornelia B. Sage (1876-1936), the first female director of a major American art museum, who led the Albright Art Gallery from 1910 to 1924. Her detailed records, preserved in the archives of the Buffalo AKG Art Museum, include correspondence and admin-

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istrative files related to numerous exhibitions she organised, such as the *Exhibition of Pictorial Photography* (1910), the first of its kind in the United States,[22] and the retrospective on Constantin Meunier (1913-1914) (Fig. 1).[23] These materials also detail the work of the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD), a network organisation co-founded by Sage in 1916 that significantly advanced the flourishing of circulating exhibitions during the 1920s.

The article begins by outlining the evolving exhibition cultures in Europe and the U.S. during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, along with the changing cultural, economic, and fiscal conditions that facilitated the rise of travelling exhibitions. It then focuses on the Albright Art Gallery under Sage's directorship, analysing her aims, strategies, and achievements through a case study of the Meunier retrospective. The study explores aspects of the exhibition's organisation, administration, logistics, and communication to illustrate how Sage used travelling exhibitions to position her museum as a modern, professional institution. Finally, the article examines the broader role of the AAMD in developing travelling exhibitions as a collaborative endeavour, demonstrating how these exhibitions contributed to the professionalization of American art museums and their emergence as promoters of modern art.

Evolving exhibition practices and the rise of art museums in America

In her 1953 *Manual*, Elodie Osborn highlights a series of 1850s loan exhibitions organised by London's South Kensington Museum (now the Victoria and Albert Museum) and circulated among various art schools as prototypes for the type of travelling exhibitions she and her team later developed at MoMA.[24] By framing her work within a tradition of didactic aims, Osborn emphasized the educational mission underpinning her initiatives to make modern art accessible to broad audiences in the 1930s and 1940s. However, this focus omits other origins of exhibition practices, which began in the late

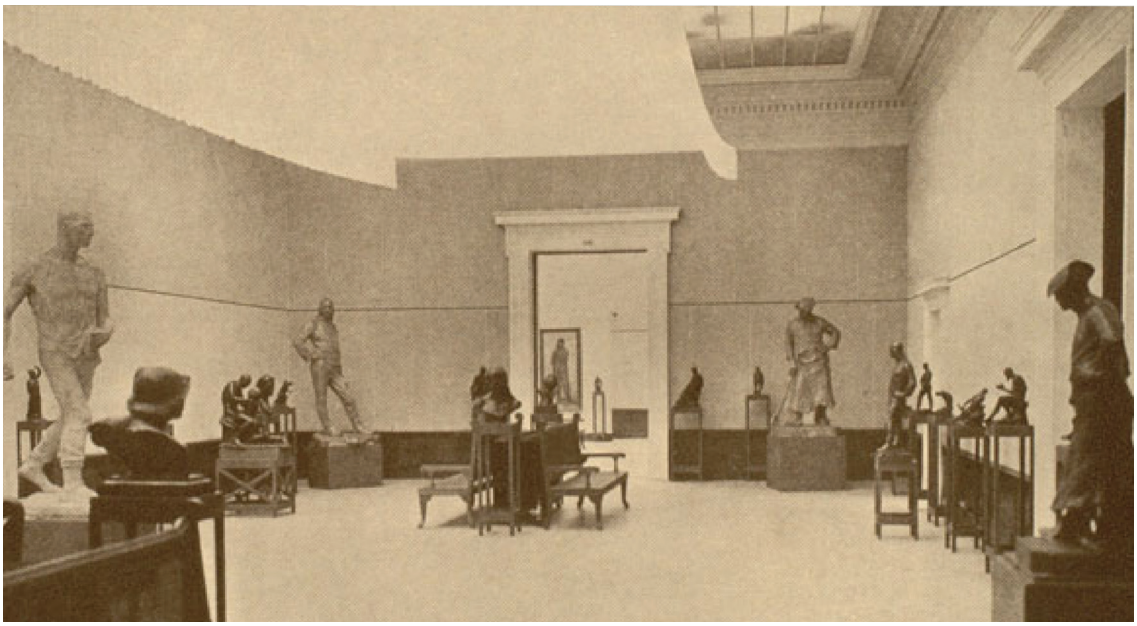

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Fig. 01: Installation view of *Constantin Meunier* (20 November-22 December, 1913, Albright Art Gallery), *Academy Notes*, Volume IX, Number 1, January 1914-October 1914, page 13. Buffalo AKG Art Museum Archives and Digital Assets Collection.

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eighteenth century and shaped exhibition cultures through the organisation of shows featuring works by living artists.

In Europe, the development of contemporary art exhibitions was closely tied to the academic system and networks centred in traditional art hubs. Until the late nineteenth century, these efforts were dominated by the annual Salons organised by the academies. These exhibitions, governed by strict juries, determined access to exhibition opportunities and the sale of artworks, profoundly shaping the careers of artists.[25] Salons typically occurred in fixed locations, at times within the nascent museums that often evolved out of the academies themselves.

By contrast, the United States, with its vast geography and emerging infrastructure, saw the early adoption of travelling exhibitions as a means to bring art and culture to remote areas. As early as 1820, artist Rembrandt Peale (1778-1860) pioneered the concept of touring exhibitions to promote artistic literacy, elevate public taste, and achieve personal fame. Lacking centralized institutions for art exhibitions, the U.S. relied on travelling exhibitions to reach its growing population.[26]

Over the course of the nineteenth century, opportunities for living artists expanded with the advent of International Exhibitions, which included sections dedicated to contemporary art.[27] The first official World's Fair in the United States was held in Philadelphia in 1876, followed by events like the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (1893), the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo (1901), and the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis (1904). These fairs not only showcased the booming American industry and economy, but also demonstrated a growing appetite for luxury goods and cultural experiences. The increasing art production for American audiences in Europe further reflected the demand for European art and the desire of European artists and dealers to expand their markets overseas.[28]

By the late nineteenth century, a new, wealthy middle-class community in America was increasingly "hungry for art".[29] During the Gilded Age, collectors sought canonical European artworks to bolster their cultural status and ambitions, while American artists aspired to emulate established models to enhance their professional development.[30] As collectors, philanthropists, and museums multiplied, the U.S. began to emerge as a major player in the global art market.[31]

Initially, this boom was concentrated along the East Coast, where institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (both founded in 1870) created prominent public collections. Wealthy individuals such as William Henry Vanderbilt, Henry Clay Frick, and Isabella Stewart Gardner further expanded the cultural landscape by founding private galleries. Demand for art and cultural goods soon spread to the so-called "Rust Belt", prompting the establishment of museums such as the Art Institute of Chicago (1879), the Saint Louis Art Museum (1879), the Detroit Museum of Art (1885, today Detroit Institute of Arts), the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh (1895, now the Carnegie Museum of

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Art), and the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo (1905, now the Buffalo AKG Art Museum). The directors of these institutions, including William M.R. French (1843-1914, Chicago), Halsey C. Ives (1847-1911, Saint Louis), and Charles M. Kurtz (1855-1909, Buffalo), were deeply involved in organising the Fine Arts sections of the World Fairs of 1893, 1901, and 1904, giving them extensive experience in the logistical, administrative, and financial aspects of temporary exhibitions, including the administration of loans.[32]

However, the importation of European art to the U.S. was hampered by high tariffs, which were a frequent subject of public debate.[33] Between the 1880s and 1913, import duties on art ranged from 10 to 30 percent, significantly increasing costs for collectors and museums. While the Payne-Aldrich Act of 1909 exempted works over twenty years old from these duties,[34] it had little effect on the circulation of contemporary art. Only with the Underwood-Simmons Act of 1913 were tariffs on modern art abolished, a reprieve that lasted until rates were raised again in 1918.[35]

A key exception, introduced with the Dingley Tariff Act of 1897, allowed artworks imported for the encouragement of the arts and sciences during temporary exhibitions to enter the U.S. duty-free, provided they were not for sale and their exhibition duration did not exceed six months (with a possible six-month extension).[36] This regulation facilitated the organisation of exhibitions by reducing costs and provided the legal and administrative framework for events orchestrated by Cornelia Sage and her colleagues. The developments – alongside growing economic prosperity, an expanding middle-class audience, and the establishment of new museum collections – created fertile ground for a flourishing exhibition culture in early twentieth-century America.

According to Elodie Osborn, "The circulating exhibition has come into being for two principal reasons: the usefulness of temporary exhibitions to museums, and the educational opportunities offered by a concentrated collection of material on one or more related subjects."[37] Osborn's observation highlights the advantages of travelling exhibitions, particularly for smaller institutions with limited resources. These exhibitions offered access to high-quality works, enabling museums to provide diverse and engaging displays that educated the public and elevated cultural tastes, objectives equally relevant in the early twentieth century.[38]

For many of the emerging museums in turn-of-the-century America, temporary exhibitions were central to shaping their profiles and collections. For example, the Art Institute of Chicago organised multiple exhibitions annually from 1883 onward.[39] At the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, founding director John W. Beatty (1850-1924) established an annual survey exhibition of modern American and Western European art in 1896, which became the longest-running North American exhibition of international contemporary art and contributed directly to the museum's acquisitions.[40]

Similarly, the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, under its first director Charles M. Kurtz, implemented an ambitious program of tempo-

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rary exhibitions beginning in 1905. Starting with three special exhibitions in the inaugural year, the number of temporary shows and associated events organised under Kurtz' direction increased annually, reaching a climax in 1909, with no less than 22 exhibitions and six lectures.[41] From the beginning, temporary exhibitions were used to build the institution's identity, educate the public, and shape its collection. Kurtz' prior experience and network – he had served as an assistant of Halsley C. Ives from Saint Louis and had been the art director for the Louisiana Purchase exhibition in 1904 – proved invaluable in organising successful exhibitions such as the Sorolla retrospective of 1909, for which Kurtz also closely collaborated with Ives.[42]

For Kurtz' successor, Cornelia Sage, temporary exhibitions were equally important. As director of the Albright Art Gallery from 1910 to 1924, Sage curated up to sixteen exhibitions annually.[43] While focusing on fewer events than Kurtz, she prioritized quality, using these exhibitions to sustain public interest in Buffalo's young museum and enhance its reputation.

Travelling exhibitions and professional strategy

Cornelia Sage was a key figure in the growing circulation and exhibition of modern art in early twentieth-century America. Her extensive personal and professional networks, coupled with collaborations with other emerging art museums along the East Coast and in the Rust Belt, were instrumental in realising significant exhibitions.[44]

One of Sage's notable exhibitions was the retrospective of Belgian sculptor and painter Constantin Meunier (1831-1905), who had become a leading and widely exhibited modern artist in Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, internationally recognized for his representations of the working class that combined naturalism with classical idealism.[45] Between 26 November 1913 and 1 June 1914, this exhibition toured six venues: the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo (26/11-22/12/1913) (Fig. 1), the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh (27/12/1913-18/1/1914), the Avery Library of Columbia University in New York City (28/1-15/2/1914), the Detroit Museum of Art (24/2-14/3/1914), the Art Institute of Chicago (24/3-17/4/1914), and the City Art Museum in Saint Louis (26/4-1/6/1914).[46] The exhibition featured nearly 150 works, including plaster and bronze sculptures, paintings, and works on paper, all on loan from Meunier's daughter, Charlotte (1866-1942), and her husband, Charles Jacques (1859-1938), who managed the artist's estate in Brussels. The American exhibition was part of a broader strategy by Meunier's heirs to promote his legacy internationally and solidify his reputation as a leading figure in modern realist art.[47]

Sage's familiarity with Meunier's work began during her visits to European exhibitions, although she never met the artist personally. In June 1913, she visited his preserved studio and collection, initiating discussions with Jacques to bring the works to America (Fig. 2).[48] For Sage, this undertaking offered important opportunities to boost her network and professional develop-

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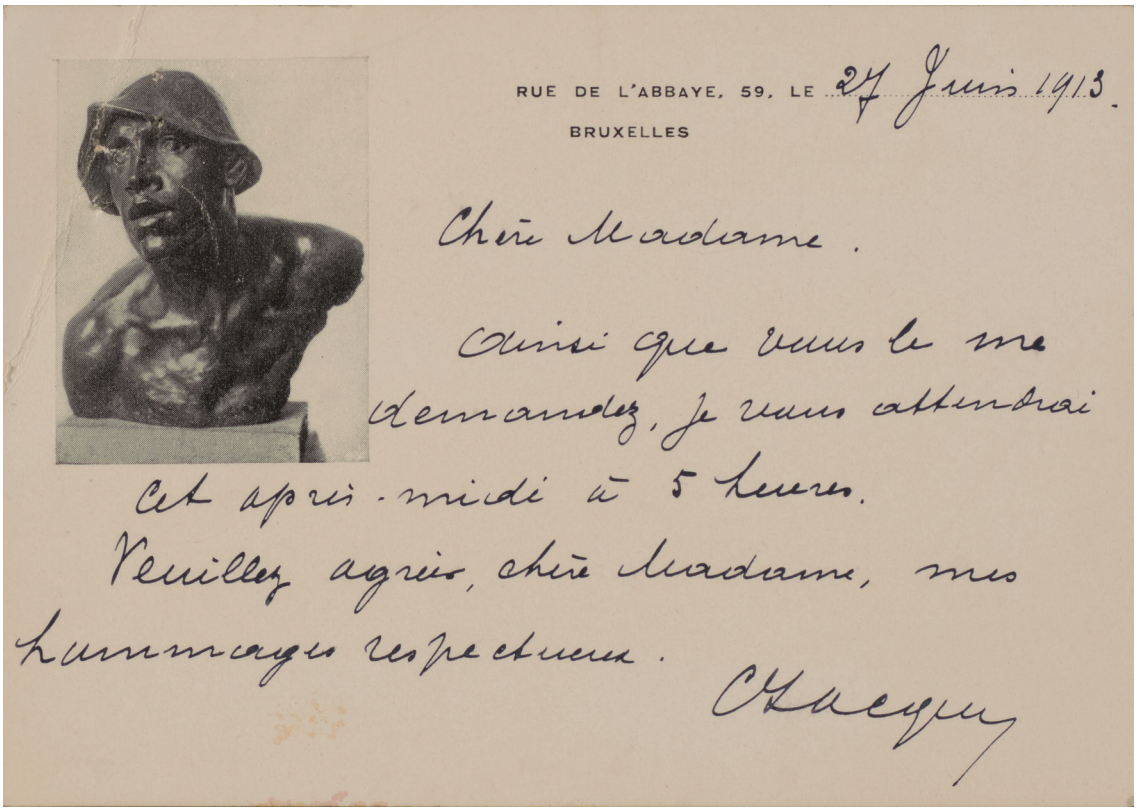

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ment. A year report described the exhibition as "one of the greatest one-man exhibitions ever shown at the Albright Art Gallery" and "one of the most notable ever brought to this country".[49] Early in her tenure as director, the exhibition underscored Sage's ambition to elevate her institution. In a letter to Edward Robinson, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, she stated her intent to make the exhibition "the greatest collection of modern sculpture ever shown in America."[50]

Sage's vision was articulated in a 1913 directive that prioritized fewer but higher-quality exhibitions, a decision that had been taken because exhibitions were often installed and dismantled "in such a rapid succession that they have no educational value whatsoever [...]. Besides a useless expense, it does no one artist any real good. It would be far better to have one exhibition at a time and by thus economizing increase the possibilities of buying pictures for the permanent collection of a museum".[51] Ensuring greater educational value while reducing expenses were thus important motivating factors. Sage's correspondence with her director colleagues reveals her determination to use this strategy to refine the gallery's programming and boost the profile and scope of her museum. Developing her own vision, she wrote that she aimed to organize "fewer and greater exhibitions", accepting only collections of the very highest standard,[52] as exemplified by the Meunier retrospective.

The logistical and financial complexities of organising a multi-city tour required Sage to establish an intricate network of collaborators. Her strategy was driven by both cultural and practical goals: expanding Meunier's visibility in the United States and sharing costs among participating institutions. Each museum had

Fig. 02: Postcard from Charles Jacques to Director Cornelia Bentley Sage on 27 June, 1913. Buffalo AKG Art Museum Archives and Digital Assets Collection.

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to "pay their share of the costs" in order to "pay all the expenses of insurance, transport, packaging, etc.",[53] thus making the exhibition financially viable. By organising a travelling show, Sage thus avoided the high costs of a one-venue retrospective, which had deterred Edward Robinson to hold a Meunier exhibition at the MET a few years earlier.[54] Her effort proved effective, with her final report noting that, thanks to the pro-rata system for fixed expenses, the exhibition's costs for Buffalo were lower than those of the gallery's typical summer exhibitions.[55]

Initially, Meunier's heirs envisioned to bring the collection to New York, Boston, and Chicago.[56] Sage expanded the programme to include six venues, ensuring representation from "the most important and progressive museums in the United States".[57] Addressing Jacques hesitation about including Saint Louis, which he considered little developed in cultural and artistic terms, Sage emphasized the city's significant acquisition funds and its importance in promoting modern art.[58]

Joining forces with fellow museums for the organisation of the exhibition had not only financial benefits, but also practical and logistic ones. The collection, packed into 49 crates, arrived in New York City by steamboat on 28 October 1913, and travelled by railroad to Buffalo, reaching the Albright Art Gallery on 3 November.[59] Sage entrusted the installation and care of the artworks to A. Leeder, the gallery's Building Superintendent. Leeder accompanied the exhibition to each venue, overseeing unpacking, condition reporting, installation, and repacking, while providing regular updates to Sage.[60] Writing to Clyde H. Burroughs of the Detroit Institute of Arts, Sage praised Leeder's experience, calling him "a whole host in himself and most efficient. [...] All I can say is that Mr. Leeder is worth his weight in gold and I feel that it will be advisable for you to arrange to have him come" to install the Meunier show in Detroit.[61]

An additional challenge was the provision of pedestals for Meunier's sculptures, which were not included with the collection. But also in this regard, collaboration and the strengthening network proved beneficial. While the Albright and the Carnegie Institute (the first two venues of the show) had their own pedestals, Sage arranged with John W. Beatty for Carnegie's pedestals to be borrowed by other venues, because "the expense of transportation of 'Carnegie Institute' pedestals would be much less than the cost of making them yourself."[62] A photograph of the Detroit installation reveal the pedestals' plain and functional design, allowing for easy installation and flexible use (Fig. 3). They also accommodated drawing sessions for art students in the exhibition.[63] The large reliefs of Meunier's *Monument to Labour* – visible in the background of the same photograph – had a special architectural setting, designed and constructed by Leeder in Buffalo, which was likewise borrowed and shipped to each location.[64]

A robust communication and promotional campaign further ensured the exhibition's success. For this purpose, securing a considerable number of photographs of the most important artworks and rights

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to reproduce them from Meunier's heirs was a great concern for Sage.[65] These images were used for illustrated posters to announce the shows (Fig. 4), the exhibition catalogue, and press materials. Sage enlisted Christian Brinton, a respected art critic and personal friend of Meunier, to author the catalogue and contribute articles, including a widely disseminated piece in *The International Studio*.[66] Brinton also gave lectures while the show was in Buffalo and New York, attracting additional audiences.[67]

Sage worked hard to maximize press coverage. She secured lavishly illustrated articles in prominent newspapers to promote the exhibition. During the preparation of the show, Sage aspired "to get an article, with photos, in some of the N. Y. daily papers: NY 'Times', 'Sun' or 'Pact', to awaken the general public and prepare them before the opening day".[68] The article in the *New York Times* appeared on 9 November 1913, in time to inform the public about the entire circuit of the exhibition.[69] Throughout late 1913 and early 1914, numerous publications featured detailed articles with high-quality reproductions of Meunier's works (Fig. 5), making his oeuvre widely known and accessible also to those who did not visit the exhibition but read popular journals.[70] The widespread publicity attracted large audiences, with attendance figures of 21.000 in Buffalo, 27.000 in New York City, 63.600 in Detroit, and 91.700 in St. Louis.[71]

The exhibition's impact extended beyond public visibility. It strengthened the professional networks of participating institutions and advanced the Albright's reputation as a leading promoter of modern art. Clyde H. Burroughs of the Detroit Institute of Arts expressed his gratitude, writing that Sage had "won the confidence of our entire Board of Trustees" and inspired him to adopt a similar strategy of prioritizing fewer but more significant exhibitions.[72] Lastly, the exhibitions also helped to place Meunier's art in public and private collections. Several museums acquired sculptures from the exhibition or com-

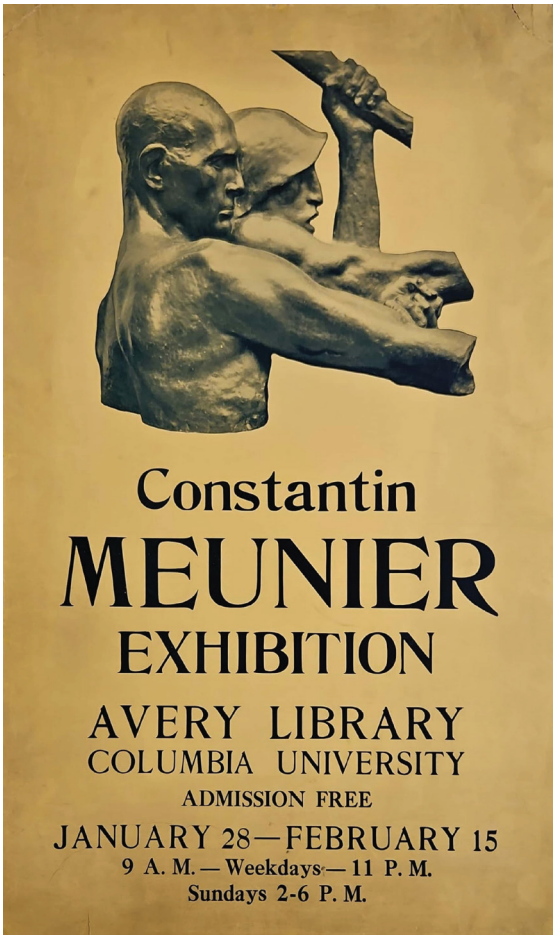
Fig. 03:
Class from the Detroit School of Design drawing from sculptures at the *Constantin Meunier* Exhibition, Detroit Museum of Art, 1914. From: *Bulletin of the Detroit Museum of Art*, Vol. VIII, no. 2 (1914), p. 35. https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/BULLDETMUSART41934897

missioned new casts, a practice that was not unusual during the period, but rather aligned with broader aims towards fostering collection development.[73]

The Association of Art Museum Directors and its exhibitions

The active exhibition strategies developed by Cornelia Sage and her colleagues – exemplified by events like the Constantin Meunier retrospective – played a crucial role in fostering professional development and networking among American art museums. These efforts culminated in the establishment of the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) in 1916, which explicitly aimed to professionalise the organisation of travelling exhibitions. Over the later 1910s and 1920s, the AAMD advanced an ambitious exhibition policy for modern art, significantly contributing to the expansion and standardisation of travelling exhibitions.[74]

The composition of the AAMD's founding board reflected the close networks forged in the preceding years. Among its twelve founding members were Cornelia B. Sage of the Albright Art Gallery, Clyde H. Burroughs of the Detroit Museum of Art, N. H. Carpenter of the Art Institute of Chicago, Robert A. Holland of The City Art Museum (Saint Louis), John W. Beatty of the Carnegie Institute (Pittsburgh), and F. Allen Whiting of the Cleveland Museum of Art. Carpenter was elected the association's first president, while Sage – who had led much of the correspondence leading to the Association's foundation – served as its inaugural secretary-treasurer.[75] The founding meeting took place



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in Cleveland in June 1916, during which collectors and philanthropists Archer M. Huntington and Charles L. Freer were named honorary members.[76]

As secretary-treasurer, Cornelia Sage played a central role in shaping the AAMD's early direction. Correspondence preserved in her archival records provides insights into the motivations behind the association's founding, its main objectives, and its organizational structure. Writing to Henry R. Howland, president of the American Association of Museums, which had existed since 1906,[77] Sage outlined the unique needs of art museums, emphasizing the importance of creating a separate network for their directors "to take care of large special exhibitions of paintings, sculpture, etc.", and to sustain public interest.[78] She

Fig. 04: Poster announcing the *Constantin Meunier* Exhibition at Columbia University's Avery Library, New York City, 1914. Columbia University Archives.

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MEUNIER

THE SCULPTOR OF THE PROLETARIAN

CONSTANTIN MEUNIER.

MINER'S WIFE WITH SHOVEL (PAINTING)

THE HARVEST.

FOR the first time in America the sculpture and painting of Constantin Meunier, the Belgian master, is being shown. Reflected in these stalwart, these honest and uncomplaining figures is the spirit of the typically American man. Here in this country, of all places on the civilized globe, the message of Meunier should be understood and appreciated. For this message is the glorification of toil, the honest portrayal of the dignity and grace of work; of its force and power and possibilities, hidden though it is beneath an exterior of pressure and distress.

Meunier's spirit and sympathy were with the man of the factory and the forge, the worker in the mine and in the quarry, and the toiler before the blast furnace and the blowpipe. No work was too hard, too monotonous, too wearying, but this sculptor could wring from it its element of honorable dignity. His work is the epic of modern industrialism. He is the apostle of labor.

INDUSTRY.

THE HAMMER MAN.

A DOCK HAND.

Years ago there were reproach and incomprehension when Millet portrayed the peasant at work in the fields. Realism had no place in art, the critics said. But his realism is only a faint shadow of the truth beside Meunier's courageous portrayal of the most common types of everyday life, the basic features of our industrial world, the minute cogs which before have been only recognized as a part of the machine, not of human beings.

His "Smith" he calls the "knight of labor," and his "Puddler" is a perfect representation of the dignity and grace of the proletarian spirit. The artist's constant theme is the struggle of man against the eternal fatalities of nature and the pressure and strain of work.

* *

Not an Appeal or a Protest.

Meunier knew what he was portraying. Born of humble people, he spent his youth in the suburbs of Brussels, and watched ever with keenest interest the struggles of the miners, the ambitions and hopes of the quarrymen, and the patient endeavor of the workers at the forge and the blast furnace.

At first he was draftsman only—later painter, and last as the finished product, sculptor. And these two early occupations have given to his work a finesse and precision not to be found in many of the modern sculptors where so often the energy is put entirely into the idea instead of into line and modeling.

It was at the glass works of Val Saint-Lambert that the great vision of his future work came to him, and as he watched the earnest preoccupation of the workers, their spirit of unity and cooperation, there came to him the idea of the great "esthetics of work."

His art is not an appeal to the sympathy or to the emotions. He scorns sentimentality or weakening pity. It is not an appeal or a protest. It is a courageous acceptance of conditions as they are, and an effort to wrest from these conditions all that is noble and fine. He gives esthetic expression to the modern worker as the Greeks gave it to the gladiator or the wrestler. In his work the social and the artistic interests are welded. To the Greek idealism has been added a deep modern humanitarianism. His sympathy is for that section of labor where the toil is great and the reward small.

In the catalogue written for the present American exhibition, Christian Brinton says of Meunier:

"There can be no question concerning the relative status of Constantin Meunier. Though in a measure restricted in scope, it ranks in general significance beside the pellucid and spacious vision of Puvis de Chavannes, the penetrant humanity of Eugene Carriere, and the sensuous unrest of Auguste Rodin. At once the poet of the past and the present, his artistic heritage may be traced through the sober majesty of Millet and graphic vehemence of Honoré Daumier, back to the fountain heads of medieval and ancient sculpture. Bearing with manful mien their burden of earthly toil and tribulation, these sombre figures take up their position in the plastic procession of all time. And just as assuredly does their earnest souled creator find his place in the pantheon of modern art. He possesses, indeed, dual claim to his hard won haven. His triumph was not alone esthetic but spiritual. He wrought in beauty and nobility and his also was a conquest of human hearts."

* *

Exhibition to Come to Chicago.

So far the exhibition has not been the success that one could have predicted for America. The collection of about 150 of the best pieces of this master has been shown in Buffalo and Pittsburgh and in New York. In all of these places the exhibition was free, the time was limited, and it was announced that this would be the only opportunity to see these works. In view of this one might suppose that the galleries would be full. But M. Jacques-Meunier, son-in-law of the sculptor, said significantly to an interviewer recently:

"On week days practically nobody came. On Sundays there were more people in the buildings, and as they wandered through the halls they might peer into the room which held the sculpture and wander in as if saying, 'Eenie! There's something here, too!' In Pittsburgh the exhibition seemed to be in competition with the elephants and giraffes which fill the near-by zoological gardens, and in New York people seemed to regard it as a serious pilgrimage to get to Columbia, and it suffered there."

Surely when the exhibition comes to Chicago March 24 there will be no excuse, with the institute at the foot of Adams street, for not going to see the sculpture which is representative of the root and core of our working nation—the ordinary man at the ordinary work, and yet so dignified and idealized that the tribute to industrialism cannot be missed. In the nobility of his esthetic philosophy and in the grave beauty of the modeled figures, the pity of which is breathed from his work, there is an invigorating joy in life, a renewed pride in labor, and a lesson to the rebelling and dissatisfied.

THE CHICAGO SUNDAY TRIBUNE.

Ulrike Müller
Modern Masters on the Move: The Professionalisation of American Art Museums Through Travelling Exhibitions Before MoMA, ca. 1900-1929
https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/22952

further described the AAMD as "a small group of Art Directors who are working for special exhibitions and who talk over things once or twice a year".[79] Unlike "large museums which have great permanent collections and are therefore not dependent upon special exhibitions to educate the people", the AAMD explicitly targeted smaller museums, which depended heavily on temporary shows to fulfil their educational missions.[80] The association's primary purpose, Sage explained, was "to secure better conditions for art exhibiting, better rates from express and insurance companies etc.".[81]

In its early years, the AAMD focused on practical improvements and administrative streamlining for temporary exhibitions. For example, during its first meeting, the association adopted a standardised policy for participating museums to take a 10 percent commission on sales made during exhibitions.[82] It also prioritised agreements on insurance policies for artworks and developed shared guidelines for packaging, shipping, and installation.[83] Also in 1916, the AAMD circulated a survey among its members on their use of and experience with insurance.[84] One year later, the association proposed to ship exhibitions without frames and use standardised frames by the institutions, as a means to reduce costs and increase efficiency as well as object security during transportation.[85] These initiatives seem to build on earlier efforts to rationalise the planning and execution of temporary exhibitions, such as those that had been a matter of concern when Sage circulated the Meunier collection in 1913-1914.

The AAMD's efforts significantly advanced the professionalisation of museum practices, particularly in the logistical and administrative aspects of organising exhibitions. Simultaneously, the association itself organised numerous travelling exhibitions of modern art that circulated among its member institutions. While more research is necessary on the concrete programming, composition, and organisation of the exhibitions circulated by the AAMD, these exhibitions mainly showed works by American as well as European artists, the latter frequently shipped from overseas. Understandably, the reintroduction of import tariffs in 1918, set at 10 percent,[86] posed challenges. The AAMD, like other art and cultural associations, protested these tariffs, arguing they hindered artistic exchange. In 1921 the AAMD passed a resolution against another tariff change.[87] Despite this opposition, Congress doubled the art rate to 20 percent in 1922, targeting especially modern and contemporary works, while exempting artworks over a hundred years old,[88] and thus further complicating the organisation of international exhibitions.

Fig. 05: *Meunier. The Sculptor of the Proletarian*, in "The Chicago Sunday Tribune", 22 February, 1914. The Art Institute of Chicago, Museum Archives.

Conclusion

By the late 1920s, the AAMD faced mounting challenges that ultimately led to the decline of its travelling exhibitions programme. Financial pressures, combined with competition from artists' associations such as the American Federation of Arts that organised their own shows, strained the viability of the initiative. Additionally the programme's strong emphasis on European art sparked growing criticism from American artists and curators, who

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sought greater representation of domestic artistic movements. These debates about the scope and focus of modern art exhibitions were eventually overshadowed by the emergence of MoMA. With its more narrowly defined vision of modern art, MoMA introduced the influential concept of "Classical Modernity" and would reshape the exhibition landscape.[89]

This article has demonstrated that significant efforts to develop a thriving network for travelling exhibitions of modern art preceded the establishment of MoMA. Emerging from practices introduced during American World Fairs, the first decades of the twentieth century saw important strides toward the professionalisation of exhibitions. Initially driven by initiatives of individual curators like Charles M. Kurtz and Cornelia B. Sage, these efforts relied on expanding personal and institutional networks. Later, these networks were formalized through the AAMD, which standardised and institutionalised many of the tools and strategies developed during the 1910s, and applying them on a larger scale.

Travelling exhibitions organised during this period – such as the Constantin Meunier retrospective of 1913-1914 – not only had a positive impact on professionalising the institutions that hosted them, but also served as a model for collaborative practices that would later be central to MoMA's programme. These exhibitions, supported by active communication and promotional strategies, enhanced the profiles of participating museums as dedicated and modern institutions for the arts. They also strengthened the collaborative networks and professional practices of America's young museums, helping to position them as promoters of modern art.

While further research is needed to fully assess the long-term impact of these exhibitions on shaping public collections and institutional profiles, this study suggests their significance in fostering American art museums. It also highlights the need to reconsider the dominant narrative that positions MoMA and the New York art world as singular pioneers. Through exhibitions and networks, museums outside of the traditional artistic centres not only advanced their cultural and educational missions but also laid the foundations upon which MoMA would later build – repositioning the periphery as a formative space in the making of American modernism.

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Endnotes:

1 Osborn Courter 1953.

2 Weismann 1954, p. 246.

3 *Circulating Exhibitions*…1954, p. 3.

4 Silver-Kohn 2024, p. 186. See also Beck, Bregengaard, Eckert, Eisenbrand 2018.

5 Silver-Kohn 2024, p. 171.

6 Silver-Kohn 2024, p. 171.

7 Temkin, Silver-Kohn 2024, pp. 7, 12. See also Porter, Zalman 2020; Lorente 2011.

8 Osborn Courter 1963, pp. 58-59.

9 Colomer, Pons-Sorolla, Roglán 2015.

10 Codell 2021.

11 Walker 1999.

12 See, for example, Meijer-van Mensch, van Mensch 2010.

13 See, for example, Guy, Williams, Wintle 2023; Staniszewski 1998.

14 Meyer 2021. See also the recent (2022-2024) AHRC Research Network *Making Museum Professionals, 1850-the present*: Hill, Russel, Wintle 2025.

15 An exception is Anguix-Vilches, Fabrizi, Papini 2023, which, however, generally focuses on the mid- to late-twentieth century.

16 Longair 2011, p. 4.

17 Micklewright, Mirza, Simavi, Smith 2023.

18 Kohlstedt 2008.

19 Codell 2021.

20 Guy, Williams, Wintle 2023, pp. 2, 8.

21 See, for example, Mulloli 2021; Altshuler 1998; 2008; Staniszewski 1998.

22 Paysant 2025.

23 Müller, Depelchin, Jacobs forthcoming.

24 Osborn Courter 1963, pp. 58-59.

25 Kearns, Mill 2015; Pointon, Binski 1997.

26 Pohrt 2020.

27 See, for example, Pergam 2011.

28 Catterson 2017.

29 Codell 2021, p. 317.

30 Zalewski 2012; May 2010.

31 Feigenbaum, Van Ginhoven, Sterrett 2024, pp. 1-2.

32 Walker 1999, p. 54.

33 Feigenbaum, Van Ginhoven, Sterrett 2024, pp. 6, 22-23; May 2010; Orcutt 2002.

34 May 2010, p. 84.

35 May 2010, pp. 88-89.

36 United States Congress 1897, § 701, 702. See also United States, Treasury dept., Division of Customs 1908, pp. 64-65, and May 2010, p. 72. I am grateful to Anne Helmreich for bringing the original source to my attention.

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37 Osborn Courter 1963, p. 60.

38 Osborn Courter 1963, p. 60.

39 https://www.artic.edu/exhibitions/history.

40 https://carnegieart.org/art/carnegie-international/history-of-the-carnegie-international/. See also Clark 1996.

41 The Buffalo Fine Arts Academy Albright Art Gallery 1911, p. 66; The Buffalo Fine Arts Academy Albright Art Gallery 1914, p. 23.

42 Colomer, Pons-Sorolla, Roglán 2015, p. 154.

43 The Buffalo Fine Arts Academy Albright Art Gallery 1914, p. 64.

44 Paysant 2025.

45 Jerome-Schotsmans 2012.

46 Brinton 1913.

47 Müller, Depelchin, Jacobs forthcoming.

48 *Postcard from Charles Jacques to Cornelia B. Sage, 27/06/1913,* AKG Archives, Meunier Exhibition, File 5.13.

49 The Buffalo Fine Arts Academy Albright Art Gallery 1914, p. 28.

50 *Letter from Cornelia B. Sage to Edward Robinson, 26/9/1913,* MET Archives.

51 *Editorial* 1913, p. 72. Also cited in: The Buffalo Fine Arts Academy Albright Art Gallery 1914, p. 23.

52 *Letter from Cornelia B. Sage to Clyde Burroughs, 6/8/1913,* DIA Archives, Meunier Exhibition, File 1.9, 1914b.

53 *Letter from Cornelia B. Sage to Charles Jacques, 16/7/1913,* AKG Archives, Meunier Exhibition, File 5.13.

54 *Letter from Cornelia B. Sage to Edward Robinson, 4/9/1913,* AKG Archives, Meunier Exhibition, File 5.12.

55 *Cornelia B. Sage, Report on the Meunier exhibition,* AKG Archives, Meunier Exhibition, File 4a.3.

56 *Charles Jacques to Cornelia B. Sage, 25/9/1913,* AKG Archives, Meunier Exhibition, File 5.14.

57 *Letter from Cornelia B. Sage to Charles Jacques, 23/12/1913,* AKG Archives, Meunier Exhibition, File 5.14.

58 *Letters from Charles Jacques to Cornelia B. Sage, 19/12/1913,* and *Cornelia B. Sage to Charles Jacques, 23/12/1913,* AKG Archives, Meunier Exhibition, File 5.14.

59 *Correspondence and shipment invoices,* AKG Archives, Meunier Exhibition, Files 4a.2, 5.16, 6.6.

60 See, for example, *Letter from A. Leeder to Cornelia B. Sage, 20/2/1914,* and *Letter from Clyde H. Burroughs to Cornelia B. Sage, 25/2/1914,* DIA Archives, Meunier Exhibition, File 1.9, 1914a.

61 *Letter from Cornelia B. Sage to Clyde H. Burroughs, 13/2/1914,* DIA Archives, Meunier Exhibition, File 1.9, 1914a.

62 *Letter from A. Leeder to Clyde H. Burroughs, 4/2/1914,* DIA Archives, Meunier Exhibition, File 1.9, 1914a. See also: *Letter from Clyde H. Burroughs to Cornelia B. Sage, 9/2/1914,* DIA Archives, Meunier Exhibition, File 1.9, 1914a, and *Letter from Cornelia B. Sage to Frank D. Fackenthal, 26/4/1914,* CU, Central Files, Box 666, Folder 19: Cornelia B. Sage File.

63 *Bulletin of the Detroit Museum of Art*...1914, pp. 37-39.

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64 *Letter from Clyde H. Burroughs to Cornelia B. Sage, 7/2/1914*, DIA Archives, Meunier Exhibition, File 1.9, 1914a.

65 *Letter from Cornelia B. Sage to Charles Jacques, 15/9/1913*, AKG Archives, Meunier Exhibition, File 5.13.

66 Brinton 1913; 1914.

67 *Meunier Exhibition Popular*…1914. See also *Letter from Frank D. Fackenthal to Cornelia B. Sage, 12/2/1914*, CU, Central Files, Box 666, Folder 19: Cornelia B. Sage File.

68 *Letter from Kate La Montagne Butler to Cornelia B. Sage, 15/10/1913*, AKG Archives, Meunier Exhibition, File 4a.5.

69 *Meunier's Remarkable Sculpture to Be Shown Here*…1913.

70 Dabakis 2011, p. 116.

71 *Cornelia B. Sage, Report on the Meunier exhibition*, AKG Archives, Meunier Exhibition, File 4a.3. The exceptionally high number in St. Louis was because the show coincided with the Pageant and Masque, a historical festival celebrating the 150th anniversary of the founding of the city.

72 *Letter from Clyde H. Burroughs to Cornelia B. Sage*, 15/4/1914, DIA Archives, Meunier Exhibition, File 1.10, 1914a.

73 Müller, Depelchin, Jacobs forthcoming.

74 Walker 1999, p. 8.

75 https://aamd.org/celebrating-100-years/timeline.

76 Files relating to the first meeting of the AAMD, Cleveland, 6/7/1916, AKG Archives, AAMD, 2:3, Box no. 5, Folder 2.

77 Meyer 2021, pp. 10, 55.

78 *Letter from Cornelia B. Sage to Henry R. Howland, 26/09/1916*, AKG Archives, AAMD, 2:3, Box no. 5, Folder 2.

79 *Letter from Cornelia B. Sage to Henry R. Howland, 26/09/1916*, AKG Archives, AAMD, 2:3, Box no. 5, Folder 2.

80 *Letter from Cornelia B. Sage to Henry R. Howland, 26/09/1916*, AKG Archives, AAMD, 2:3, Box no. 5, Folder 2.

81 *Letter from Henry R. Howland to N.H. Carpenter, 23/09/1916*, AKG Archives, AAMD, 2:3, Box no. 5, Folder 2. See also the association's constitution, as formulated during the first meeting of the AAMD, Cleveland, 6/7/1916, *Letter from Cornelia B. Sage to Henry R. Howland, 26/09/1916*, AKG Archives, AAMD, 2:3, Box no. 5, Folder 2. The AAMD's mission has evolved over time. Today, its explicit goals are to "advance[…] the profession by cultivating leadership capabilities of directors, advocating for the field, and fostering excellence in art museums", https://aamd.org/about/mission.

82 *Minutes of the first meeting of the AAMD, Cleveland, 6/7/1916*, AKG Archives, AAMD, 2:3, Box no. 5, Folder 2.

83 *Minutes of the second meeting of the AAMD, Detroit, 16/10/1916*, AKG Archives, AAMD, 2:3, Box no. 5, Folder 2.

84 *Insurance Questionaire*, AKG Archives, AAMD, 2:3, Box no. 5, Folder 2.

85 *An exhibition framing proposition*, AKG Archives, AAMD, 2:3, Box no. 7, Folder 1: correspondence 1917.

86 May 2010, p. 90.

87 https://aamd.org/celebrating-100-years/timeline.

88 May 2010, p. 89.

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89 Walker 1999, pp. 225–227, 235.

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TOW. ZACHĘTY SZTUK PIĘKN. W WARSZAWIE

PRZEWODNIK № 22

WYSTAWA
SZTUKI WĘGIERSKIEJ

KWIECIEŃ 1927 ROKU

The Evolution of Hungarian National(ist) Art Exhibitions in the 1920s

Samuel D. Albert[1]

Keywords:
Hungary; Art Exhibitions; Nationalism in Art; Horthy; Cultural Diplomacy

ABSTRACT:

This article focuses on the "Representative Exhibitions" organized under the aegis of the Hungarian government in the inter-war period, from the end of the First World War until 1930. It considers the underlying ideology and rhetoric of these exhibitions and how they both changed over time. In their fundamental organization the shows were quite similar and often contained the same art works, but how these exhibitions and their artifacts were introduced by the catalogue essay often changed over time.Immediately after the First World War in the aftermath of the Treaty of Trianon, the exhibitions were revanchist. As the decade progressed, they become more and more modernist and international. Ultimately, in the latter years of the decade, as with the 1927 Polish and 1928 German shows, they became catalysts for reintegrating Hungarian history into that of Western Europe.

L'articolo si concentra sulle "Esposizioni Rappresentative" organizzate sotto l'egida del governo ungherese nel periodo tra le due guerre, dalla fine della Prima guerra mondiale fino al 1930. Si esaminano l'ideologia e la retorica sottese a queste esposizioni e come entrambe si siano modificate nel tempo. Nella loro organizzazione sostanziale, le mostre erano piuttosto simili e spesso includevano le stesse opere d'arte, ma il modo in cui queste esposizioni e i loro manufatti venivano presentati nel catalogo cambiava frequentemente nel corso degli anni. Subito dopo la Prima guerra mondiale, in seguito al Trattato di Trianon, le mostre avevano un carattere revanscista. Con il passare del decennio divennero sempre più moderniste e internazionali. Alla fine degli anni Venti, come nel caso delle mostre in Polonia del 1927 e in Germania del 1928, esse diventarono catalizzatori per il reinserimento della storia ungherese in quella dell'Europa occidentale.

Opening Picture:

Wystawa Sztuki Węgierskiej/Exhibition of Hungarian Art, Warsaw, 1927. Catalogue Cover. (Image from Author's Collection).

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After capitulating to the terms of the Trianon Treaty and abandoning military solutions, the Horthy Regime began a new offensive, one of cultural diplomacy. Many of the objectives were similar to those of the military campaigns of the previous years: a revision of Hungary's borders was the goal. Unlike the pre-Trianon skirmishes, fought with guns and blood which sought to physically change the borders, this new campaign, fought with ink and paintbrushes, sought to change the international perception of Hungary and its treatment at the hands of the victorious Allies.

This task was given to a special desk within the Ministry of Religion and Public Education under the aegis of K. Róbert Kertész.[2] The Külföldi Művészeti Kiállítások Végrehajtó Bizottság/Executive Committee for Foreign Art Exhibitions, of which he was Secretary, was charged with organizing, curating, and promoting the Magyar Reprezentativ Kiállítás/Hungarian Representative Exhibition, a series of art shows. Actively displaying throughout the 1920s and continuing – though with seemingly less enthusiasm into the 1930s – the Executive Committee for Foreign Art Exhibitions organized exhibitions, which were usually bilateral. Around the time a Hungarian Representative Exhibition was shown in a particular country, an exhibition of that country's art would open in Budapest. Initially limited to European venues, beginning in the 1930s these shows expanded to include American venues. This article will explore the organization and implementation of these exhibitions in the 1920s.

Literature Survey

The interest in cultural diplomacy is an ever-increasing one. In the period under consideration, 1920-1930, in addition to the catalogues of the shows themselves, there were a number of publications about the concept.[3] The role of cultural diplomacy in the 1930s and 40s was noted in various publications.[4] Recent years have seen an increased academic focus, with Zsolt Nagy one of the leading American academics writing on this topic. While his major work is *Great Expectations and Interwar Realities*, he has authored several articles which focus on aspects of Hungarian cultural diplomacy activity.[5] The role of cultural diplomacy in the relationship between Hungary and Poland, especially in the interwar period has also been a fruitful field of study.[6] One of the key figures of Hungarian cultural activity at this time was the Minister of Religion and Public Education, Count Kunó Klebelsberg, whose life and activity and especially his ideas concerning cultural diplomacy and its implementation have been explored more and more.[7]

Methodology

This article is part of a larger project focusing on Austro-Hungarian, Austrian, and Hungarian art exhibitions abroad, 1890-1940. It is based on an examination and consideration of catalogues from Austro-Hungarian and Hungarian art exhibitions in the 1920s, especially those in which Hungarian National Fine Arts Council was involved. This is obviously a rather limited selection. While there are many other exhibitions and exhibition venues which might

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be better known, such as the Venice Biennale[8] or World's Fair, the focus in the article is the activity of the Council as a cultural and political arm of the Hungarian government and the exhibitions the Council organized. In a larger, forthcoming work, more of the exhibitions will be considered.

This paper does not focus on nor consider individual works. One of the major quandaries facing this project is correlating titles in catalogues with images exhibited. While the name of the artist and of their work displayed are listed, scant visual documentation of the displays in question exists. More elaborate catalogues do include illustrations but never record the entire show; what images are included are only black and white and of low quality. Generalizations can be made about the works based on a knowledge of the artists and their career trajectories, but in the absence of good-quality color reproductions, any art historical or aesthetic analysis of the image would be ill-founded.

Greater reliance thus is placed on the text of the catalogues and published writing about the exhibitions rather than on the visual content of the exhibitions themselves. As this research is ongoing, it is hoped that in the future, a closer correlation between the works listed in the catalogues and the actual images themselves might be achieved.

Horthy Regime

To understand Hungarian cultural and foreign policy in the interwar period, a brief grounding the history and decline of Austria-Hungary and the emergence of Hungary is called for. What follows is a rather superficial description of that history.

Following the defeat of the Hungarian uprising under Lajos Kossuth, Austria brutally occupied Hungary, which it had ruled since the 1700s. In 1867, a compromise was reached between the Austrians and the Hungarian. In exchange for the Hungarians acknowledging the right of the Habsburgs to rule Hungary, the Austrians would grant Hungary a certain measure of autonomy. There would be three common ministries: the foreign ministry, the finance ministry, and the war ministry. All other ministries, such as religion and culture, or transportation, would be unique to an imperial half, either Austria or Hungary. The Habsburg ruler, in this case Franz Joseph I, would be crowned King of Hungary and the Hungarian government would rule in his name while he would be at the same time the Emperor of Austria. Thus, the Austrian Empire was converted into the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Following the Compromise, Hungary rapidly developed culturally and economically, but was still politically bound to Austria. Though both Vienna and Budapest were capitals, the weight of power lay with Vienna. Hungary sought other ways to assert and demonstrate its independence. One way was through culture: an opera, a national theater, and a dedicated art museum were all founded in this era and imposing homes for them constructed. In art production as well, Hungarians sought to differentiate themselves from their Austrian counterparts. This differentiation took form in education and production. As throughout Europe, Hungarian artists looked to

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the rural as a source for forms and subjects. And despite Vienna's significance as a center of artistic education, Hungarian artists chose to study elsewhere: Munich, Berlin, or Paris.[9]

After the Austro-Hungarian defeat in the First World War, an independent Hungarian Republic was proclaimed, though it lasted only a short time. In March of 1921, a communist Hungarian Soviet, under the rule of Béla Kun emerged; it lasted 100 days. Throughout this period, Hungary was being assaulted with various degrees of success by the surrounding countries: Czechoslovakia, Serbia (aided by French troops), and Romania. Romanian armed forces penetrated far into Hungary, occupying Budapest in August of 1919.

When the Hungarian Soviet collapsed, right-wing[10] forces based in the southern city of Szeged coalesced around the figure of Miklos Horthy. Horthy, a naval officer who had risen from the rank of sub-lieutenant (the American equivalent is Lieutenant j.g.), serving along the way as aide-de-camp to Franz Joseph I. He ultimately attained the rank of Rear Admiral in the Austro-Hungarian navy. Conservative, well-bred, and dashingly handsome, Horthy was the perfect figure around which the right-wing forces could organize. Initially, Horthy was very much only a figurehead. Great violence by the reactionary forces, acting in his name but not under his direction, the so-called "White Terror" ravaged in countryside.

Horthy, at the head of the "National Army" entered Budapest in November 1919, just days after the Romanians had retreated from the city, though they would not retreat from Hungary entirely until the Spring of 1920. In March 1920, the national assembly reconstituted the Kingdom of Hungary, but rather than installing the Habsburg pretender, Charles IV, they instead choose Horthy to act as Regent. Thus, famously, "the Admiral without a Navy became the ruler of a Kingdom without a King".

This entire time, Hungary was beleaguered by foreign troops on almost all borders. Even though the War itself had ended, the final boundaries of the successor nations to Austria-Hungary were not fixed until the Treaty of Trianon, signed in June 1920. Hungary, in no position to contest the terms of the Treaty, emerged vastly diminished. Two-thirds of the land mass of prewar Hungary and a little more than half the population were assigned to other countries: Czechoslovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Yugoslavia, or Austria. Millions of ethnic Hungarians now found themselves living outside of Hungary. In addition to the economic devastation the dismemberment of Hungary caused – most of the territory removed was either very productive farmland or the sites of heavy industry and mining, there was a great social loss; the country was shattered. The Horthy regime used the revanchist dream as a rallying cry. Phrases such as "No, No, Never!" or "Rump Hungary is not a Country; Greater Hungary is Heaven" were found on posters, schoolbooks, and public documents.[11] Statues commemorating the lost lands and people appeared all over Hungary. It was within this social and economic milieu that the Horthy regime inaugurated the Magyar Reprezentativ exhibition series.

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Hungarian Representative Exhibition (1920)

The history of the Magyar Reprezentativ exhibitions has been previously discussed by me in a longer article which focused on the rhetoric surrounding the displays. This article, in contrast, will focus on the artists and materials displayed. However, a brief description of the program is called for; this brief description draws on that article.[12]

The origin of the Hungarian Representative Exhibitions, of which about 10 took place between 1920 and 1930[13] can be found in the diplomatic and cultural activity of Count Miksa Hadik (1868-1921), Austro-Hungarian Ambassador to Sweden, during the last years of the First World War. Hadik solicited Count Gyula Andrássy Junior (1860-1929) to organize a show of Hungarian decorative arts in Sweden. The stated goal was to build on the example of the so-called "Kriegsausstellung", exhibitions of artwork produced during the Great War. In Austria-Hungary, these exhibitions were coordinated by the Kriegspressequartier/Sajtohadiszallitas which during the War had enlisted artists to record the scenes of battle and its aftermath as well as the everyday humdrum of military life.[14] During the war, a number of exhibitions – at least three – of the office's works were organized. Hadik was particularly taken with the 1917 show in Holland and took that as the model.[15]

Even before his selection by Hadik, Count Andrássy had been involved in what would now be called "cultural diplomacy". He had long championed the display of Hungarian art as a means of promoting greater interest in and understanding of Hungarian culture. In a 1912 essay, he wrote:

> *And we could gain a lot especially through art. Our language is not understood in Europe. Our science and fiction are largely closed books to strangers. International influence, prestige and cultural weight can be gained most quickly and surely with our art. The language of art is a world language that everyone understands. The Hungarian personality could become known the earliest and most surely through the works of art.*[16]

Although the actual show envisioned and desired by Hadik was delayed because of the war, the idea lived on.

With the emergence of the Horthy regime, it revived. Gyula Pekár, Minister for Religion and Public Education, again sought out Gyula Andrássy for assistance. This renewed effort resulted in the creation of the Külföldi Művészeti Kiállítások Végrehajtó Bizottság/Executive Committee for Foreign Art Exhibitions, a desk within the Ministry of Religion and Public Education, which was tasked with organizing, coordinating, and promoting the shows. Little was written about the impetus for the Committee at the time of its creation, but in 1927, when the mandate of its bureaucratic successor, the Magyar Országos Képzőművészeti Tanács/ Hungarian National Fine Arts Council, was concluding, Béla Déry, a long-time member of both committees, recounted the founding idea for the Representative Exhibitions in his book, *Foreign Art Exhibitions in 1927: Warsaw, Poznan, Cracow, Vienna, Fiume*. At the time, the early 1920s he wrote, Hungari-

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an art would only make an appearance and be judged if there were a World's Fair or similar large-scale international art exhibition. Hungarian art was not often invited to present itself abroad independently, so its development and high quality were unknown outside of Hungary.[17] The Representative Exhibitions were deliberately designed as a remedy to that foreign ignorance and provinciality. Additionally, the Horthy regime used the shows as a tool of cultural diplomacy and propaganda, working to deepen ties with friendly states, and, through the presentation of Hungarian art, to publicize Hungarian political discontents and aspirations.

The revived Committee initially organized an exhibition in The Hague and in Amsterdam. Further shows were already envisioned throughout Europe. As was reported in the newspaper "Világ" in February 1920:

> *On the initiative of State Secretary Gyula Pekár, there was a meeting in the Ministry of Religion and Public Education regarding traveling art exhibitions planned abroad, at which the Executive Committee of Foreign Art Exhibitions was finally established. Ministerial adviser Dr. Árpád Nagy, head of the art department, presided. The meeting determined the program of traveling exhibitions. These exhibitions will be held in Zurich, Bern, Basel, Amsterdam, The Hague, Rotterdam, Gröningen, Stockholm, Copenhagen, and Berlin, and the exhibition material will be on its way by the end of March.*[18]

The shows' goals were clearly articulated by the organizers. When asked by the newspaper "Magyarország" as to what he expected from the exhibition, Count Andrássy responded: "One of the strongest weapons of Hungarian culture is fine art, not only because it is at a very high level in our country, but also because its language is international and can be understood by everyone.[19]" Andrássy acknowledged the economic aspect to the show, a reflection of the parlous state of the Hungarian economy at the time, saying that "[t]he economic importance of the exhibition is also very important and we can hope that our artists will get good foreign currency".[20]

This inaugural Budapest version of the Representative Exhibition was understood as a new chapter in Hungarian art diplomacy. It built upon but also expanded the work of its immediate precursor, the much smaller-scaled and focussed Kriegsausstellungen. János Bende, in a 5 December 1920 article in the newspaper "Ország-Világ" insightfully understood and articulated the goals of the show. Beyond simply presenting the Hungarian art of the day, the show was intended to have great international diplomatic meaning. As Bende wrote:

> *Participating in international exhibitions has always been a matter of first priority for individual nations and thus for Hungarians, and it is all the more important for us in the current circumstances. After all, now that all other*

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> *weapons have been wrested from our hands, [exhibitions are] the only weapon we have in our culture with which we can gain recognition from abroad and prove the viability and historical vocation of Hungarians. And even among the intellectual weapons, fine art is the most important, because our language is not understood anywhere in Europe, our literature is a closed book to foreign countries, while fine art, which speaks the international language of colors, lines and shapes, is equally understandable everywhere and is therefore best suited to prove to the world the vitality and the will to live of the Hungarian nation sentenced to death with an exclamatory speech. This exhibition only partially meets this goal, as it lacks the greatest strengths of our fine arts.*[21]

The Budapest show, though clearly oriented to the Hungarian audience, was a grand success. Prince Castagnetto Castiglione, Minister Plenipotentiary of Italy, visited the show repeatedly; he so impressed with the material shown that he arranged for the Italian government to request a show of Hungarian art in Rome. He also organized an invitation for Hungary to the 12th Venice Biennale, already evidence of the effectiveness of the concept of cultural diplomacy.[22]

The inaugural show in Budapest presented approximately 170 paintings and 45 sculptures from a total of 85 artists: 61 painters and 24 sculptors. No written record of the arrangement of the pieces with the National Salon has been located. One of the few visual records is an image published in the newspaper "Ország-Világ".[23] This image, while it does present a view of the exhibition has as its focus visitors to the show, in this case, the English Admiral Trowbridge and his son, rather than the art displayed. Nonetheless, in the background, the hanging of the paintings is clearly visible.

The printed catalog of the exhibition gives no indication of the physical arrangement of the works, either room by room, by date, or by style. Works in the catalogue are grouped first by medium, then alphabetically by artist.

The catalog does not provide dates for the works shown, but it does provide life dates for the exhibited artists, which allows for a certain cursory analysis. The oldest artists, classified by the catalog as "the great masters of Hungarian painting": Géza Mészöly (1844-1877), Mihály Munkácsy (1844-1900), Béla Pállik (1845-1908), László Paál (1846-1879), and Lajos Bruck (1846-1910) were all born in the 1840s while the youngest artist displayed, Pal Udvary, was born in 1900, a range of some sixty years. A close examination of the birth decades of the artists furnishes some insight into their training and artistic pedigree. The single largest decennial cohort, with 21 artists, was the 1870s. The preceding and following decades 1860 and 1880, had 13 and 12 artists, respectively. This would mean that the earliest artists would, by necessity, have trained abroad, as the

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Magyar Képzőművészeti Egyetem/ the Hungarian Fine Arts University, was not founded until 1871. But the vast majority of those born in the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s, would have been able to train in Hungary, at initially, though the more successful ones might have studied further in Munich, Berlin, or Paris.

Also instructive and worth noting are the lenders to the exhibition. The provenance of 34 of the works displayed is listed. Thirteen of the displayed works were listed as belonging to the Hungarian Fine Arts Museum (Szépművészeti Múzeum tulajdona), the only public institution listed as lending to the exhibition.[24] The remain 21 works are from private collections. The largest group, 9 pieces, are from the collection of Gusztáv Sajóházi Schuller. Károly Horváth loaned 6 works to the show; Baron Adolf Kohner 3 works. Count and Mrs. Andrássy each had one work on display; they are listed separately as owners. Surprisingly, the well-known Hungarian collector, Marcel Jánoshalmi Nemes,[25] had but one single work on display. A possible explanation for this small number of works from such a renown collector is the First Show of Works taken into Public Possession/A köztulajdonba vett műkincsek első kiállítása of just a year earlier. Organized by the short-lived Hungarian Soviet led by Béla Kun, the show was the result of the government confiscation of private art collections. An extensive catalogue was produced, in which Nemes' name repeatedly appears.[26] It is well possible that there was either a reluctance on his part to lend to another show, even if this time voluntarily or the return of the works, which began with the ascension of the Horthy Regime, was slow.

The catalogue for this inaugural show featured a long essay by Károly Lyka, a leading art writer of the time. The essay, which is discussed at far greater length in my previous article, emphasizes the role of Hungary in the defense of Europe and the price it paid through the lack of cultural development:

> *Hungarian art has always been and still is an integral part of European art. Beyond the borders of Hungary built by nature, towards the East there is no European art, that is, there is no art that shared ideals with the art of Western European peoples. Beyond the Hungarian borders, the process of development stopped in the Middle Ages, and the art of Hungarians represents the last great belt in the south-east of Europe, on which Hungarian art has been continuously forming, organically changing and developing for many centuries.*[27]

Hungary, he declares, was the bastion again the Muslims in earlier centuries, just as it is again the bastion against the current threat from the East.

Hungarian Representative Exhibition: Holland (1921)

After the premier of the Magyar Representative Exhibition cycle in Budapest, it travelled to the Netherlands, where it was shown in

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Amsterdam and Gravenhage. The Dutch shows differed from the Budapest variant in organization and in presentation. A similar number of works were shown (173 paintings in Budapest; 195 in Amsterdam), but with significant differences in participants. About 30 artists (see appendix 1) exhibited in both shows, but which of their works were displayed and their provenances differed. As previously discussed, for 1920 show, few lenders were named. For the Amsterdam and Gravenhage versions of the show, no lenders at all were named. But, as the vast majority of the works are listed as being for sale, it is doubtful the works were either from Museum collections or private collectors.[28] With this show, as with almost all the shows discussed in this paper, a significant research obstacle clearly identifying precisely which works were shown. The Hungarian language poses a number of problems: in addition to the difficulty posed to foreigners by the larger number of letters in the Hungarian alphabet, the Hungarian pattern of family name preceding given name is also often further confused by the use of titles of nobility. While much of this confusion can be cleared up through recourse to lexicons and other reference sources to identify artists, the titles of artworks themselves present problems as well. The original Hungarian titles are sometimes oddly translated and more precise identification is often further complicated by the painting's generic titles – *Reclining Nude*, *Early Morning*, *Village Scene*. Although some of the catalogues do have illustrations appended, there are usually relatively few. In the absence of reliable visual documentation, it is almost impossible to determine if works of one exhibition with a similar title actually coincides with the image in a different exhibition. However, based on the uniqueness of the titles, it does seem that five images were common to both the Budapest show and the Dutch shows: László E. Baranski *Dredge*; Andor Basch, *Resting Woman*; Gyula Conrad, *Festa Veneziana*; Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch, *Self-portrait*; and Lajos Szlányi, *Winter Sun*. With the exception of Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch, *Self-portrait*, these four works, like of the works in the show, were for sale, a clear demonstration that Andrassy's idea that this cycle could generate foreign currency was taken seriously.[29]

The show's catalogue is very basic. It thanks the members of the organizing committee and then simply lists artist, work name, medium, and price, if for sale.

The Stedelijk Museum, the venue for the Amsterdam iteration of the show, has no archival material about the show, either documentary or photographic. Little of substance seems to have been written about the shows in the Dutch press. Most of the articles are simply announcements of the show or a report on the opening, which was notably attended by Queen Wilhelmina. One article, published in the newspaper "De Standaard", and found in the Stedelijk's archive, did engage with the aesthetics of the show. The author, who is not listed, was rather critical, asking if the work exhibited was really the best of Hungarian art and artists, or if perhaps the Dutch just did not understand Hungarian art. In any event, the author credits the Hungarians as "handsome figure-makers" continuing that the

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"mood of variegated landscapes is a quality that few have in common with them".[30]

While the ideological origins of the show are reasonably well known, the actual organization of the show remains shrouded in mystery as does most of the work undertaken by the Ministry of Religion and Public Education. In 1956, the Soviets mistook the Hungarian State Archive building for a military installation and shelled it. Fire broke out and while much of the archival material could be removed and saved, the papers of the Ministry of Religion and Public Education were decimated. Only scattered bits remain, but it is often possible from other sources – published reports or newspaper reporting – to discern some of the activity of the Ministry, but the details of decision making contained in the archives are lost. Such is the case with the Hungarian Representative Exhibition in Holland. The catalogues from the shows are very basic with neither introductory essay nor illustrations. In later shows both would be present. In addition to Béla Déry, identified as "Referent" of the Executiv-Comité which was credited with organizing the show, a pair of well-known Hungarian-based artists are named as well: the painter Moric Góth and the sculptor Ede Telcs.[31] Also listed among the organizers, as the "Hungarian Government's expert in Holland," is the painter Oskár Mendlik. Mendlik (1871-1963) had studied in Budapest in the late 1890s; in 1898 he won a fellowship to Rome. From 1911 onward, he lived and worked in the Netherlands, specializing in seascapes; numerous exhibitions have been devoted to his work. His activity in the Netherlands on behalf of the Magyar Studio, a main organizer of the show, is not completely clear. Interestingly, despite his seemingly critical involvement with the show with his activity meriting enough attention to be credited as the Hungarian Government's specialist in Holland, he had no contributions to the show.

Hungarian Representative Exhibition: Finland and Estonia (1922)

In the following year, 1922, another iteration of the Hungarian Representative Show (possibly the fifth)[32] was presented in Finland and Estonia. This show marks the beginning of a change: there was a refocusing of the underlying exhibition ideology as well as shift in goals of the exhibition. While the same complaints about the iniquities of Trianon still surface in the catalogue, that is not the sole focus. It additionally focuses on Hungary's relationship with the host countries.

Opening on 15th of November 1922, the show consisted of about 180 paintings and 60 sculptures. Present were Kaarlo Ståhlberg, first President of Finland and patron of the show, as well as the Hungarian Minister Plenipotentiary, Baron Gyula Bornemissza, and Béla Déry, the principal organizer of the show. In addition to the physical show, Count Kunó Klebelsberg, the Hungarian Ministry of Religion and Public Education, commissioned Aladár Bán, a well-known Hungarian expert in Finno-Ugric culture, to present illustrated Finnish-language lectures about the development of Hungarian art.[33] Bán lectured in a several Finnish cities: Helsinki, Turku, Pori and Tampere.[34] While the contents of the lectures remains unknown,

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it no doubt related to the exhibition with which it was associated.

Unlike the Dutch show of the previous year, where the catalogue had neither an essay nor illustrations, this version of the show, in its Finnish-Estonian dual-language catalogue, had both and essay and illustrations. The catalogue essay[35] is vaguely credited to the "Hungarian Committee for the Exhibition"[36] which does not narrow down the authorship, as the catalogue lists a total of 33 members of the committee.[37] While many of the committee members did participate in the Finnish show, it is more likely that the essay was written by one of the members who organized more than one show, probably Ervin Ybl, listed in the catalogue as ministerial secretary. He authored a number of essays for the Representative Show cycle.

The essay is quite similar to that of the 1920 Budapest show, though significantly shorter, only a page and a half, as opposed to 13 pages. Despite its brevity, similar complaints are still brought forth. The same rhetoric of Hungary as the self-sacrificing bastion of the West, preventing the Eastern hordes from destroying Western Civilization are still presented, but not at the same great length as previously. The argument is more refined and less inciting. The essay decries the misplaced Western belief, "the lie they have spread for decades, that our people have only ruled by brute force over foreign-racial peoples living in Hungarian territories".[38] The misconception is disproved "by the history of the development of our culture and our art" which "clearly proves that our people have not only been able to wield a sword, but also a pen, a brush and a knife, and have triumphed, not only through bravery, but also through civilization, over those peoples who have now usurped most of our country".[39] When describing the ideal and realization of this Representative Exhibition, the author evokes the mythic relationship between the Finns and the Hungarians:

> *Our exhibition as a whole gives a picture of development. It wants to show our northern relatives the degree of development of our art and its different directions. Our best artists take part in it with their most descriptive products. From their creative minds blow the whining breeze of the Hungarian plains, the colors of their paintings and the shapes of their sculptures conjured before your eyes the flourishing landscapes of the roads plundered from Hungary and the types depicting our people.*[40]

This evocation of the relationship between the Hungarians and the Finns had great currency at the time.[41] The 1920s and 1930s saw a rise in the popularity of "Turanism," the political and cultural ideology of the unity of the Ural-Altaic speaking peoples. In the late 19th century, its popularity in Hungary was widespread; it was perceived as an antidote to the then-surging idea of "Slavic Brotherhood" which was based on commonality in language as well. From 1913 until 1944, the Turán Society (Hungarian Asian Society) published a journal "Turán"

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devoted to exploring and promoting this ideology. In the 1920s and 1930s Turanism experienced a mild revival, again, as an antidote to the cultural, political, and linguistic isolation of Hungary.[42] The evocation of the mystic chords of memory and fraternity are present in the closing of the catalogue essay:

> *But we must confess that we have come here not only out of artistic ambition, but also out of fraternal respect, and we know that fair criticism and understanding awaits us here. With this thought in our souls, we greet our art-loving brotherhood and express our heartfelt thanks in advance to all those who have worked kindly for the success of our exhibition!* [43]

The works shown were from a range of artists. Of the 73 artists exhibiting, 19 of them had participated in the Dutch show the previous year.[44] It is particularly striking that the artist Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch (1863-1920) had the largest contribution to the Finnish show, 12 works. One possible explanation is his close personal relationship with Akseli Gallen-Kallela, the renowned Finnish national artist who was also the Honorary Finnish supervisor of the exhibition. At the turn of the century Gallen-Kallela had travelled to Hungary where he spent time with Körösfői-Kriesch and others at the Gödöllő artists' colony, a Hungarian manifestation of the Morrisian art idyll and ideal.[45] After returning to Finland, he still maintained close ties to Körösfői-Kriesch. Given Körösfői-Kriesch's recent death (1920) it would not be surprising that his work was given such prominence by his colleagues and friends.

As with the Dutch shows, one of the stated goals of the Finnish exhibition was art sales, to raise hard foreign currency for both the empoverished Hungarian State and suffering Hungarian artists. While none of the financial materials of the exhibitions have been found, a report in the journal "Turán" does discuss the financial results of the exhibit and not in the most glowing of terms. Overall, it seems close to 12 million crowns were raised through the sale of material from and related to the show. It was reported though, that a travelling Hungarian salesman exploited the occasion of the show to peddle lesser-quality goods, particularly folk-art, claiming them to be from the show.

The Finnish show marked the beginning of a change in the tenor of the Hungarian Representative Exhibitions. While the shows would continue on in name until 1930 and beyond, and while the sponsoring organizer, the Országos képzőművészeti tanács, did remain in charge, a shift in what was shown and more significant, how the exhibitions were presented, what their ultimate goals were, did take place. Again, as the archival materials of the Ministry of Religion and Public Education are lost, it is impossible to know the precise machinations behind the changes, but they do coincide with the start of Count Kunó Klebelsberg's tenure as Minister, a position to which he ascended on June 16, 1922 and held until 1931, just before his untimely death at the age of 56.[46] Though by the time he began at the Ministry, it was prob-

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ably too late for him to have any significant ministerial influence on the Finnish exhibition, as Minister he did commission Aládar Bán's lecture series, the organization and implementation of which require much less time and planning. The series also supported Klebelsberg's ideas on the renewal of Hungarian culture and the importance of cultural diplomacy were well known at the time.

A practical manifestation of Klebelsberg's recognition of and interest in the cultural diplomatic work of the Representative Exhibitions was his revival of the Országos képzőművészeti tanács/ National Fine Arts Council, which had been moribund since 1918. In November of 1923, Klebelsberg revived the Council, extending its bailiwick to include architecture. While the committee received a new name, its membership, its composition and its goals were similar to those of the now abolished Külföldi Művészeti Kiállítások Végrehajtó Bizottság/ Executive Committee for Foreign Art Exhibitions. Notably, K. Róbert Kertész remained as president of the Council, similar to his role in the previous Committee and Béla Déry remained as the main artistic organizer.

With the new name came an expanded remit. While the Hungarian Representative Exhibitions continued as free-standing undertakings, as they had before, the Council now also participated in foreign art exhibitions. While the works would be part of larger shows, they were still submitted and exhibited under the title "Hungarian Representative Exhibition". At the 1925 Great Berlin Art Exhibit, for instance, there was a distinct section of the show – and of the catalogue – devoted to Hungarian art. From the catalogue, it is not clear if the works displayed were actually shown separately within the general exhibition space or if they had their own distinct area, but within the catalogue at least, the Hungarian works are clearly differentiated from the German works. Credit for the organization of the Hungarian exhibition is given to the Ungarischer Landes Senat für Schöne Künste and the Comité der Ausländischen Ausstellungen.[47] This seems to be the first exhibition within an exhibition, a format which would coexist into the 1930s with the free-standing Hungarian Representative Exhibition.

By this time, well into his third year as Minister, it is highly probable that Klebelsberg had some hand in the organization of the Exhibition. The year of the exhibition, 1925, also saw Minister Klebelsberg take a culturally and politically significant trip to Berlin. Though his presence in Berlin, in late October 1925, did not coincide with the Exhibition, which ran from May 16 until the end of August 1925, the show, nonetheless, was a clear physical manifestation of his cultural diplomatic ideals.

In an address Klebelsberg read in the entrance hall of the Friedrich Wilhelm's University, which he himself had attended 30 years earlier, *Ungarische Kulturpolitik nach dem Kriege*, the Minister clearly verbalized the ideas and ideals undergirding his new cultural political program, especially its outward cultural-diplomatic aspect. Klebelsberg stated that the goals of his visit were two-fold. The first was to

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"strengthen the spiritual ties that always united Germans and Hungarians" and the second was to "report on the tireless work we have done in Hungary after the collapse to save traditional Hungarian culture".[48] Lauding German culture, he continues that without German education, culture itself would be impossible and thus he had come to Berlin to announce the creation of a permanent cultural institution, the *Collegium Hungaricum*, to "give our spiritual cooperation an organic, that is, a continuous and living form.[49]

The Berlin Collegium Hungaricum was the second of the 4 such institutions which would be opened during Klebelsberg's tenure. The first, in Vienna,[50] opened in September of 1924; that of Berlin followed in 1925; and in 1928 the Rome Collegium (re) opened.[51] A number of Hungarian Institutes, seemingly smaller, less well-funded, and with more modest goals were also established in Madrid, Warsaw, Amsterdam, and Stockholm at the same time.[52]

The new tack in cultural diplomacy was implemented not just in Germany. In Italy as well, similar to the Grosse Berliner Kunstausstellung, within the Seconda Esposizione internazionle di belle arti dell citta di Fiume/ The Second International Exhibition of Fine Arts of the City of Fiume, was a separate section labelled in the catalogue as the Esposizione rappresentative del Regno d'Ungheri followed by listing of the Membri del Consiglio Nazionale di Belle Art.[53]

The show, an international exhibition, did have foreign displays: Yugoslavian, Czechoslovakian, Bulgarian, and Polish, but they were presented as inherent constituent sections of the show. The Hungarian section though was listed separately and it was given much more ink. It is not clear if the works were shown in their own, separate and distinct spaces, or integrated with the rest of the materials displayed.

The catalogue of the Fiume show also featured a four-page essay, by Béla Déry, one of the organizers and a key figure in the Council. Unlike the catalogue essays of previous exhibits, this one did not dwell upon the iniquities of Trianon or even mention it. It focused instead on the long-standing artistic and cultural relationship between Hungary and Italy.[54]

Within the Hungarian section were two separate displays. One was a selection of works, approximately 35, from the City Museum of Budapest, which had been collecting art since before the turn of the century.[55] The second portion of the exhibition was the Hungarian Representative Exhibition which, in addition to over 200 works of art, also had about 50 pieces of Herend porcelain.

Hungarian Representative Exhibition: Warsaw, 1927

While smaller versions of the Hungarian Representative Exhibition were often annexed to other art shows, the independent exhibit of the early 1920s did continue. In both cases, the organizers remained essentially the same, the newly minted Council having an almost identical composition to that of the Executive Committee for Foreign Art Exhibitions that it replaced. And both: the Council and Executive Committee for Foreign Art Exhibitions were under the Ministry of Religion and

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Public Education.

The year 1927, which saw the expiration of the enabling legislation of the Council, also saw an exhibition of Hungarian Art in the Polish capital, Warsaw. The exhibition then traveled to Poznan and to Cracow. In Vienna, and, as already mentioned, in Fiume, the exhibitions had Hungarian portions presented as part of the larger more general exhibition. In the case of Vienna, the Hungarian portion was curated by Béla Déry, as Royal Hungarian Government Commissioner, Béla Iványi Grünwald, painter, and Dr. Sándor von Jeszenszky, general secretary of the Szinyei Society. Whatever role the Council may have had is not noted, though presumably Déry used his position to his advantage.[56]

In 1927, as the mandate for the Council was ending, long-time Council member and director of the National Salon, Béla Déry produced a history of the Council and its activities, particularly focusing on those of the last year of its existence. His book *Művészeti kiállítások külföldön az 1927. évben: Warszawa, Poznań, Kraków, Wien, Fiume* includes Vienna and Fiume more for chronological completeness than for comparison as the two shows were not only rather small but, more important, were not free-standing shows organized by the Council alone; they were housed separately within the larger overarching show.

In many ways, the Polish show of the 1927 was the ultimate fulfillment of the Council's goals of cultural diplomacy and represented the zenith of its activity in form, in content, and in purpose. Though there were three different venues: Warsaw, Poznan, Cracow, and the contents of the three shows did not vary greatly, the success of each show in its respective venue did. As Déry relates, each venue posed its own unique political quandaries, especially Cracow, where the various competing local art societies –which controlled the desirable art venues-- were constantly feuding.

Déry places the origins to a show of Polish Graphic Art in Budapest in 1926.[57] The Polish Ambassador I.S. Michalowski extended an invitation to the Regent Miklos Horthy during the opening of the Polish show. Horthy accepted the invitation, then delegated organization of the show to the Fine Arts Council's Foreign Exhibit Committee. This committee, coordinating with the Council, named a larger committee to supervise both the organization and administration of the show.[58]

The exhibit itself consisted of 271 pictures and graphic works, representing about 90 artists. The works themselves were drawn from a range of sources, public and private. For the purposes of organization, the Director of the Budapest Fine Arts Museum, Dr. Elek Petrovic, was seconded to the committee. Through his connections, he seems to have been able to secure loans from a variety of private collectors, such as Marcel Nemes, Count Gyula Andrássy, Dr. Henrik Nádor, Baron Adolf Kohner, and József Wolfner. A number of Hungarian art societies, such as the Szinyei Merse Pál tarsasag/Pál Szinyei Merse Society,[59] the Képzőművészek Új/ New Artists Society, whose name is often abbreviated KUT,[60] as well as the Benczúr Tarsasag/ Benczúr Society also participated.

The first of the show's three stops

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was Warsaw. As befit its political and cultural significance, this was also the most elaborate presentation of the works, within the building of the Towarzisztvo zachetny Sztuk Pieknich/Polish Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts. The size of the Society's space allowed the organizers to allocate separate rooms for each of the participating societies. The entrance to each space was marked to indicate the society displaying within. As the work of the Benczur group was so small, it shared the same room as the historical exhibition. Déry notes, however, that the catalogue did not differentiate amongst the artists' associations, it simply listed the participants alphabetically.

The show's opening, as described by Déry, demonstrated the diplomatic and cultural significance the show represented. Nationally and locally significant Polish dignitaries, ranging from the President of the Polish Republic to the Foreign Minister to Mayor of Warsaw as well as numerous foreign Ambassadors: French, American, English, Austrian, Belgian, Italian, Dutch, Bulgarian, Danish, Brazilian, Estonian, Finnish, Romanian, Swiss, Norwegian, and Czechoslovak were all present. In addition to the Hungarian organizers who traveled to Poland, the Hungarian Ambassador Sándor Belitska, attended. Also present was Dr. Adorján Divéky, press attaché and Hungarian history and language lecturer at the Warsaw University, a post he assumed in 1917, after having spent two years at the University of Cracow as a lecturer in history. In 1935, when a Hungarian Institute formally opened in Warsaw, following several years of the existence of a Hungarian Library and Cultural Center, Divéky was named the first director.

After a four-week run in Warsaw, the show traveled westward to Poznan, where it was housed in the Greater Poland Museum/Wielkopolski Muzeum. While the Poznan opening was still festive, it was neither as grand nor as significant as that of the Warsaw opening. Local dignitaries, not national or international, comprised the audience. The show, which only ran for two weeks, seems to have had the same content as that of the Warsaw show.

The third, and final stop was the formerly Austrian controlled city of Cracow. A feud among the various artists' groups which controlled exhibition space within the city almost prevented the show from taking place. However, as Déry writes, it was only through the intervention of the Mayor of Cracow and the District Vojvoda, that for the duration of the Hungarian exhibition that peace was achieved between the parties, which had been feuding for years.[61]

In Cracow, for technical reasons, the planned reception for the invited guests from Budapest could not take place. The Hungarian Ambassador, Sándor Belitska, was present though, as were the leading cultural and intellectual figures of Cracow. The Cracow stop was, like that in Poznan, only two weeks long. A total of 7,141 visitors were recorded.

Déry's final accounting of the Hungarian Representative Exhibition in Poland shows that while the cultural-diplomatic aspect was important, as in the previous show, finances remained significant as well. As he sums up: total cost of transportation and installation for the 135 days the

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show was up was 3025 pengő (and 61 fillér). The show was viewed by a total of 27,142 visitors, the vast majority in Warsaw. A happy result of the show was the sale of 47 works, of painting, graphic art, or applied art, for a total of 12,840 pengő, when the average laborer's income was 1,000 pengő a year.

The choice of Poland as the venue for this major demonstration of cultural politics was deliberate. Hungary and Poland have a long and intertwined history dating back to the 1300 and 1400s when there was a physical union between the countries through the ruler. The Polish-Hungarian relationship, though hoary, was also constantly renewed. In 1848, Bem József (Józef Zachariasz Bem) offered his services to Kossuth and his revolutionary army. Initially entrusted with the defense of Transylvania and subsequently with command of the Székely troops, Bem acquitted himself well. Ultimately leaving Hungary with the sundering of the 1848 Revolution and casting his lot with the Ottoman Turks (after accepting Islam) he is nonetheless well-remembered in Hungary, where he earned the nickname *Bem apó*/Grandpa Bem.

In 1925, the 75th anniversary of Bem's death, the Hungarian Polish Society commissioned a commemorative plaque for Bem in Budapest, which was dedicated the next year. The following year, 1926, saw the founding of a Polish committee to construct a monument and rebury Bem's ashes in his homeland. The next anniversary of his death, December 11, 1927, marked the 77 years since his death and to mark the occasion, the Hungarian Bem Society organized a commemorative "Bem Day". The following year, 1928, Bem's ashes were reinterred in Tarnow; the handling of them as they passed through Hungary was organized by the Bem Society.[62]

While that element of their common history fresh in mind, there was another reason Poland was the site of the great cultural diplomatic event. In the immediate post-war era, Poland was Hungary's nearest neighbor with whom they did not have a boundary dispute, even if Trianon and other post-war treaties had resolved the issue and fixed "new" boundaries.

The works displayed in the Polish exhibition were rather different than those of the Finnish/Estonian exhibition, the last free-standing Hungarian representative exhibition, as opposed to the Fiume, Berlin, or Vienna exhibitions where, while the organizer was the same, fewer works were displayed, but, more important, they were only constituent parts of a much larger exhibition.

Six of the artists of the Finnish exhibition were also exhibited in Poland: Gyula Batthyány, Gyula Conrad, István Csók, Aladár Edvi-Illés, Oszkár Glatz, and Kálmán Kato. More significant than the artists who had shown previously were the newer artists displaying such as Vilmos Aba-Novak, Istvan Bosznay, or Béla Iványi Grünwald, whose works represent a new trend in Hungarian painting. The Polish show, unlike any of the previous shows, organized display of the participants by the artistic group with which they were aligned. Three main groups were shown in Poland: The Szinyei-Merse Society founded in 1920; the Benczur Society founded

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in 1921; and the Képzőművészek Új Társasága (KUT), the most modern of the groups. The artists exhibiting in Poland also represented a turn in Hungarian painting. While there had been a violently modernist tendency from the late teens until the crushing of the Hungarian Soviet, those artists who had allied themselves with the communists, such as Lajos Kassák, Róbert Bereny, or Sándor Bortnyik, were forced into exile. Kassák went to Vienna; Bortnyik to Weimar, where he was associated with, but not technically part of, the Bauhaus. With the general amnesty of 1925, they were allowed to return, though it was predicated upon abjuring political activity. While the artists returned, the styles that had forced them into exile generally remained abroad. They concretized their forced journeyman years in their work once they returned. Bortnyik for instance, adopted many of the pedagogical ideas of the Bauhaus and founded his own school, the Műhely/ Workshop, often referred to as the "little Bauhaus".[63]

But these were not the artists nor the art displayed in Poland. These "modern" works in Poland were still representational. Hungary displayed the modernism of Cezanne and the Impressionists, not the modernism of Picasso and Moholy-Nagy.

Exhibition of Modern Art: Nuremberg 1928

Similar to the way Bem bound Poland and Hungary, Albrecht Dürer bound Germany and Hungary. Dürer's father, Albrecht Senior, emigrated to Germany from the small Hungarian town of Ajtos. In Germany, his original Hungarian last name, Ajtosi (meaning from or of Ajtos) was translated to Türer or Dürer.[64]

The year 1928 saw the four hundredth anniversary of Dürer's death. A series of Dürer events were organized to celebrate that quadricentennial in Germany as well as in Hungary. Coordination though, was not between States, not between Germany and Hungary, but between Nuremberg, Dürer's hometown, and Budapest, though there was support from the Ministry of Religion and Public Education, both Minister Klebelsberg himself, as well as Kertész and Déry. While the Council does not seem to have been formally administering the exhibition, their presence and participation are apparent.

The Mayor of Nuremberg, Dr. Hermann Luppe, along with the Nuremberg City Council organized a series of celebrations of the great German Renaissance Artist and hometown boy. As part of this celebration, an exchange was organized between Nuremberg and Budapest. Nuremberg hosted a "Hungarian Week" while Budapest was the site of a "Nuremberg Week". In addition to concerts, operas, and dance performances, a series of exhibitions were organized. In Budapest these included a general exhibition, an exhibition of Nuremberg's Schools and Culture,[65] as well as an exhibition of "Old and New Art" which was shown in the Nemzeti Salon, premier art exhibition venue of the city.[66]

As part of the Nuremberg's Ungarische Woche, parallel events were organized: concerts, plays, and dance performances. There was also an art exhibition, the Ausstellung neuzeitlicher ungarischer Kunst/

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Exhibition of Contemporary Hungarian Art.[67] Organized by Professor Franz Traugott Schulz, the show was the product of a longer sojourn of his in Budapest, where he made contacts with various artist organizations, such as the Szinyei-Merse Society, the Benczur Society, and KUT but also numerous studio visits. While there was initial skepticism about a foreigner selecting Hungarian art for display abroad, it was overcome, and the show was ultimately embraced by Budapest's artistic community. Schulz's organizational work, in Hungary and in Nuremberg, was aided by Erwin von Körmendy (Körmendi-Frim Ervin, 1885-1939) a Hungarian painter then residing in Nuremberg who was also a member of KUT. As the title of the show indicates, the focus of the show was modern art, but as a prologue, there was a smaller retrospective portion of the show, organized by Dr. Alexius Petrovics, General Director of the Hungarian Museum of Fine Arts. This included works both from the Museum itself and from well-known private collections.[68]

A highlight of the commemoration was a visit by close to 600 of the leading citizens of Nuremberg. Arriving by chartered train, they first celebrated in Budapest and then travelled on a pilgrimage to Ajtos where a festive banquet was held. The significance of this visit – its political importance to Budapest and Hungary – can be seen in the commemorative medal produced at the time. Designed by the renowned Hungarian medal artist, József Reményi, on the obverse the medal shows a man wearing traditional Hungarian festive garb (Diszmagyar) holding a shield with the Nuremberg coat of arms, shaking hands with a German in medieval garb, holding a shield with the Budapest coat of arms. Encircling them is the phrase "The Capital City of Budapest Warmly Welcomes its Guests from Nuremberg".[69] The reverse has a traditionally-dressed Hungarian Huszar with a flag and shield on which is the date 8-15/9; to his left is 1929. Encircling him is the German phrase "Welcome in Budapest".[70]

The Germans produced several commemorative medals, but they were focused on Dürer, his achievement, and his Germanness, not the his relationship to Hungary.. One medal for instance, produced by the Bavarian State Mint, features Dürer's well-known self-portrait on the obverse, encircled by the caption "Albrecht Dürer-Jahr Nürnberg". The reverse has the door of Dürer's coat of arms and the so-called "small seal" of the city of Nürnberg below the phrase "Ehrt Eure deutschen Meister!" a quotation from Richard Wagner's opera, Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg. A number of similar medals seem to have been produced.

The intellectual product of the Dürer-jahr is extensive. In Hungary, a number of publications, dedicated to the commemorative year but also to underscoring Dürer's relationship with Hungary were produced: *Dürer-literature in Hungary, 1800-1928*, *Dürer on the Occasion of the Four- Hundredth Anniversary of his Death* or *Albrecht Dürer, 1528-1928: Also an Attempt at a Hungarian Dürer Bibliography.*[71]

The Hungarian art exhibition, housed in the Norishalle, consisted of about 420 works, divided into two groups. There was a small "Retrospective portion" of 65 objects

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from 16 artists, with works of older Hungarian masters, such as Michael Munkacsy, Pal Szinyei-Merse, or Simon Hollosy, drawn from the collection of the Fine Arts Museum. But the main feature was the "Living Art" section, which, with slightly more than 100 artists exhibiting 400 works, constituted the bulk of the exhibition and was significantly larger than exhibitions of the previous years. Several of the artists had also exhibited in Poland[72] but there were also numerous artists for whom this was a first time showing in an exhibition associated with the Council.[73]

Again, the works of the exhibition are not profoundly abstract; there is the loose brushwork of modernism, the deliberate countervailing use of color, and a movement away from studio-bound history or religious paintings, but there are still clearly objects at the base of each image. A total of 18 works, painting and sculpture, were purchased by the Nuremberg City Museum.[74] With the exception of some confiscated in the 1930s as "Degenerate" and one lost during bombing in the War, they still remain in the City's Collection.

The Nuremberg show of contemporary Hungarian art was the last great such independent Hungarian show of the decade. At the time little was made of the exhibition in the Hungarian press; it is often only mentioned in passing. But it is precisely the mundaneness of the reception of this exhibit which demonstrates the success of the program of Hungarian Representative Exhibitions. No longer was Hungary an outsider, decrying the iniquities of history, but rather, it had taken its place among the nations of Europe as an equal. The pain of the forced border revisions continued – throughout the interwar period various groups advocated for changing the borders[75] – but the government shifted its focus to forging alliances rather than pushing complaints.

The theme of this issue is "Objects on the move". In the case of the Hungarian Representative exhibitions, the objects in motion are not necessarily individual paintings or sculptures, but rather, the concept of an exhibition. Organized by the same governmental ministry over the course of the two decades, the Hungarian Representative exhibitions' materials changed over time even as the format remained essentially the same. In the course of the 1920s, the focus, the ultimate theme of the exhibitions, changed from the painful national trials of Hungary under the iniquitous Treaty of Trianon, to the uniqueness of Hungarian art, to the role of art and art exhibitions as cultural ambassadors.

Through the 1930s, as Hungary tried to navigate between the Scylla of Nazi Germany and the Charybdis of Fascist Italy, this cultural diplomatic role of the exhibitions took on a greater and greater significance. This object that moved, the exhibitions, also branched across the Atlantic, finding a home in the United States. Beginning in 1930, a series of exhibitions, never as large as any iteration of the Hungarian Representative Exhibition of the previous decade, were held in venues across the United State. This was a clear demonstration of the Hungarian government's belief that it was not just objects that could be moved, but minds as well.

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Magyar Reprezentativ 1920 Catalogue Name	Holland 1921 Catalogue Name	Finland Estonia 1922 Catalogue Name	Warsaw 1927 Catalogue Name	Nuremberg 1929 Catalogue Name
			Wilhelm Aba Novak	Wilhelm Aba-Novak
		Ede Balló	Edward Balló	
László E. Baranski	László E. Baranski	László E. Baranski		
Gyula Batthány	Gy. Batthyány	Gyula Batthyány	Juljusz Batthyany	Julius Batthyány
Andor Basch	Andor Basch	Andor Basch		Andor Basch
Ernő Béli Vörös	Ernő v. Béli Vörös	Ernő Béli-Vörös		
Ágost Benkhard	Agost Benkhardt			
Géza Bornemisza	Géza v. Bornemisza		Géza Bornemisza	Geza Bornemisza
István Bosznay	István Bosznay		Stefan Bosznay	
			Rudolf Burghardt	Rudolf Burghardt
Gyula Conrad	Gyula Conrad	Gyula Conrad	Juljusz Conrad	
Dénes Csánky	Dénes Csánky		Dyonizy Csanky	Dénes Csánky
István Csók	István Csók	István Csók	Stefan Csok	István Csók
Jenő Csuk	Jenő Csuk	Jenő Csuk		
Béla Déry	Béla v. Déry	Béla Déry	Déry Béla	Béla Déry
Aladár Edvi Illés	Aladár Edvi-Illés	Aladár Edvi-Illés	Aladár Edvi Illés	Aladár Edvi Illés
		Adolf Fényes		Adolf Fényes
Károly Ferenczy	Karl Ferenczy			Károly Ferenczy
	Frigyes Frank	Frigyes Frank		Frigyes Frank
	Ferencz Gaál	Ferenc Gaal		
Oszkár Glatz	Oszkár Glatz	Oszkár Glatz	Oskar Glatz	Oskar Glatz
Ferenc Hatvany	Ferenc Hatvany			Ferenc Hatvany
Béla Iványi-Grünwald	B. Iványi-Grünwald		Béla Iványi Grünwald	Béla Jványi-Grünwald
				Péter Kálmán
Kálmán Kató	Kálmán Kató	Kálmán Kato	Kálmán Kató	
	L. v. Kézdi-Kovács	László Kézdi-Kovács		
Ervin (sic) Körmendi–Frimm	E. Körmendi-Frimm			Eugen Körmendy
Aladár Körösfői Kriesch	A. Körösfői-Kriesch	Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch		
	József Koszta			Josef Koszta
Gyula Kosztolányi Kann	Gy. Kosztolányi-Kann			Gyula Kosztolányi
	Géza Kövesdy	Géza Kövesdy		
	Lajos v. Kunffy			Lajos Kunffy
Cézár Kunwald	Cézár Kunwald			Caesar Kunwald
László Mednyánszky	L. Mednyánszky	László Mednyánszky		László Mednyánszky
Róbert Nádler	Róbert Nádler			Róbert Nádler
				Károly Patkó
				Isaak Perlmutter
István Réti	István Réti			Stefan Réti
József Rippl-Rónai	József Rippl-Rónai			József Rippl-Rónai
Gyula Rudnay	József Gyula Rudnay			Julius Rudnay
Lajos Szlányi	Lajos Szlányi			Lajos Szlányi
Ödön Szmrecsányi	Ödön v. Szmrecsányi			
				Péter Szüle
Elemér Vass	Elemér Vass			Elemer Vass
János Vaszary	János v. Vaszary	János Vaszary		Johann Vaszary
	István Zádor			Stefan Zádor

Appendix 01: Locations and date of Artists exhibiting in 3 or more *Representative Exhibitions.*

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Endnotes:

1 This project has been generously supported by the Center for the History of Collection of the Frick Collection, the Botstiber Institute for Austrian-American Studies, Fulbright Hungary, and the Fashion Institute of Technology.

2 For clarity and uniformity, Hungarian names will be presented in the traditional western format: first name, last name. However, names will not be translated, so Szinyei-Merse Pál will be presented as Pál (not Paul) Szinyei-Merse.

Kertész trained as an architect at Budapest's Technical University. At the turn of the century, he was best known for his work in researching foreign architecture, having travelled to the Far East during his student years. He produced articles and books about Ceylonese, Japanese, and Far Eastern architecture. He, along with Gyula Svab, collected plans for traditional folk houses. Kertész, Sváb 2011. His interest turned to national architecture in the late teens, when he authored Nemzeti epitoműveszet/National Architecture. He designed the objects and setting for the coronation of Karoly IV.: Kertesz 1917. Kertesz began working in the Ministry of Religion and Public Education in 1908 as a consulting architect; from 1922-1934 he headed the Fine Arts Section and served as State Secretary.

3 Déry 1921; 1927.

4 Nékám 1935.

5 Nagy 2011; 2015; 2017; 2021.

6 Gerencsér 2018.

7 Klebelsberg 1925; 1927; 1930a;1930b; 1930c; Glatz, 1969; 1971; Kiss 1998; Herzog 2003; Ujváry 2009; 2013; Klein, Huszar 2023.

8 Hungarian participation in the Venice Biennale has been well documented in: Bódi 2014.

9 This issue and the complex relationship among various constituent nationalities of Austro-Hungary is thoroughly and deeply discussed in: Clegg 2006.

10 Commonly referred to as "white" as opposed to communist "red" forces.

11 The pervasiveness of Trianon revanchism has been explored in: Zeidler 2002.

12 Albert 2024.

13 These are the representative exhibition I know of: 1920 Budapest; 1922 Amsterdam and Gravenhage; 1922 Stockholm; 1922 Finland and Estonia; 1924 Vienna (this is listed in the accompanying catalogue as the "Ninth" exhibition, but it is not clear if each individual showing of the exhibition, i.e. in two cities within the same country during the same tour, count as one or two exhibits for the organizers); 1927 Warsaw; 1929 Oslo.

14 The activity of the Kriegspressequartier or the Sajtóhadiszállás as the Austrian and Hungarian offices were, respectively, are dealt with is: Kollros, Pils 2014; Colpan et al. 2015; Reichel 2016. The work of Hungarian artists in particular is explored in: Róka, Szücs 2014.

15 *Tentoonstelling van werken…* 1917.

16 Déry, Bányász, Margitay, 1912. Foreward.

17 Déry, 1927, p. 3.

18 "Világ", February 14, 1920, p. 8.

19 Magyar kultúrának egyik legerősebb fegyvere a képzőművészet, nemcsak lázért, mert ez nálunk igen magas nívón áll, hanem mert a nyelve internacionális és így mindenki által megérthető. A kiállítás gazdasági jelentősége is igen fontos és remélhetjük, hogy művészeink jó külföldi valutához fognak jutni. Ami a magyar művészet nyugat felé való törekvését illeti, erről csak azt mondhatom, hogy ennek függetlennek kell lenni minden politikai orientációtól. Azt el kell ismerni, hogy a francia művészet kétségtelenül mindig

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vezetője volt a modern piktúrának, de ebbe a művészeti motívumokon kívül semmilyen politikai. “Magyarorszag”, November 21, 1920, 5.

20 “Magyarorszag”, November 21, 1920, 5.

21 “Ország-Világ”, 40 (56), December 5, 1920, p.1.

22 Dery 1921 p. 10; Bódi, p. 15.

23 “Ország-Világ”, December 5, 1920, p. 585.

24 The current disposition of the pieces which, at the time, belonged to the Fine Arts Museum is not known.

25 While there is an extensive bibliography of works on the Andrássy family, grandfather, father, and son, it focuses more on their political activity rather than their collecting. Of the collectors listed here, Nemes was the best known, and to date the most studied. See: Sümegi 1975; Tüskés 2008; Németh 2011; 2012; Wéber 2013.

26 Műtárgyakat 1919. Further investigation of the show and its aftermath can be found in: Juhász 2019a; 2019b.

27 Lyka 1920, p. 11.

28 This article will focus primarily on the artists showing, not the works shown.

29 Little material about sales at the shows exists. Several articles do mention total overall sales but do not break it down to individual pieces.

30 “De Hongaren betoonen zich knappe figuurteekenaars en het in stemming brengen van bonte landschappen is een qualiteit, die slechts weinigen met hen gemeen hebben”; De Standaart, May 22, 1920, p. 3.

31 Listed as Maurus Góth and Eduard Telcs in the catalogue. *Catalogus*... 1921, n. p.

32 See footnote 13.

33 Ban later wrote a book on the Finnish-Estonian Hungarian relationship. Bán 1928.

34 Magyar művészeti kiállítás... 1922.

35 There is both a Finnish- and an Estonian-language version, as there is for every aspect of the catalogue, from title to organizers to the names of the works themselves. They seem to be identical.

36 Näyttelyn Unkarilainen Toimikunta/ Näituse Ungari Toimkond.

37 One of the more interesting members of the committee is the Finnish-born sculptor Yrjö Liipola. Having fled Finland to avoid conscription, he settled in Hungary, working as both sculptor and translator. In 1934, he returned to Finland, where he resided until his death in 1971.

38 *Unkarilainen*... 1922, p. 12.

39 *Unkarilainen*... 1922, p. 12.

40 *Unkarilainen*... 1922, p. 12.

41 A discussion of the long-term relationship between the Hungarians and the Finns can be found in: Numminen, Nagy 1985. See also: Richly, 2021. Also Egey, 2010.

42 The overall history of Turanism is dealt with in: Kessler 1967, particularly chapters 6 and 7.

43 *Unkarilainen*... 1922, p. 13.

44 The artists common to both shows were: László E. Baranski (2 works), Gyula Batthyány (2 works), Andor Basch (4 works), Ernő Béli-Vörös (2 works), Gyula Conrad (7 works), István Csók (2 works), Jenő Csuk (4 works), Béla Déry (4 works), Aladár Edvi-Illés (4 works), Frigyes Frank (1 work), Ferenc Gaal (2 works), Oszkár Glatz (1 work), Kálmán Kato (2 works), László Kézdi-Kovács (1 work), Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch (12 works), Géza

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Kövesdy (1 work), László Mednyánszky (2 works), and János Vaszary (4 works),

45 For a general history of Gödöllő see: Gellér, Keserü 1987. More focused studies of the work of Gödöllő are Keserü 1988; 1993.

46 Klebelsberg (1875-1932), a trained attorney, served as a member of Parliament, Interior Ministry (1921-1922), and for almost a decade, (1922-1931) served as Ministry of Religion and Public Education. During his tenure he instituted numerous educational reforms, both at the primary school level as well as at the University level, including instituting a system of scholarships for University students. A number of research and cultural institutions were called into being during his term as minister: the Biological Research Institute on the shores of Lake Balaton, as well as a series of Hungarian Collegia and Institutes abroad.

He is also considered the father of the *numerus clausus*, the limiting of the number of Jews in Hungarian higher education. See: Karády, Nagy 2012.

47 *Grosse Berliner* 1925, p. 83.

48 Klebelsberg 1925, p. 343.

49 Klebelsberg 1925, p. 344.

50 Ujváry 1994; 1998.

51 The Rome location had been the Fraknoi Historical Institute from its founding in 1894. In 1912, a newly constructed second building housed the Fine Arts Academy. With the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, use and possession of the buildings was disputed. In 1928, Klebelsberg acquired the Palazzo Falconieri, which became the home to the Royal Roman Hungarian Academy, which incorporated both the Fraknoi Institute and Pontifical Hungarian Ecclesiastical Institute in the City. For more on the history of the institute see: Ujváry 1995; 1996; 2008. Also: Molnár, Tóth, Campbell 2016.

52 There seems to be little mention in the Hungarian press about the institutes, as opposed to the larger Collegia, and when they are mentioned, it seems to be mostly in passing.

53 *Seconda esposizione…* 1927, pp. 64-71. The exhibition is briefly discussed in: Glavočić 2019.

54 Déry, 1927 p. 14.

55 Fitz, Földes, Mattyasovszky 2014.

56 The Vienna exhibition, 48. Jahresausstellung der Genossenschaft der Bildenden Künstler Wiens noted that the last exhibition of Hungarian Art in the Künstlerhaus, of 1924, remained well-remembered. *Grosse Kunstausstellung* 1927, p. 4.

57 Déry 1927, p. 9. The show to which he refers produced a catalogue: *Az első budapesten…* 1926.

58 The committee members overlap greatly with the membership of the Fine Arts Council: President:

Mr. K. Kertész Róbert State Secretary; Vice presidents: Oscar Glatz and Floris Korb; Council rapporteur: Dr. Lajos Tihamér; Foreign exhibition committee speaker: Dr. Aladár Haász; Member of the Council responsible for organizing: Béla Déry. Members of the foreign exhibition committee: Lajos Agotai, Edward Balló, Zoltán Bálint, Dr. Elemér Czakó, Ödön Faragó, Dr. Tibor Gerevich, István Gróh. Kálmán Györgyi, Rezső Hikisch, János Horvai, Dr. Jen Lechner, Miklós Ligeti, Dr. Pál Majovszky, Géza Maróti, Dr. Elek Petrovics, István Réti, József Rippl Rónai, József Róna, Miksa Róth, Zsigmond Kisfaludi-Stróbl, Ferenc Szablya-Frischauf, István Szentgyörgyi, Edward Telcs, István Tóth, János Vaszary, Gyula Wälder and György Zala. Déry 1927, p. 10.

59 A brief history of the Society and its activities can be found in: Vargyas 2021.

60 This acronym is a pun as well, Kut meaning well or spring. The history of the

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group has been well-explored by Anna Kopócsy in a variety of works: Kopócsy 1997; 2015.

61 Már már lehetetlenné volt téve a magyar kiállításnak Krakkóban való bemutatása, amikor azonban Krakkó város polgármestere és a kerületi vojvoda komoly közbelépése a magyar kiállítás tartamára békét teremtett az évek óta harcoló felek között azzal a formulával, hogy a Sztuka igazgatója eltávolításával járó mozgalmakat a művészek felfüggesztik, de a magyar kiállítás összes szervezési, fogadási és installációs munkálatait a művészek maguk fogják végezni. Déry 1927, p.18.

62 The interest in Poland remained through the 1930s. Two volumes published in the 1930s demonstrate this continued interest: Kertész 1934; 1938.

63 For Bortnyik's own description see: Bortnyik 1928. For a more formal analysis: Bakos 2003.

64 Ajto is Hungarian for door; ajtos, an adjective would be "doorish." A loose translation to German would be türer. The interchanging of "T" and "D" is a common spoken German trope. Today, in Hungary, Albrecht Junior is still proudly referred to as Ajtosi-Dürer. Dürer's coat of arms features a door as one of the decorative elements.

65 *Nürnbergi* 1929.

66 Schulz *et al.* 1929.

67 *Katalog* 1929.

68 *Katalog* 1929, p. 5.

69 Budapest Székesfőváros Szeretettel Köszönti Vendégeit Nürnberg Városából.

70 Willkommen in Budapest. The medal can be seen on the site of the Hungarian National Gallery: https://mng.hu/mutargyak/82157/.

71 Hoffmann 1928; Várdai 1928; *Albrecht Dürer…* 1928.

72 Vilmos Aba-Novak, Ede Ballo, Gyula Batthyany, Geza Bornemisza, Desző Burghardt, Dénes Csanky, István Csok, Béla Dery, Aladár Edvi Illés, Oszkár Glatz, and Béla Iványi Grünwald.

73 A more complete history of the exhibition and Dr. Luppe's role in its creation can be found in: Curtius 2021, especially pp. 125-44.

74 As listed in the Museum's archive: Aurél (Aurel) Bernáth *Blumentopf*, 1928; Frigyes Frank, *Terrace*, 1928 (confiscated as Degenerate, 1937); Oskar Glatz, *Mädchen mit kleinem Huhn*, 1925; Peter Kálmán, *Familienkonzert*, 1928; Erzsébet K. Fejérvary, *Blumenstilleben mit chinesischer Vase*, 1918; Ervin von Körmendy, *Sonniger Weg*, 1929; Joset Koszta, *Vor dem Fenster*, before 1929; C. Paul Molnar, *Verkündigung*, 1927; Desider Orban, *Dom in Eger*, 1928 (confiscated as Degenerate, 1937); Karl Patkó, *Toilette*, 1928; Desider Pécsi Pilch, *Schloß in Fontainebleau*, 1927; Isaak Perlmutter, *Kinder in der Stube*, 1913; Imre Szobotka, *Selbstbildnis*, 1921 (confiscated as Degenerate, 1937); János Vaszary, *Mädchenkopf*, before 1929. The sculptures purchased were: Janos Pasztor, *Abschied*, 1906; Istvan Szentgyörgyi, *Brunnenfigur*, 1928; and Sigmund Kisfaludi-Strobl, *Mädchenakt (knieend)*, 1925 (destroyed).

75 The culture of interwar revisionism is explored in: Zeidler 2002.

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Un esempio di mostra itinerante al servizio della propaganda coloniale: la *Somalia pittoresca* di Giorgio Grazia (1934-1940)

Priscilla Manfren

Keywords:
Fascismo; Propaganda; Arte coloniale; Giorgio Grazia; Somalia.

ABSTRACT:

The essay analyses the case of *Somalia pittoresca*, an extensive series of works created by Giorgio Grazia, a painter from Bologna who spent much of 1934 in the colony. Having concluded a first presentation of his paintings in Mogadishu, the artist returned to the homeland, where his works were displayed in a traveling exhibition that, between 1935 and 1940, visited several Italian cities. Indeed, the joint action of several institutions, including the Istituto Coloniale Fascista (Fascist Colonial Institute), transformed the exhibition into a powerful pedagogical and propaganda tool, useful in instilling in Italians the long-desired colonial consciousness. After a general introduction, the text offers a brief profile of the artist, which is followed by a documentary reconstruction of the trips of *Somalia pittoresca* in the Fascist Italy. The final paragraph, on the other hand, reflects on the post-war reception of the author and his works.

Il saggio analizza il caso della *Somalia pittoresca*, ampia rassegna di opere realizzate da Giorgio Grazia, pittore bolognese che trascorre in colonia buona parte del 1934. Conclusasi una prima esposizione a Mogadiscio, l'artista torna in patria, ove i suoi lavori vengono presentati in una mostra itinerante che, tra il 1935 e il 1940, fa tappa in diverse città italiane. L'azione congiunta di svariati enti, fra i quali spicca l'Istituto Coloniale Fascista, trasforma infatti la rassegna in un potente strumento pedagogico e di propaganda, utile a instillare negli italiani la tanto auspicata coscienza coloniale. Dopo un'introduzione generale, il testo propone un breve profilo dell'artista relativo ai suoi esordi, a cui fa seguito la ricostruzione documentaria delle tappe della *Somalia pittoresca* nel contesto dell'Italia fascista. Il paragrafo finale riflette invece sulla ricezione postbellica dell'autore e delle sue opere.

Opening Picture:

Giorgio Grazia, *Gheber - bimba somala*, 1934. Ca' Pesaro - Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna, Venezia. Foto Francesco Girotto © Archivio Fotografico - Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia. Particolare.

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Introduzione, ovvero contesto storico, fonti ed esiti della ricerca

La propaganda attuata dal regime fascista per far sorgere e radicare negli italiani una "coscienza coloniale" investe, com'è noto, tutti i campi della comunicazione e della quotidianità nazionali, intensificandosi specialmente a partire dagli anni Trenta. È infatti nel secondo decennio di dittatura che il governo mussoliniano rende più evidente la propria volontà di gareggiare con gli altri Stati europei nell'agone della politica espansionista, volontà che, sulla scorta del *casus belli* innescato dal cosiddetto incidente di Ual Ual del dicembre 1934, si concretizza poi nell'ottobre 1935 con l'inizio dell'avanzata italiana in suolo etiopico.[1]

Un riflesso delle aspirazioni fasciste di potenza si intravede – com'è ormai stato messo in luce dagli studi – anche nel settore delle esposizioni nazionali e internazionali, a carattere sia commerciale che più specificamente artistico:[2] per fare qualche esempio, basti ricordare che l'Italia non solamente è presente con padiglioni magniloquenti alle grandi rassegne di Anversa (1930)[3] e di Parigi (1931),[4] ma si fa promotrice, a Roma (1931) e poi a Napoli (1934), delle due note mostre internazionali espressamente dedicate all'arte coloniale.[5] Non è superfluo ricordare come tale filone artistico si insinui nei secondi anni Trenta, seppur in maniera non esplicita e programmatica, anche nel contesto delle Biennali veneziane, segnate da un'evidente svolta retorica e celebrativa dell'Italia imperiale.[6]

Va tuttavia sottolineato che il regime, per la sua opera di propaganda, non si affida unicamente allo strumento delle grandi esposizioni, ma può contare anche su una miriade di iniziative e mostre di più ridotte dimensioni, che rispetto alle prime agiscono in modo autonomo ma parallelo. Gli scopi di queste rassegne sono infatti diversi: le prime sono volte a rappresentare l'Italia fascista nel panorama estero, legittimandone le ambizioni di *grandeur* sulla scena pubblica europea, le seconde si rivelano invece utili all'attività tentacolare della propaganda interna. Le piccole mostre coloniali erano invero potenti strumenti pedagogici in grado di diffondere, in maniera capillare e su scala locale, conoscenze sull'Oltremare, favorendo al contempo il sorgere di curiosità e interesse nei riguardi dei possedimenti italiani.

È in un simile contesto che va letta la singolare vicenda oggetto del presente contributo, ossia quella relativa alla *Somalia pittoresca* di Giorgio Grazia, un corpus pittorico quantitativamente rilevante e, a tratti, qualitativamente ragguardevole, che fu investito – poco dopo la sua creazione – del ruolo di mezzo di propaganda, divenendo protagonista di una mostra itinerante che per diversi anni si spostò nella penisola raggiungendo alcune delle più importanti città italiane.[7]

Prima di entrare nel vivo dell'argomento, pare utile evidenziare che gran parte delle fonti utilizzate per la trattazione – fatti salvi alcuni cataloghi reperiti sul mercato antiquario e lo spoglio mirato di qualche periodico – proviene da raccolte conservate presso tre diverse istituzioni: un primo importante nucleo è stato reperito all'Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee della Biennale di Venezia, che cu-

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stodisce un dettagliato curriculum e un album contenente una serie di ritagli stampa dedicati alla mostra in esame, materiali entrambi inviati dall'artista nel giugno 1938. Un secondo bacino di informazioni è emerso nel corso di alcune ricerche condotte all'Archivio bioiconografico della Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Roma: i materiali lì conservati, comprendenti articoli, cataloghi e inviti relativi ad alcune delle tappe della rassegna, hanno consentito di approfondire ulteriormente la ricostruzione, fornendo altresì notizie in merito alle successive vicende e alla ricezione postbellica dell'autore e del suo corpus di opere somale. Il terzo ambito di indagine è stato, infine, quello relativo all'Archivio dell'Istituto Fascista dell'Africa Italiana – Sezione di Bologna, conservato presso il Museo civico del Risorgimento nel capoluogo emiliano-romagnolo: anche in questo caso è emerso un insieme di articoli che ha contribuito ad ampliare la rassegna stampa relativa alla mostra in esame.[8]

La ricerca ha consentito, dunque, di ripercorrere l'*iter* delle ben quindici tappe che ebbero come protagonista la *Somalia* di Grazia, portando inoltre al reperimento e alla pubblicazione a colori di un primo gruppo di opere,[9] alcune delle quali inedite, facenti parte del corpus originario che, in precedenza, era stato parzialmente riprodotto, per lo più in bianco e nero, a corredo di alcuni articoli d'epoca, cataloghi e studi recenti.[10] Non va infine tralasciato che l'indagine ha permesso di toccare con mano e ricostruire – attraverso i quasi cento titoli di rassegna stampa rinvenuti –[11] un caso di *battage* ove il tema dell'arte è stato indissolubilmente fuso con gli scopi della politica espansionista di regime. Ciò anche per iniziativa di alcuni enti, quali la Federazione dei Fasci di Combattimento, l'Istituto Coloniale Fascista (ICF) e l'Istituto Fascista di Cultura (IFC), la cui attività nel complesso meccanismo della propaganda coloniale si espresse, attraverso l'opera coordinata delle sezioni periferiche, in una mirata azione di raccordo tra élite e masse, tra centro e periferia.

Giorgio Grazia: per un breve profilo dell'artista prima dell'esperienza africana

Come si apprende dalla scheda informativa autografa inviata nel giugno 1938 all'Archivio Storico della Biennale di Venezia,[12] Giorgio Grazia, figlio di Diego, nasce a Bologna il 22 ottobre 1895. Nel capoluogo emiliano, egli cresce e si forma nel campo della pittura, beneficiando di un alunnato presso Alfredo Grandi – noto con lo pseudonimo di Garzia Fioresi –, autore di origine pavese stabilitosi a Bologna sin dall'adolescenza, nel 1902, e distintosi come pittore di figura e paesaggio in diverse rassegne di portata nazionale e internazionale, non ultima la Biennale veneziana.[13] Alla formazione presso Grandi, Grazia affianca un percorso di studi ufficiale, diplomandosi all'Accademia della propria città natale e ottenendo poi l'autorizzazione all'insegnamento della Storia dell'Arte negli Istituti privati. Nel suo curriculum l'artista, dopo una dichiarazione sul suo *status* di "ex combattente, fascista, iscritto al sindacato Belle Arti e alla Milizia",[14] elenca – con l'eccezione delle mostre individuali coloniali, a cui riserva una sezione a parte –

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una serie di esposizioni alle quali ha partecipato tra il 1925 e il 1936: di nove, otto sono rassegne svoltesi a Bologna e dintorni entro il 1931,[15] mentre fa eccezione la sindacale milanese del 1936.[16] Sino al *turning point* somalo la carriera artistica di Giorgio Grazia pare attestarsi, dunque, entro i più modesti e ristretti confini della sua città natale. Osservando però tali partecipazioni, non è secondario evidenziare che in tre casi si tratti di mostre dedicate al paesaggio, spia del fatto che in Grazia albergasse già prima del soggiorno oltremare una certa preferenza per l'elemento naturale, inclinazione forse ereditata dal maestro Grandi, ricordato come amante della solitudine e della natura integra e selvatica.[17] Nonostante tale predilezione, le doti di Grazia emergono anche nella resa della figura umana, come si può constatare da alcune sue opere[18] poste a corredo di un breve ma lusinghiero articolo pubblicato nel 1927. Qui un anonimo articolista, accennando alla personale dell'autore svoltasi in quello stesso anno, scrive:

> *Fra i giovani pittori che maggiormente lasciano sperare per il buon nome dell'arte a Bologna va annoverato il Grazia che, specialmente nell'ultima mostra personale – nei locali degli impiegati civili – ha affermato la sua individualità con attitudini di indiscusso valore.*
>
> *Già furono apprezzate le sue opere in esposizioni regionali e nazionali e la critica ebbe per lui le parole più lusinghiere, ma nell'ultima mostra il giudizio più oggettivo e rigido non può usare che l'espressione della lode nel suo termine più onesto. Forse l'artista non ha detto l'ultima parola circa la tecnica ed il modellato; ma il problema della luce e del colore l'ha risolto senza sforzo felicemente con energia singolare dando freschezza ai lavori e realtà vivente alle scene ch'egli predilige ritrarre [...].*[19]

E ancora, proseguendo:

> *Il Grazia si cimenta nella figura e nel paese e si dimostra ritrattista spigliato; facile impressionista del paese nei più improvvisi effetti, appassionato riproduttore di scenette piacevoli ove la gamma coloristica ingentilisce ed affina. Il grande amore per la sua arte, l'aspirazione verso il meglio lo porta allo studio indefesso ed alla tenacia nel lavoro. Così negli studi di tutte le dimensioni, ove il nudo della donna e dell'uomo è reso nelle più svariate pose, l'artista fa tutte le ricerche per rendere il vero con maggior evidenza e con più suggestiva maniera senza cadere nel vuoto e nel deforme infantilismo che caratterizza la decadenza artistica della nostra epoca.*[20]

Da ulteriori ricerche risulta inoltre che Grazia si fosse cimentato, al pari di tanti altri, nel campo dell'*affiche* e della grafica: restano tracce di questa sua attività nel manifesto creato per la *Messa giubilare di S.S.*

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Pio XI, svoltasi a Roma il 21 dicembre 1929,[21] e in quello realizzato per le *Esposizioni Riunite al Littoriale*, rassegna tenutasi a Bologna tra il 18 maggio e il 1° giugno 1930.[22] L'artista, inoltre, si era aggiudicato nel gennaio 1934 – poco prima di partire per l'Africa – il secondo posto nel concorso per la nuova copertina della rivista "Il Comune di Bologna", presentando il bozzetto contraddistinto dal motto "Cuore di Bologna".[23]

Giorgio Grazia e la *Somalia pittoresca* – parte I: la fama negli anni Trenta

> *La boscaglia tutta fiorita dopo le piogge che l'hanno rinfrescata e rinverdita, i contrasti vivaci fra i colori madreperlacei del mare e quelli bruni degli scogli, l'infinita distesa della pianura uniforme eppur varia, il passaggio improvviso dalla terra bianca a quella rossa, le snelle sagome delle palme dum, la caratteristica coloritura dei sambuchi pitturati di fresco, la festosa animazione dei mercati indigeni dove uomini, merci e cammelli si agitano e si mischiano in un fervore di vita, la pesantezza bruna del masso di Bur-Hacaba, i riflessi schiumosi dei nostri fiumi, la trasparenza ricamata delle ombrellifere, i giochi violenti di luci e di ombre delle zone battute dal borato e caldo sole equatoriale, tutto, insomma, tutto quello che è caratteristico e particolare di questa terra è stato colto e raffigurato da Grazia con tanta sensibilità e tanto gusto di artista, da fare delle sue opere – quando saranno portate ed esposte in Italia – un potente strumento di propaganda per la maggiore e migliore conoscenza della Somalia.*[24]

Così Dario Vitali, il giorno di Natale del 1934, descriveva ai lettori di "Somalia fascista" – quotidiano della Federazione dei Fasci di Combattimento della Somalia italiana – l'ampio corpus di opere a soggetto indigeno realizzato in quello stesso anno da Grazia e presentato nella mostra personale dal titolo *Somalia pittoresca* alla Casa del Fascio di Mogadiscio. Come si evince dal relativo catalogo – uno spartano opuscolo intestato contenente l'elenco dei titoli –, la rassegna si componeva di ben ottantotto lavori – fra quadri e impressioni – ed era stata inaugurata due mesi prima, il 28 ottobre, offrendo al pubblico la possibilità di visitarla tutti i giorni, dalle 16 alle 19, e inserendosi a pieno fra le attività promosse dalla Commissione di Cultura e Propaganda della stessa Federazione dei Fasci somala.[25] La rassegna era stata inaugurata dal Governatore Maurizio Rava[26] il quale, in seguito, vi aveva accompagnato il Ministro delle Colonie Emilio De Bono e aveva disposto l'acquisto di due opere,[27] individuabili – grazie all'elenco di "Enti in possesso di opere importanti" allegato dal pittore stesso alla menzionata scheda informativa – in *Palme dum* e *Fabbricanti di fute*, l'uno destinato al Museo della Garesa e l'altro inizialmente voluto per figurare nel Palazzo del Governo di Mogadiscio.[28]

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Come previsto da Vitali, le opere di Grazia – nel frattempo rientrato in patria – si trasformano ben presto in un "potente strumento di propaganda per la maggiore e migliore conoscenza della Somalia".[29] Va infatti evidenziato che tale colonia, pur essendo oggetto della penetrazione italiana sin dagli anni Ottanta dell'Ottocento, era rimasta per diverso tempo quella meno nota e accessibile: la sua distanza dalla madrepatria, le complesse vicende storiche che ne avevano caratterizzato la costituzione e, soprattutto, il tardivo consolidamento del dominio italiano sul territorio – avvenuto solamente nel 1927 – avevano reso più difficile, sino a quel momento, viaggiare e, quindi, conoscere in maniera approfondita la regione. Ciò appare evidente anche nel settore artistico: infatti, mentre numerosi furono gli autori che si recarono nella ben più vicina colonia libica, verso la quale venivano organizzate di sovente crociere turistiche,[30] minore fu il numero di quanti giunsero nella colonia affacciata sull'Oceano Indiano.[31] Fu proprio questo, evidentemente, uno dei motivi che fece la fortuna della *Somalia pittoresca* in Italia. Per la sua prima tappa nazionale, il corpus dei dipinti di Grazia fu esposto nelle sale del Museo Coloniale di Roma,[32] che già da qualche anno era solito ospitare mostre personali di artisti reduci da un soggiorno nelle colonie, quali Giorgio Oprandi, Lidio Ajmone, Cesare Biscarra, Cesare Biseo, Milo Corso Malverna. Nel caso specifico, pare che fosse stato lo stesso Grazia a prendere contatti col Ministero delle Colonie al fine di poter allestire la propria mostra nella prestigiosa sede romana; ciò si ricava da una lettera di risposta inviata all'artista da Alessandro Lessona, Sottosegretario di Stato al suddetto Ministero, ove si legge:

> *In relazione alla richiesta da Lei rivoltami mi è grato comunicarLe che ho autorizzato la Direzione del Museo Coloniale Italiano ad accogliere nei locali del Museo stesso la sua mostra personale di tipi e di paesaggi della Somalia Italiana.*
>
> *E ciò in considerazione delle benemerenze che Ella si è acquistato verso l'Amministrazione Coloniale organizzando e portando a compimento, con i suoi soli mezzi, un viaggio di studio e di documentazione artistica nella nostra colonia dell'Oceano Indiano.*[33]

La lettera, datata 28 marzo 1935, pare essere un tardivo ringraziamento tributato all'artista dalle autorità più che un avviso in merito all'avvenuta autorizzazione, dato che la mostra ai primi di aprile è già aperta, con tanto di catalogo intestato *ad hoc* (fig. 1), e pubblicizzata dai giornali.[34] Il gruppo delle opere esposte, probabilmente per la maggiore capienza degli spazi, sale qui a centosei.[35] La stampa sembra apprezzare i lavori: Carlo Dall'Ongaro, puntando sulla loro utilità, sottolinea che "ottima propaganda coloniale è quella di far conoscere le nostre terre d'oltremare attraverso rappresentazioni di interpreti che ne sappiano dare precise impressioni e felici scorci".[36] Piero Scarpa, che nota subito come Grazia dipinga "più con la spatola che col pennel-

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Fig. 01: *Somalia pittoresca, mostra di quadri del pittore G. Grazia*, catalogo delle opere (Roma, Museo Coloniale Italiano), [1935]. Foto Priscilla Manfren © Priscilla Manfren, Padova.

lo", parla di immagini "piene di vita e fosforescenti di luce, [...] suggestive nel loro verismo così strano e così inconfondibile",[37] mentre Francesco Callari definisce l'insieme "un buon complesso di studi e di quadri", reso con una colorazione "molto intensa e appropriata agli ambienti; calda infocata di effetti sorprendenti negli sbattimenti di luce, incisiva nella rappresentazione di uomini, donne e bimbi del paese".[38] Alberto Neppi, invece, si fa positivamente polemico, lamentando la totale assenza dei lavori di Grazia alla passata mostra internazionale di Napoli, ove la sua *Somalia pittoresca* "avrebbe costituito un elemento di interesse documentario".[39] A conclusione di questa tappa, che si chiude il 20 aprile,[40] avvengono i primi acquisti su suolo nazionale: il Ministero delle Colonie decide infatti di riservare per il museo due vedute, ossia *Il Mercato di Burhacaba* e *Baobab a Kisimayo*,[41] di cui oggi rimane solamente la seconda, custodita presso il Museo delle Civiltà di Roma (fig. 2).

In poco più di due settimane, la mostra lascia la Capitale per essere presentata nella città natale dell'autore: dal 5 maggio al 9 giugno, in una versione leggermente ridotta composta da novantuno opere, la *Somalia pittoresca* è aperta al pubblico in orario pomeridiano – dalle 17 alle 20 – presso la centralissima Casa del Fascio bolognese di Via Manzoni 4, grazie all'azione congiunta delle sezioni locali della Federazione dei Fasci di Combattimento, dell'ICF e dell'IFC.[42] Protagonisti attivi dell'iniziativa sono infatti i presidenti delle sezioni locali dei due istituti, il dottor Italo Papini e l'avvocato Cesare Colliva, che inseriscono l'evento – inaugurato dal critico locale Sebastiano Sani – a corredo visivo di un ciclo di conferenze sull'Italia coloniale avviato dal generale Arturo Vacca Maggiolini. Anche in questa circostanza la stampa, sottolineando come la sua organizzazione sia "assai tempestiva, per la particolare condizione politica italiana", non manca di evidenziare il valore "altamente propagandistico" e al contempo pedagogico della rassegna, affermando che "la propaganda, comunque sia svolta, è sempre utile, e maggiormente in tal caso dove essa si riveste di forme artistiche che rallegrano l'occhio e nel contempo educano la mente".[43] La mostra – allestita nel salone delle riunioni e quindi visibile anche al pubblico lì giunto per le conferenze e i corsi di cultura – viene visitata dal Principe ereditario Umberto di Savoia, il quale dispone l'acquisto di *Ombrellifere sulla strada* e *Moschea*, opere che, stando a Grazia stesso, figuravano

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02

nel 1938 alla Reggia di Napoli, ma che dalle verifiche odierne risultano disperse.[44] In occasione di questa tappa, la Cassa di Risparmio di Bologna si aggiudica *Azienda agricola* (fig. 3) e, forse nella stessa circostanza, *Portatrici d'acqua in riposo* (fig. 4), oggi conservate presso l'Intesa Sanpaolo Private Banking di Via Farini 22.[45] *Case bianche*[46] è invece acquistato dal Comune per la Galleria d'Arte Moderna di Bologna, all'epoca allestita presso Villa delle Rose, ove il dipinto è certamente esposto nel 1936.[47] A proposito di quest'opera, alcuni documenti del Secondo dopoguerra – oggi conservati al MAMbo e gentilmente segnalatimi da Barbara Secci – spiegano come essa sia andata dispersa, insieme a circa altre settanta, negli anni 1942-1943, quando tutti i quadri della galleria erano stati ricoverati al Littoriale e, in quella circostanza, manomessi o asportati dalle truppe lì accasermate. Parte delle perdite fu poi compensata chiedendo agli artisti di donare alla galleria un altro loro lavoro: Grazia inviò, nel febbraio 1949, *Matera – Case nel sasso*.

Non passa una settimana dalla chiusura della prima tappa bolognese – ve ne saranno altre due – che la rassegna giunge in Liguria, a Genova, ove rimane sino al 7 luglio: l'ICF, in coordinamento con il Ministero delle Colonie, invita infatti Grazia a presenziare con il proprio gruppo di opere nella sala centrale del padiglione allestito a cura del dottor Sandro Strazza, presidente della sezione locale, nell'ambito della III Mostra Nazionale delle Industrie del Mare e della Spiaggia, organizzata nel capoluogo ligure in occasione del Giugno Genovese. Non molto altro si sa, attualmente, in merito a

Fig. 02: Giorgio Grazia, *Baobab a Kisimayo*, 1934. Museo delle Civiltà, Roma. Foto Fabio Naccari © Museo delle Civiltà, Roma.

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03

04

Fig. 03: Giorgio Grazia, *Azienda agricola*, 1934. Collezione Intesa Sanpaolo, Bologna. Foto Priscilla Manfren © Archivio Patrimonio Artistico, Intesa Sanpaolo.

Fig. 04: Giorgio Grazia, *Portatrici d'acqua in riposo*, 1934. Collezione Intesa Sanpaolo, Bologna. Foto Priscilla Manfren © Archivio Patrimonio Artistico, Intesa Sanpaolo.

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questa tappa, tranne il fatto che in tale circostanza l'artista non pare aver beneficiato di acquisti ufficiali.[48]

Dopo Genova, gli spostamenti della mostra somala si arrestano per qualche mese, fornendo a Grazia un periodo di stasi utile alla rielaborazione di alcuni disegni e rapidi bozzetti al fine di trarne nuovi dipinti. Trascorso quel periodo, la *Somalia pittoresca* si rimette in movimento, questa volta in direzione del Piemonte: dal 3 novembre al 1° dicembre la rassegna – con un numero imprecisato di lavori – viene presentata a Torino, nei saloni del Circolo del Littorio in Via Carlo Alberto 43 (fig. 5). Anche in questo caso, l'iniziativa vede agire in concerto le sezioni locali dell'IFC e dell'ICF, in quel momento attive nell'organizzare mostre d'arte – con ingresso libero al pubblico – utili come "documentazioni schiette" delle colonie italiane in Africa. La mostra di Grazia, curata dal conte Cavalli d'Olivola e apprezzata in virtù della sua "immediatezza espressiva", risulta la prima in tal senso. Va notato che in questa occasione vengono previste due differenti fasce orarie di apertura, dalle 9 alle 12 e dalle 15 alle 18.30, sintomo dell'effettiva volontà di allargare il pubblico dei visitatori.[49] Il passaggio della rassegna in questa prima tappa piemontese frutta all'artista almeno due vendite importanti: il Comune di Torino acquista per la sua Galleria d'Arte Moderna i *Tessitori di fute*, mentre la famiglia Agnelli compra *Mundul a Uardiglei*,[50] opere di cui oggi non si hanno notizie, se non una rara riproduzione a colori, rintracciata in una rivista d'epoca, che potrebbe essere relativa alla prima (fig. 6).[51]

I viaggi della mostra per il 1935 non si concludono però nel capoluogo piemontese: in meno di una settimana, sotto gli auspici dell'ICF, le opere vengono trasportate nel nord della regione, giungendo a Biella per iniziativa del Gruppo rionale Mario Gioda, che le allestisce nella sua sede di Via Seminari (fig. 7).[52] La rassegna, inaugurata il 7 dicembre, rimane a disposizione del pubblico sino al 22 dicembre, con ingresso libero in due fasce orarie serali, ovvero dalle 17 alle 19.30 e dalle 21 alle 23; il numero delle opere qui esposte – probabilmente le stesse di Torino – non risulta chiaro dalle fonti rintracciate, che in un caso parlano di cinquanta dipinti[53] e in un altro di novanta.[54] Due brevi articoli di taglio critico danno, in questa occasione, una differente visione del corpus di lavori: il primo, dopo aver sottolineato l'importanza dell'opera di autori come Grazia, capaci di "fare opera d'arte e divulgazione insieme", mette in luce l'evoluzione che l'artista ha sperimentato nel corso del suo soggiorno somalo, evidenziando come "dalle opere del primo tempo, vive ma di una vivezza quasi esclusivamente documentaria egli passa ad opere più *pensate* dove il paesaggio rivela il suo spirito [...]".[55] Più smorzato nelle lodi – e interessato al valore estetico delle opere piuttosto che a quello propagandistico – sembra invece il testo di Pio Costantini, che inizialmente pare accusare il pittore di aver puntato più sulla quantità che sulla qualità dei lavori, salvo poi imputare tale impressione al fatto che la mostra, nel corso delle tappe già effettuate, si fosse probabilmente depauperata a causa della vendita dei pezzi migliori. E, a tale riguardo, conclude:

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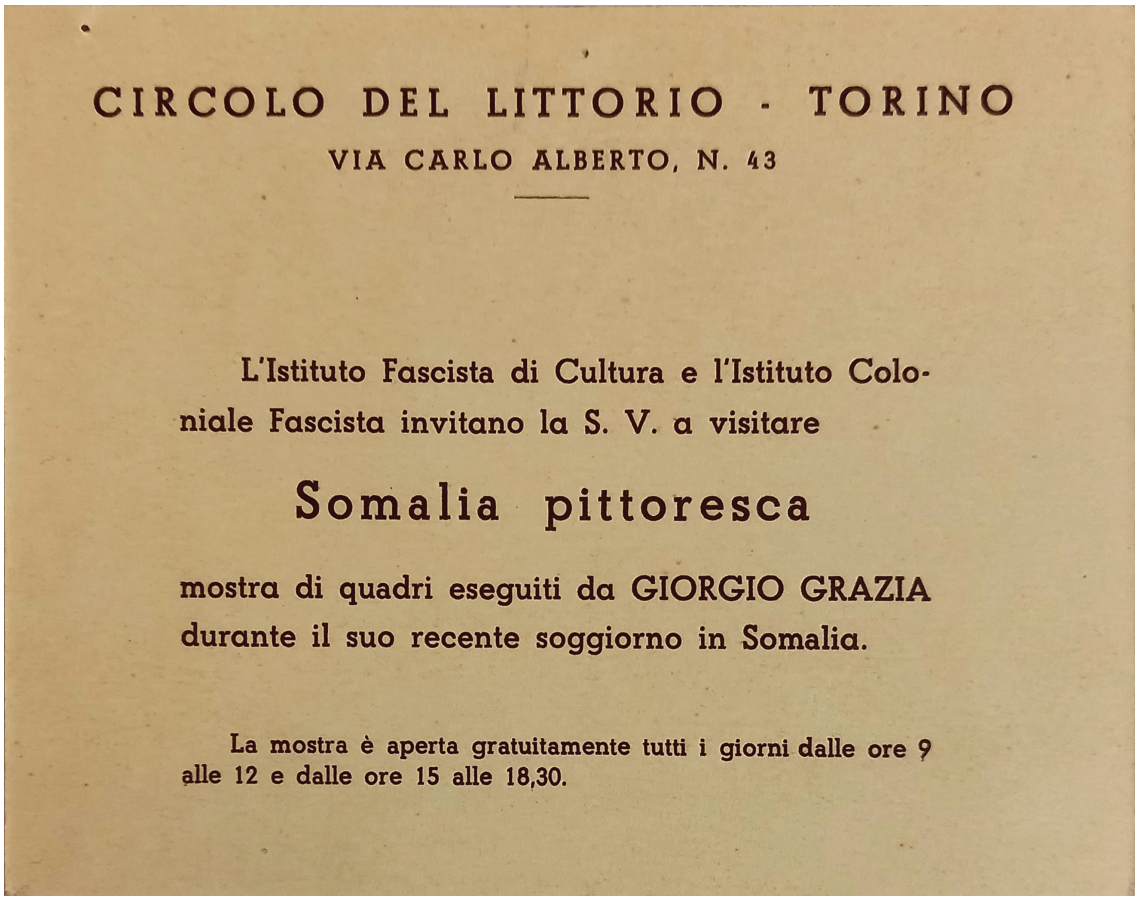

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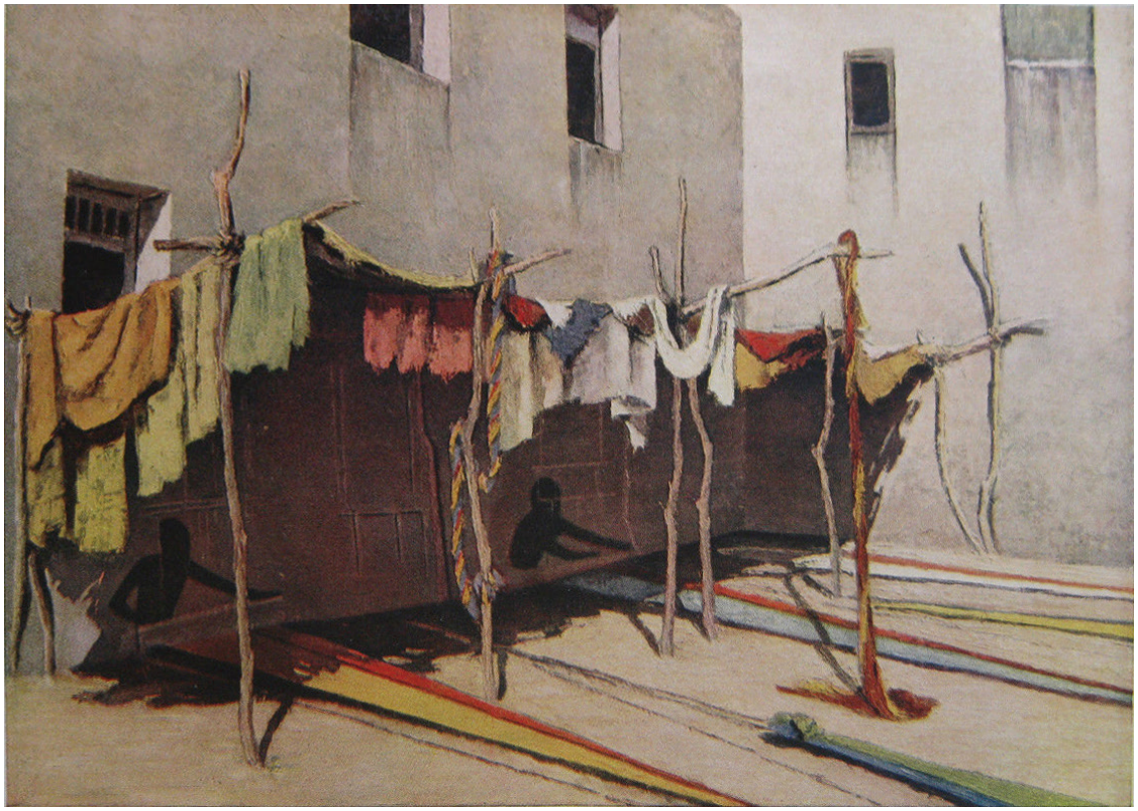
Fig. 05: *Somalia pittoresca, mostra di quadri eseguiti da Giorgio Grazia*, invito (Torino, Circolo del Littorio, Via Carlo Alberto, n. 43), [1935]. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Roma. Foto Priscilla Manfren © Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Roma. Su concessione del Ministero della Cultura. È fatto divieto di ulteriore riproduzione o duplicazione con qualsiasi mezzo.



06

Fig. 06: Giorgio Grazia, *Tessitori di fute*, 1934 [?], in "Le Vie d'Italia e del Mondo", 1936, 10, allegato a colori tra p. 1010 e p. 1011.

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> *Abbiamo motivo di crederlo, perché in questa mostra non abbiamo trovato nessun quadro che si distacchi dagli altri per incisività di esecuzione od espressione di sentimento o di stato d'animo; che costituisca, insomma, il capolavoro: cosa che poteva parere impossibile per un pittore di talento e a tavolozza vasta come il Grazia. Ciò riprova che i migliori quadri non ci sono più.*[56]

Proprio in merito agli acquisti, è infine lo stesso articolista a rendere noto il "buon successo" e la vendita immediata di un dipinto raffigurante "una bambina sorridente in pieno sole, allo zenit, appoggiata a due balle di kapok", salvo poi concludere che le opere con figure umane "non sono generalmente sentite" dall'artista.[57]

Trascorso il periodo natalizio, il 1936 si apre per la *Somalia pittoresca* con un viaggio verso il Veneto. Le pagine della "Gazzetta di Venezia" sono in quel periodo traboccanti, al pari di quelle degli altri quotidiani, di informazioni sull'Etiopia e, soprattutto, di notizie sull'andamento del conflitto iniziato pochi mesi prima. L'attenzione per l'Oltremare è quindi altissima anche nel capoluogo veneto[58] e di frequente compaiono, in particolare sulla quarta pagina dedicata alla cronaca cittadina, annunci relativi a iniziative organizzate dalle sezioni provinciali di ICF e IFC – anche in concerto con altri enti – volte alla trattazione di temi coloniali: il 1° febbraio, per esempio, si annuncia la conferenza all'Ateneo Veneto di Giorgio Maria Sangiorgi, deputato parlamentare e direttore de "Il Resto del Carlino", nonché il ciclo di conferenze al Teatro La Fenice che inizierà dal 9 febbraio con l'intervento dell'ex governatore della Somalia Maurizio Rava, seguito da quelli di altre figure del panorama coloniale italiano quali Luigi Federzoni, il conte Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata ed Emilio De Bono.[59] È dunque in questo fervente contesto che l'ICF, nuovamente sotto gli auspici della Federazione dei Fasci di Combattimento, accoglie a Venezia la mostra di Grazia, inaugurata l'8 febbraio nella sala terrena dell'ex Bauer in Via XXII Marzo (fig. 8).[60] Anche in questa circostanza, il numero dei dipinti in mostra non è chiaro, poiché la "Gazzetta di Venezia" menziona "una sessantina di tele",[61] mentre il "Gazzettino" quasi ne raddoppia il numero scrivendo "più di un centinaio".[62] In ogni caso la rassegna, aperta ben sette ore al giorno – dalle 10 alle 12 e dalle 15 alle 20 – pare ottenere consensi, tanto che la sua chiusura, inizialmente prevista per il 16, viene posticipata al 19 febbraio "in considerazione del notevole e ininterrotto afflusso dei visitatori, che conferma il pieno successo propagandistico della mostra".[63] Il buon esito dell'iniziativa è avvalorato dall'acquisto di tre opere importanti, così segnalate nel menzionato elenco stilato dall'artista nel 1938: *Moschea di Scek Ibrahim*, acquisita dall'allora Cassa di Risparmio cittadina, *Case arabe a Mogadiscio*, comprata dal Consiglio Provinciale dell'Economia di Venezia, e *Gheber-bimba somala*, acquisita dal Comune per la Galleria d'Arte Moderna di Ca' Pesaro.[64] Alcune verifiche effettuate in occasione del presente studio hanno però consentito di gettare nuova luce sui tre dipinti e sui dati – in parte errati –

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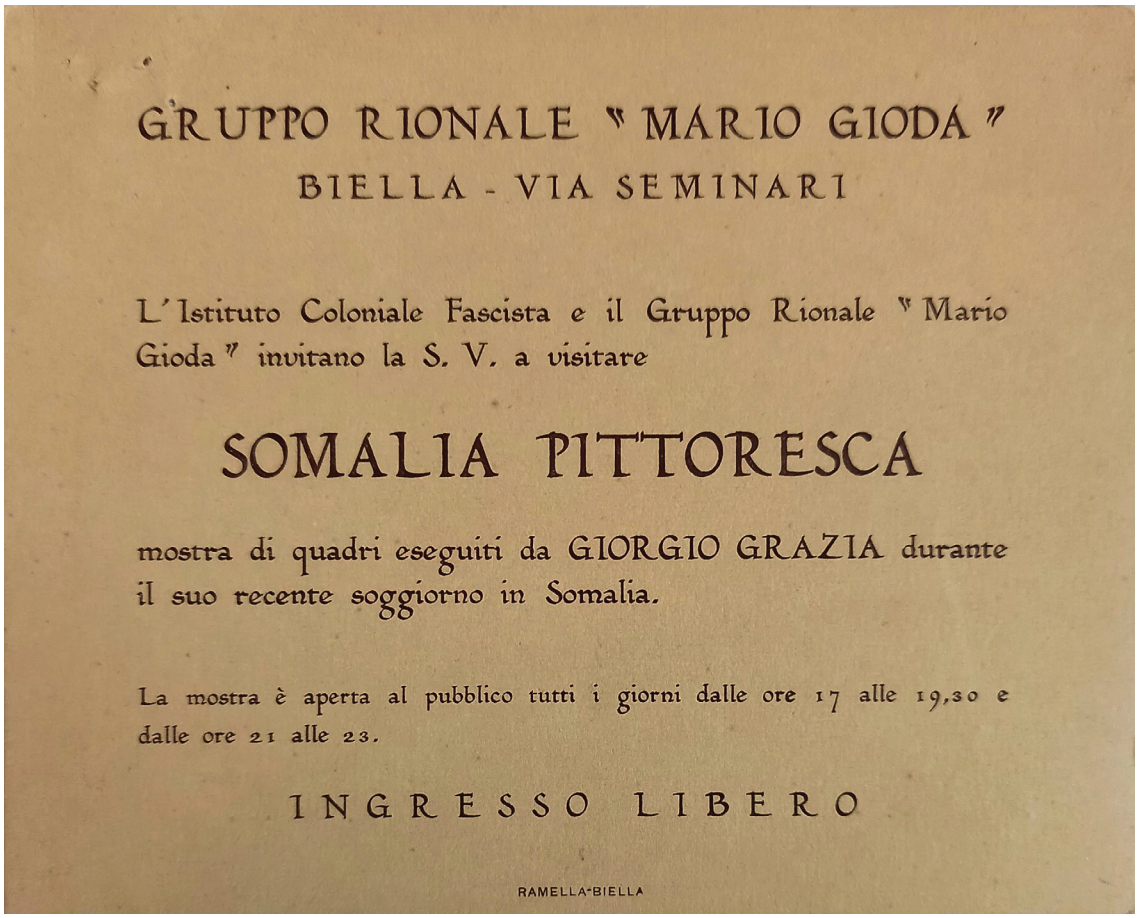
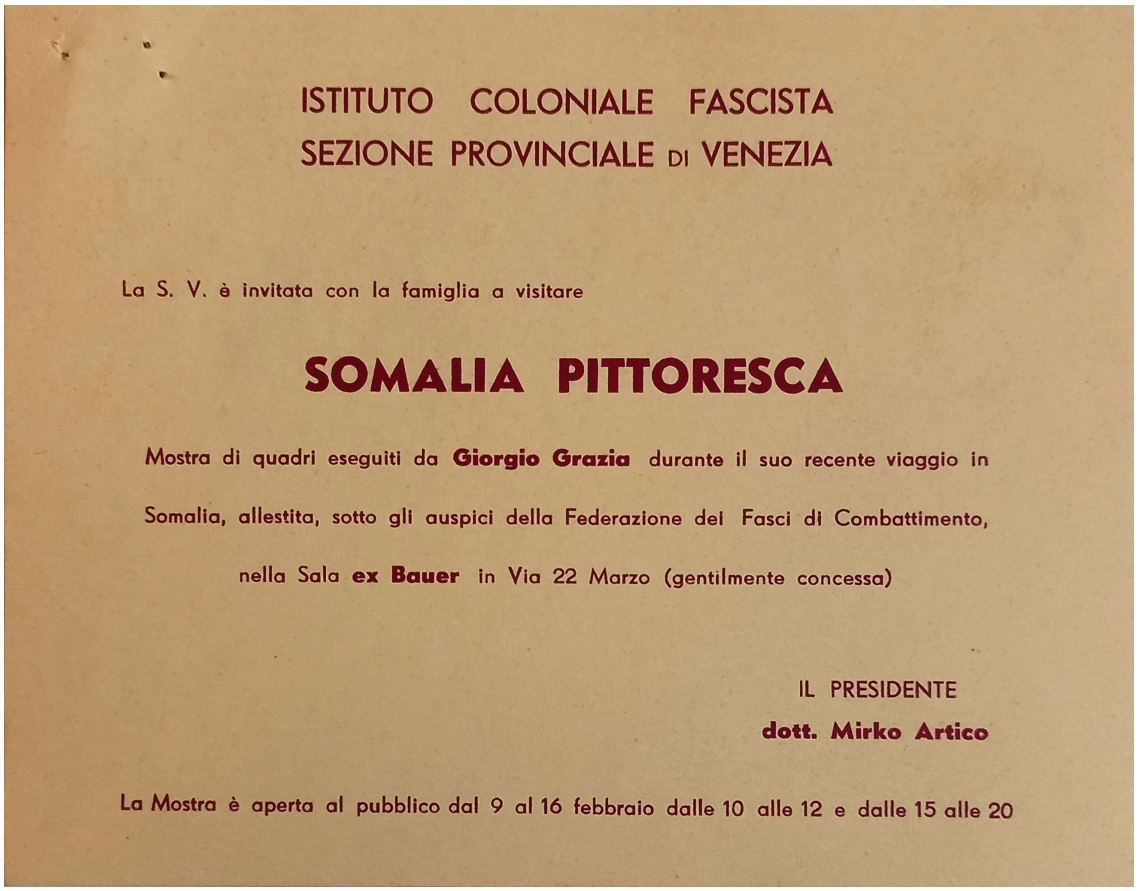


07

Fig. 07: *Somalia pittoresca, mostra di quadri eseguiti da Giorgio Grazia*, invito (Biella, Gruppo rionale Mario Gioda, Via Seminari), [1935]. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Roma. Foto Priscilla Manfren © Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Roma. Su concessione del Ministero della Cultura. È fatto divieto di ulteriore riproduzione o duplicazione con qualsiasi mezzo.



08

Fig. 08: *Somalia pittoresca. Mostra di quadri eseguiti da Giorgio Grazia*, invito (Venezia, Sala ex Bauer, Via 22 Marzo), [1936]. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Roma. Foto Priscilla Manfren © Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Roma. Su concessione del Ministero della Cultura. È fatto divieto di ulteriore riproduzione o duplicazione con qualsiasi mezzo.

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forniti da Grazia: oltre ad apprendere che il primo lavoro raffigurante una moschea somala – variamente riprodotto in bianco e nero in articoli d'epoca e studi più recenti –[65] risulta attualmente disperso, si è potuto constatare che il Consiglio Provinciale dell'Economia – denominazione applicata alle Camere di Commercio nel 1926 – non acquistò *Case arabe a Mogadiscio* – riapparso recentemente sul mercato antiquario –[66] bensì *Moschea Giama a Scingani,* come si intuisce dal lacerto di etichetta sul retro del dipinto oggi presente presso il veneziano Palazzo Ca' Nova, sede legale della Camera di Commercio Venezia Rovigo (fig. 9). Per quel che riguarda il ritrattino infantile di *Gheber* – che fu tra i lavori più pubblicati dai periodici[67] e forse più amati da Grazia stesso, il quale lo scelse per la copertina del catalogo della mostra in almeno due occasioni –[68] va detto che solamente con questa ricerca l'opera, prima schedata come di autore non identificato, è stata rinvenuta e correttamente attribuita all'artista (fig. 10).[69]

Nell'estate del 1936, a poco più di un mese dalla proclamazione dell'Impero, le visioni somale del pittore bolognese compiono un breve tour anche in Lombardia, figurando in due differenti città: a Milano, dalla metà di giugno ai primi di luglio, nel

Fig. 09: Giorgio Grazia, *Moschea Giama a Scingani*, 1934. Camera di Commercio Venezia Rovigo, Venezia © Camera di Commercio Venezia Rovigo, Venezia.

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contesto della *Mostra d'arte coloniale* organizzata al Palazzo della Permanente per volontà dell'onorevole Luigi Silva, presidente della sezione lombarda e vicepresidente nazionale dell'ICF, e a Varese, dal 12 al 26 luglio, in una analoga rassegna organizzata dallo stesso ICF nelle sale della Società Adriatica. Per entrambe, le notizie sono esigue e, in particolare, della seconda si è a conoscenza solamente perché segnalata dall'artista stesso.[70] In merito alla tappa nel capoluogo lombardo si sa che, essendo la rassegna una collettiva, il corpus somalo di Grazia è presente in forma assai ridotta con appena ventiquattro dipinti, numero in ogni caso considerevole se si

Fig. 10: Giorgio Grazia, *Gheber - bimba somala*, 1934. Ca' Pesaro - Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna, Venezia. Foto Francesco Girotto © Archivio Fotografico - Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia.

pensa che viene superato solamente da quello delle opere di due artisti lombardi, Luigi Brignoli e Claudio Martinenghi. Va anche detto che, scorrendo il catalogo, si nota come la serie di dipinti di Grazia – che qui prende la più banale e descrittiva denominazione di *Paesaggi e tipi della Somalia Italiana* – sia l'unica a essere dotata di titolo, a puntualizzare non solamente che si tratta di una mostra nella mostra, ma soprattutto a evidenziarne la peculiarità tematica rispetto alle serie degli altri autori, ispirate, per lo più, ai territori della vicina colonia libica. Non a caso, Giovanni Mussio scrive in merito:

> *Sono paesaggi e sono figure, che ci si presentano con un carattere di assoluta novità, ché non sono stati molti gli artisti che si sono ispirati a quelle terre ed a quelle genti. Il Grazia è anche pittore di così facile espressività da dare a tutti questi suoi quadri buon senso di colore locale, facile possibilità, in chi vede, di 'scoprire' un ambiente, che solo da poco tempo ci è diventato più familiare.*[71]

Dopo una pausa di cinque mesi, l'attività espositiva riprende agli inizi del 1937, anno in cui la *Somalia* – non più *pittoresca* – è chiamata a svolgere un'azione pedagogica potente e strutturata nel territorio locale: sulle quattro tappe organizzate per quell'anno, tre sono infatti rivolte al pubblico emiliano.[72] A distanza di quasi due anni dalla prima apparizione felsinea, il corpus viene riproposto a Bologna – nuovamente su iniziativa della locale sezione dell'ICF – per quasi due mesi, dal 9 gennaio al 28 febbraio: come sede vengono prescelti, questa volta, i locali dell'ex Scuola di Applicazione per Ingegneri in Piazza de' Celestini 4, ove il pubblico può accedere nei giorni feriali dalle 17 alle 19.30 e nei giorni festivi in due fasce

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orarie, dalle 10 alle 13 e dalle 16 alle 19.[73] Il catalogo (fig. 11) è il più ricco fra quelli reperiti, elencando centoundici lavori, accompagnati dalla riproduzione di cinque di essi. Già da questo si intuisce il carattere ancor più propagandistico ed educativo attribuito alla mostra in tale occasione: infatti, il corpus delle opere è stato rimpinguato con nuovi pezzi[74] e, per quanto possibile, vengono esposti anche i lavori già acquistati, al fine di non ridurre il potere evocativo della narrazione visiva in cui – scrive Cesare Marchesini – i vari quadri sono "di facile lettura per il pubblico frettoloso", configurandosi come "parti di un grande poema sinfonico, scritto con animo entusiasta e pennello ardito, in lode della Somalia".[75] L'apertura della rassegna viene fatta coincidere con l'inizio delle attività annuali della sezione bolognese dell'ICF, di cui è presidente il menzionato Giorgio Maria Sangiorgi, che insieme a Grazia stesso guida le autorità cittadine nel percorso espositivo. Un'ora dopo, il ricordato vicepresidente generale dell'Istituto, Luigi Silva, è invece alla Casa del Fascio per una prolusione al corso di cultura coloniale, durante la quale sottolinea che "la passione di novità che la conquista [dell'Etiopia] ha suscitato negli italiani [...] deve essere necessariamente inquadrata e intelaiata dalla conoscenza e dallo studio preventivi di località e di questioni [perché] solo così l'Italia potrà valorizzare l'Impero".[76] D'altronde, sottolinea l'artista Nino Corrado Corazza in un articolo dedicato all'esposizione e al suo protagonista, "la conquista pittorica dell'Africa va di pari passo con quella amministrativa, agricola, economica, ecc...".[77] L'abbinata di mostra e corso coloniale rappre-

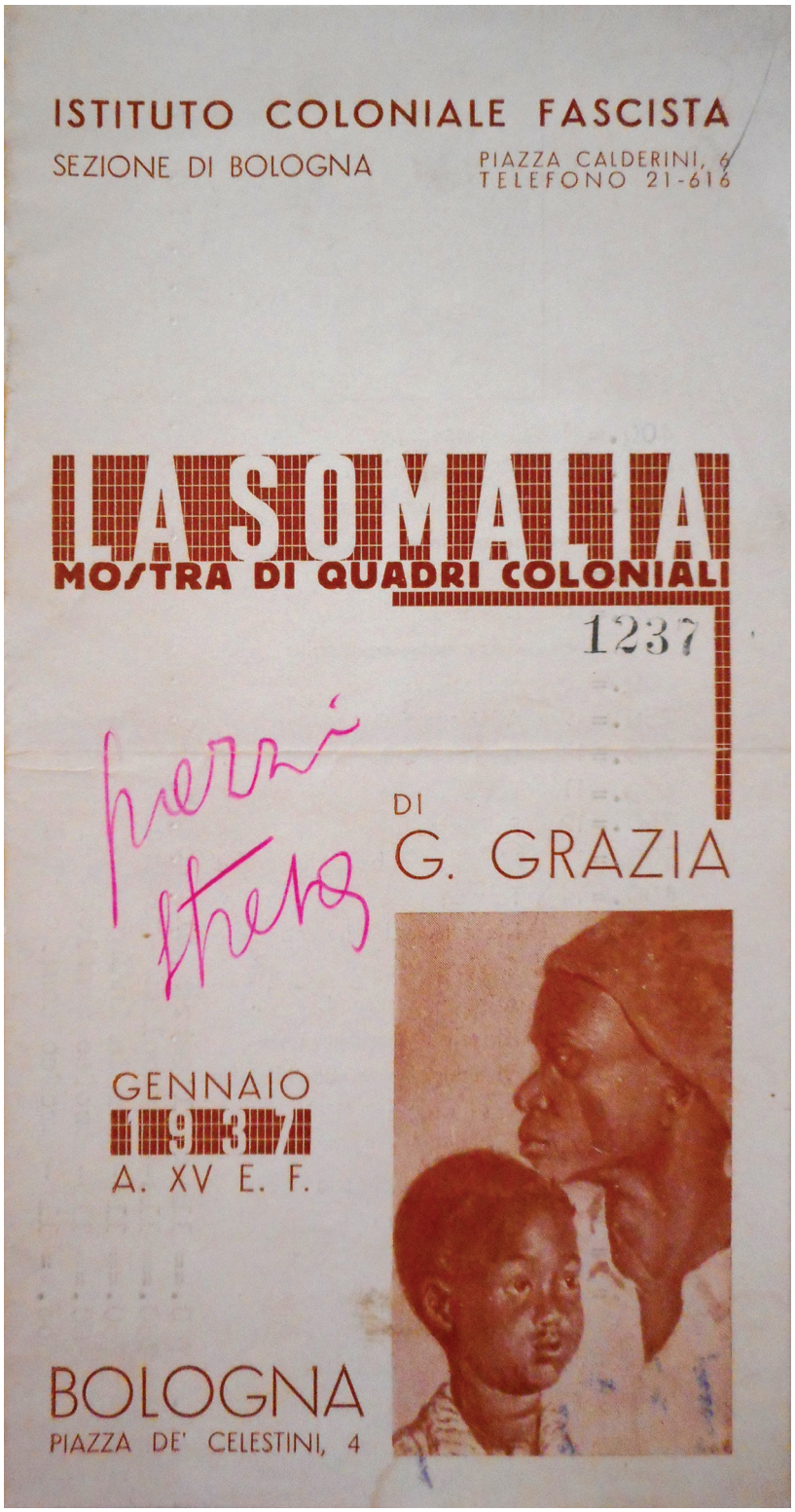

Fig. 11:
La Somalia, mostra di quadri coloniali di G. Grazia, catalogo delle opere (Bologna, Piazza de' Celestini, 4), 1937.
Foto Priscilla Manfren © Priscilla Manfren, Padova.

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senta quindi un rinnovato esempio di sinergia, volto a coltivare "sia attraverso l'approfondimento di studi adatti, sia attraverso le suggestioni visive di paesaggi e di scorci coloniali" la formazione della tanto invocata "coscienza coloniale".[78] Gli organizzatori si impegnano dunque affinché la rassegna venga visitata da "un ampio pubblico, e soprattutto dai giovani e dal popolo, per farsi un'idea sicura e sincera della floridezza delle nostre Colonie",[79] tant'è che la chiusura, grazie a una proroga, avviene alla fine invece che alla metà di febbraio.[80] A tale riguardo, è interessante osservare anche la varietà del pubblico giunto a visitare la mostra che, questa volta, è pensata come evento a pagamento – il prezzo del biglietto, visti gli scopi propagandistici, è comunque limitato a 1 lira – anche se pare non manchino le possibilità per ottenere una riduzione: si apprende così che la *Somalia* è visitata da gruppi di studenti e studentesse appartenenti a svariati istituti, quali il Liceo Scientifico Augusto Righi, l'Istituto di San Vincenzo De' Paoli, la Scuola d'Avviamento Certani, il Ginnasio-Liceo Minghetti, l'Istituto Pier Crescenzi, la Scuola d'Avviamento Manfredi, nonché da soci del Circolo di Cultura, gruppi che non di rado si avvalgono della guida di professori e studenti in carica come fiduciari dell'ICF, ma anche della presenza costante di Grazia stesso nelle vesti di cicerone. Facilitazioni economiche vengono concesse ai soci tesserati dell'ICF e ai reduci d'Africa che si presentano in divisa – per questi l'ingresso è gratuito –, mentre per gli iscritti all'Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro è prevista una riduzione.[81]

Al chiudersi della rassegna invernale, la stampa annuncia "un buon numero di acquisti effettuati da Enti pubblici cittadini e da numerosi privati",[82] anche se non è da escludere che altre opere siano entrate nelle collezioni bolognesi in occasione di una successiva e ben più breve esposizione, avvenuta nella città felsinea quattro mesi dopo, dal 26 giugno al 4 luglio, quando è il Dopolavoro rionale Paoletti a volere esposta la *Somalia* nel salone della propria sede.[83] Scopo della replica è, in questo caso, mettere in contatto diretto con tale testimonianza artistica e documentaria anche – si legge in un articolo de "Il Resto del Carlino" – il "popolo minuto e genuino del rione, tanto ricco di perspicacia e guidato dal suo infallibile istinto, ma che magari non ha mai messo piede nelle sale felpate di una analoga esposizione".[84] Tra le due presentazioni bolognesi va però ricordato come fosse stato inserito, dal 6 marzo al 4 aprile – in concomitanza allo svolgersi dei corsi di cultura coloniale –, anche un mese di esposizione a Ferrara, ove la *Somalia* era stata richiesta dalla sezione locale dell'ICF e proposta con ingresso libero, dalle 17 alle 19.30, nei locali del Circolo della Stampa al piano superiore del Teatro Nuovo in Piazza Trento e Trieste.[85] Sono queste le ultime tappe ben documentate della mostra: poi, si sa solamente – attraverso telegrafiche notizie fornite dall'artista e da trafiletti nella stampa – che essa fu presentata di nuovo in Piemonte, presso la Casa del Fascio di Stresa, durante il mese di agosto 1937, a cura della Federazione dei Fasci di Combattimento e dell'Ente per il Turismo.[86] Tale iniziativa fu probabilmente reiterata, dato che la "Rassegna della Istruzione Artistica" segnala la chiusura, in data 30 settembre 1938, di un'altra

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mostra personale dell'artista svoltasi nella stessa stazione turistica lacustre.[87] Si è infine a conoscenza di una tardiva tappa meridionale del corpus somalo: il periodico "L'Artista Moderno" annuncia infatti, nel giugno 1940, l'apertura della mostra di Grazia nella vasta sala della Casa Littoria di Potenza, città a cui l'artista era stato destinato nel 1938 dopo aver vinto il concorso per l'insegnamento del disegno negli Istituti magistrali.[88]

Risalgono dunque a queste ultime tappe molti degli acquisti che Grazia stesso segnala nel suo curriculum.[89] Se il Podestà di Stresa – identificabile nella persona di Enrico Pozzani – si aggiudica il ritratto di una *Donna Ogaden*, sono soprattutto enti e istituzioni bolognesi, come anticipato, ad acquisire dipinti del loro concittadino: si sa infatti che la Cassa di Risparmio di Bologna rinnova i suoi favori all'artista, aggiungendo alle proprie collezioni il bel *Mercato in Amaruini* (fig. 12) – registrato come acquisto del 1937 – e, probabilmente nella medesima occasione, il *Mercato a Bondere* (fig. 13).[90] Anche questi lavori, ritraenti una brulicante scena di vita quotidiana in due quartieri di Mogadiscio, sono oggi conservati – al pari dei precedenti acquisti dell'istituto effettuati nel 1935 – nella sede di Intesa Sanpaolo in Via Farini 22. È poi forse nello stesso anno che l'Unione Sindacati Bieticultori e l'Unione Sindacati Industriali di Bologna acquistano, rispettivamente, *L'antenna radio di Mogadiscio* e i *Tessitori*, opere di cui attualmente non si hanno notizie. L'Amministrazione Provinciale predilige invece *Invito alla preghiera* (fig. 14), limpida veduta di cielo azzurro ed edifici bianchi tra i quali compare una figura a braccia alzate, forse un *muezzin* che richiama, per l'appunto, i fedeli alla devozione. L'opera, oggi facente parte del patrimonio della Città Metropolitana di Bologna e conservata presso Palazzo Malvezzi in Via Zamboni 13,[91] è relativa a un gruppo di rielaborazioni compiute in Italia da Grazia tra la fine del 1935 e il 1936, come si evince dall'anno fascista "XIV" appena leggibile sotto la firma dell'autore, in basso a destra nel dipinto. Realizzato invece tra la fine del 1934 e il 1935 – come dichiara l'anno fascista "XIII" in basso a destra – è il luminoso *Tessitore* (fig. 15) acquisito dall'allora Consiglio Provinciale dell'Economia e oggi conservato presso la sede della Camera di Commercio di Bologna in Piazza della Mercanzia 4. In merito a queste ultime due opere si può supporre che l'acquisto sia stato effettuato in occasione della prima mostra bolognese del 1937, dato che esse figurano nel catalogo di tale rassegna – ai numeri 61 e 75 – ma non in quello della tappa del 1935.[92]

Giorgio Grazia e la *Somalia pittoresca* – parte II: il declino e l'oblio dal Secondo dopoguerra a oggi

Per quanto è dato sapere, il caso della *Somalia pittoresca* fu un *unicum* nel panorama dell'arte coloniale italiana di epoca fascista: non si hanno infatti notizie, sino ad ora, di altre singole mostre personali che, in quell'epoca, subirono una vicenda vorticosa analoga a quella che coinvolse la produzione africana dell'artista bolognese.[93] Viene allora spontaneo porsi alcune domande: dopo una tale apparente fama, costellata di un'intensa attività espositiva e di elogi, che cosa avvenne a Giorgio Grazia all'indomani dello sgretolarsi del regime? Quali furono i la-

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Fig. 12: Giorgio Grazia, *Mercato in Amaruini*, 1934. Collezione Intesa Sanpaolo, Bologna. Foto Priscilla Manfren © Archivio Patrimonio Artistico, Intesa Sanpaolo.

Fig. 13: Giorgio Grazia, *Mercato a Bondere*, 1934. Collezione Intesa Sanpaolo, Bologna. Foto Priscilla Manfren © Archivio Patrimonio Artistico, Intesa Sanpaolo.

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sciti delle peregrinazioni della sua *Somalia pittoresca* nella memoria collettiva? Quale sorte toccò al tanto celebrato corpus somalo?

Come per altri autori che si erano dedicati al genere coloniale e che, dunque, avevano asservito in certa misura la loro arte alla propaganda, la fine del fascismo fu per Grazia un momento di trapasso probabilmente non indolore: con il tramonto del sogno espansionista italiano, tenuto vivo solamente dalla temporanea attività dell'Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana della Somalia tra il 1950 il 1960, il turbinio e la discreta fama ottenuta dalla celebrata *Somalia pittoresca* si arrestano. Dei ricordi africani compaiono solo frammenti – i lavori rimasti invenduti – esposti qua e là dal pittore, nel frattempo tornato a Bologna, insieme alle successive creazioni del periodo lucano dedicate al Sasso di Matera[94] e a opere più recenti in cui Grazia, sperimentando nuovi stili, tenta – invano – di lasciarsi alle spalle l'etichetta di "pittore appassionato, diligente, fedele a quell'aspetto del mondo che incontra i maggiori suffragi nella memoria degli spettatori",[95] ossia il suo precedente "verismo sobrio ed equilibrato"[96] votato al documentarismo. I giudizi, ora, non sono più sempre e incondizionatamente fervidi ed entusiastici, come testimonia una breve recensione a una personale che l'artista tiene nel marzo 1948:[97]

Fig. 14: Giorgio Grazia, *Invito alla preghiera*, 1935-1936. Città Metropolitana di Bologna, Bologna. Foto Priscilla Manfren © Città Metropolitana di Bologna, Bologna.

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Fig. 15: Giorgio Grazia, *Tessitore*, 1934-1935. Camera di Commercio di Bologna, Bologna. © Camera di Commercio di Bologna, Bologna.

Alla Galleria d'arte di via Castiglione ha esposto il pittore Giorgio Grazia che ondeggia fra le strettoie di un ultimo ottocentismo e le aspirazioni ad un verismo minuto e crudo. Ci sembra però che il mestiere non lo sorregga a sufficienza in questi intenti tanto da rendergli il respiro sempre affaticato e pesante.

È strano soprattutto vedere ancora vegetare in Italia una categoria di artisti che non ha avvertito il mutare del tempo e della cultura [...].[98]

E ancora, le recensioni a una personale di circa ottanta opere, svoltasi nell'aprile 1955 al Museo Civico di Bologna,[99] mettono in luce – seppur con toni più gentili – lo spaesante eclettismo in cui l'artista si è lanciato per svecchiare il suo stile e tentare così, al contempo, di smarcarsi da quello che era ormai il suo scomodo passato da pittore coloniale. Alcuni scrivono infatti "di restare un po' disorientati di fronte alle molte sensazioni che agitano il pittore", altri di essere rimasti colpiti da "la libertà e la spregiudicatezza con cui il pittore si serve delle diverse tecniche espressive", destreggiandosi tra "un solido e borghese gusto illustrativo" e influenze futuriste,

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surrealiste ed espressioniste che, tuttavia, producono "*allineamenti* modernistici, a volte del tutto non convinti e come provincialmente diminuiti".[100] Simili sono i commenti a una mostra antologica dell'autore curata nell'aprile 1961 dall'Unione Cattolica Artisti Italiani (UCAI): vengono ricordati con nostalgia il periodo somalo, le cui opere "appaiono ancora forse le più convincenti nella loro sincera spontaneità", e la produzione lucana, poiché "dopo quella bella stagione, Giorgio Grazia solo saltuariamente ha ritrovato la giusta vena poetica".[101] Tagliente è invece il giudizio su un'altra mostra bolognese allestita nel maggio 1964 alla sala Peruzzi, nel quale vengono sottolineati i "notevoli limiti" che la pittura dell'artista rivela sul piano culturale, votata com'è "all'estro di un descrittivismo occasionale e spesso, purtroppo, banale".[102] Delle testimonianze per il secondo Novecento, la breve presentazione stilata da Athos Vianelli nel 1971 – quattro anni prima della scomparsa dell'autore, avvenuta nel 1975 – è fra le poche totalmente positive. Anche qui, come in altre precedenti, il periodo somalo viene segnalato come importante per la carriera dell'artista, che nelle sue opere fa trasparire "certe rimembranze dell'esperienza africana che hanno lasciato una traccia nel suo stile e nella sua particolare sensibilità coloristica".[103]

Da questa documentazione si comprende quindi come Grazia sia stato sostanzialmente una meteora che, lanciata dal regime nell'orbita nazionale, è poi implosa su se stessa, ripiegando nel dopoguerra sull'intimità della terra natia. Parimenti, si ha l'impressione che il pittore, pur attivo nel ricercare una nuova strada da percorrere, lontana dai trascorsi coloniali sui quali molti, nel secondo dopoguerra, vollero stendere un omertoso velo di silenzio, non sia più riuscito a eguagliare la notorietà raggiunta grazie alla sua produzione africana, che per diversi critici restò, insieme a quella del periodo meridionale, la migliore in assoluto.

Quanto alla sorte toccata al celebrato corpus somalo, essa è di fatto già emersa nel corso della trattazione: la gran parte delle oltre cento opere componenti la *Somalia pittoresca* è oggi dispersa e sostanzialmente dimenticata. Di tanto in tanto, qualche lavoro riappare – come si è visto per *Case arabe a Mogadiscio* – sul mercato collezionistico, privo di informazioni specifiche, mentre le poche opere ancora conservate dalle istituzioni che le acquisirono versano, in alcuni casi, in uno stato conservativo tuttalpiù discreto e ignorate nella loro storia, in questo accomunate a buona parte della produzione coloniale italiana che, solo in anni tutto sommato recenti – dopo un'iniziale apertura portata avanti dagli studi storici –[104] ha iniziato a essere sondata con maggiore attenzione. Si conclude, dunque, auspicando che il presente lavoro possa contribuire a una maggiore conoscenza dell'artista e a una prima riscoperta delle sue opere africane, sollecitando altresì un rinnovato interesse e la rilettura – in parte già avviata da alcuni studiosi – di un patrimonio artistico ancora oggi poco indagato.

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Endnotes:

1 Sull'onnipresenza della propaganda coloniale nella quotidianità italiana alla metà degli anni Trenta, si veda a titolo d'esempio Mignemi 1984.

2 Sul tema delle esposizioni coloniali, si vedano almeno Arena 2011; Tomasella 2017.

3 Su questa rassegna, si vedano Manfren 2017b; Tomasella 2024.

4 Sul caso specifico, si vedano almeno Carli 2004; Manfren 2017c.

5 Sulle due rassegne organizzate in Italia, si vedano almeno Jarrassé 2016; Manfren 2017d; 2017e; Roscini Vitali 2020; Tomasella 2020.

6 Sul tema Manfren 2016.

7 Alla mostra itinerante, mai sino a ora trattata nella sua interezza, avevano già accennato Gabrielli 1998, p. 38; Sorbello 2005; Manfren 2016, pp. 84-85; 2019, p. 102; 2020, pp. 70-73.

8 A tale riguardo, si segnala che, al fine di snellire la bibliografia estesa finale, si è ritenuto opportuno utilizzare delle sigle, esplicitate qui di seguito: ASAC = La Biennale di Venezia, Archivio Storico delle Arti Contemporanee, Raccolta documentaria, Artisti, b. "Grazia, Giorgio", inv. n. 19831; GNAM = Roma, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Archivio bioiconografico - Monografico - Biografico - Artisti: G - Grazia Giorgio; MRBo = Bologna, Museo civico del Risorgimento, Archivio dell'Istituto Fascista dell'Africa Italiana – Sezione di Bologna, registro 9; ReC = Il Resto del Carlino; As = L'Assalto; AI = L'Avvenire d'Italia; CP = Corriere Padano; AC = L'Azione Coloniale; rit. = ritaglio stampa. Le parentesi quadre [ ] indicano che i dati in esse inseriti si basano su quanto riportato dai catalogatori. Dato che molte voci sono prive di autore, si è proceduto a ordinarle alfabeticamente secondo l'*incipit* dei titoli; essendo questi ultimi, in molti casi, identici, si è tenuto conto dell'anno di pubblicazione e, ove anche questo fosse identico, del mese e del giorno, seguendo un modello del tipo: *La Somalia…* 1937a; *La Somalia…* 1937b; non si è tenuto conto, pur riportandole, delle differenze maiuscolo/minuscolo e della presenza di virgolette.

9 Si ringraziano qui, a vario titolo, la Camera di Commercio Venezia Rovigo (in particolare Ines Casolino, Responsabile Servizio Provveditorato e Patrimonio), la Camera di Commercio di Bologna (con attenzione a Cristina Cuccu del Provveditorato), il MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna (in particolare Barbara Secci, della Sezione Collezione e Patrimonio), la Città Metropolitana di Bologna (nello specifico, Angelo Viteritti e Licia Senatore del Servizio Patrimonio e Provveditorato), il MuCiv - Museo delle Civiltà di Roma (con attenzione ai funzionari Rosa Anna Di Lella, Gaia Delpino, Myriam Pierri), Ca' Pesaro - Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna di Venezia (nello specifico, Matteo Piccolo e Giulia De Fazio, conservatore e assistente conservatrice), Intesa Sanpaolo (nello specifico le responsabili del Patrimonio Artistico, con particolare riferimento a Cristina Tuci).

10 Tra i corredi visivi più consistenti: i quattordici lavori in Cinti 1935a; i cinque dipinti in Corazza 1937b e gli altrettanti in "*La Somalia*" 1937c; le quattro opere in Emiliani 1972, pp. 460-461; la dozzina di pezzi – in parte tratti dalle fonti precedenti – in Manfren 2019, pp. 391-395.

11 Numero certamente ampliabile con ulteriori approfondimenti per ogni singola tappa.

12 Grazia 1938.

13 Ciufo 2002.

14 Grazia 1938.

15 Fra queste, la prima Mostra regionale del Sindacato fascista emiliano-romagnolo degli Artisti, svoltasi tra novembre e dicembre 1929 in Palazzo Sampieri, rassegna in cui Grazia presenta *Dallo studio* (cfr. *I.ª Mostra…* 1929, p. 34) e la Mostra del Paesaggio organizzata nel 1931 a Porretta, località termale non molto distante dal capoluogo emiliano

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(cfr. *Pittori…*1931).

16 In tale circostanza, l'artista presenterà due opere somale, ovvero *Boscaglia di Chisimaio* e *Somalia italiana* (cfr. *VII Mostra…* 1936, p. 79).

17 Ciufo 2002.

18 X. 1927. Si tratta di un dipinto con una *Testa di vecchio* e due disegni, relativi a un'altra testa maschile e a uno studio di nudo femminile.

19 X. 1927, p. 733.

20 X. 1927, p. 733.

21 Grazia 1929.

22 Grazia 1930.

23 *La nuova…* 1934, p. 76.

24 Vitali 1934.

25 *Somalia pittoresca…* 1934.

26 Anch'egli pittore, nonché padre di Carlo Enrico, architetto razionalista autore di diversi progetti legati al contesto coloniale.

27 Vitali 1934.

28 Grazia 1938. Un esemplare del catalogo del Museo della Garesa, conservato presso il Centro Studi Somali e reperibile in ArcAdiA – Archivio Aperto di Ateneo dell'Università degli Studi Roma Tre, presenta delle correzioni a penna che segnalano, nella sezione dedicata alla Raccolta di arte moderna, il successivo ingresso nella collezione di "2 quadri ad olio del pittore Grazia" – probabilmente gli stessi acquistati da Rava – riportandone inoltre il costo per una somma di 1500 lire (cfr. Regio Governo della Somalia 1934, p. 75).

29 Vitali 1934.

30 Basti pensare, a titolo d'esempio, agli otto artisti sovvenzionati dall'Ente Autonomo della Fiera di Tripoli per recarsi nella colonia mediterranea e realizzare delle serie di dipinti da esporre alla mostra d'arte coloniale di Napoli nel 1934 o, ancora, ad autori sardi come Giuseppe Biasi e Melkiorre Melis, che rinnovarono il loro stile a contatto con la terra libica, per non parlare di svariate autrici – dilettanti e professioniste – giunte sulla 'Quarta Sponda' negli anni Venti e poi negli anni Trenta, su impulso del rinnovamento edilizio e artistico promosso dal governatore Italo Balbo. Si vedano in merito Dettori 2020; Manfren 2023.

31 Fra quelli noti, oltre a Giorgio Grazia, si ricordano Gabriella Fabbricotti, Lidio Ajmone, Cesare Biscarra, Milo Corso Malverna, Ersilia Cavaciocchi, Alberto Neiviller. In merito a questi e ad altri autori approdati in Somalia, si vedano Ciccotti 2009; Manfren 2020; 2022; Rapicavoli, De Marinis 2024.

32 Sul tale istituzione la bibliografia si è arricchita in anni recenti, per averne un'idea si vedano almeno Gandolfo 2014, Cascone 2024. Per le sue collezioni d'arte, si veda Margozzi 2005.

33 *Lettera di Alessandro Lessona (Ministero delle Colonie) a Giorgio Grazia*, 1935, 28 marzo, copia dattiloscritta riportante il testo, ASAC.

34 Dall'Ongaro 1935; V. C. 1935; N. A. 1935; Scarpa 1935; Callari 1935; *La mostra…* 1935a; *La Mostra…* 1935b; *Impressioni…* 1935.

35 *Somalia pittoresca…* 1935a.

36 Dall'Ongaro 1935.

37 Scarpa 1935.

38 Callari 1935.

39 N. A. 1935.

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40 *La mostra…* 1935a; Grazia 1938.

41 Grazia 1938; Margozzi 2005, p. 135.

42 Su questa tappa *Attività…* 1935; B. R. 1935; Cinti 1935a; Cinti 1935b; *Il Principe…* 1935; *Intensa…* 1935; *L'orario…* 1935; Manetti 1935; *Mostra…* 1935a; *Mostra…* 1935b; *Mostra…* 1935c; *Mostra…* 1935d; *Mostra…* 1935e; *Mostra…* 1935f; *Nella Sezione…* 1935; *Somalia pittoresca…* 1935b; *Somalia pittoresca…* 1935c; *"Somalia pittoresca"…* 1935d; *"Somalia pittoresca"* 1935e; *"Somalia pittoresca"* 1935f; *Una mostra…*1935.

43 *Mostra…* 1935d.

44 *Mostra…* 1935f; Cinti 1935a; Grazia 1938.

45 Emiliani 1972, pp. 460-461.

46 L'opera compare in Cinti 1935a, p. 51; *Giorgio Grazia* 1937b.

47 Comune di Bologna 1936, p. 33.

48 *"Somalia pittoresca"* 1935f; *La III Mostra…* 1935; Pini 1935; Grazia 1938.

49 *La Somalia…*1935; *Somalia pittoresca…* 1935g; *Somalia pittoresca…* 1935h; z. e. 1935.

50 Il *mundul* era una costruzione indigena simile al *tucul*.

51 b. a. 1936. Va tuttavia segnalato che un altro dipinto avente il medesimo titolo è pubblicato in Cinti 1935a, p. 53.

52 Su questa: c. g. 1935; C. P. 1935; *L'interessante…*1935; *La mostra…*1935c; *Somalia pittoresca…* 1935i; *"Somalia pittoresca"…* 1935j.

53 *L'interessante…*1935.

54 *"Somalia pittoresca"…* 1935j.

55 *Somalia pittoresca…* 1935i.

56 C. P. 1935.

57 C. P. 1935.

58 In merito si veda Donadon 2019, pp. 51-95.

59 *Letture…* 1936.

60 Sulla tappa veneziana *Istituto…* 1936a; *Istituto…*1936b; *Somalia pittoresca…* 1936a; *Somalia pittoresca* 1936b; *Una mostra…* 1936. Si veda anche Manfren 2016, pp. 84-85.

61 *Una mostra…* 1936.

62 *Somalia pittoresca* 1936b.

63 *Istituto…*1936b.

64 Grazia 1938.

65 Cinti 1935a, p. 51; Mussio 1936; Manfren 2016, p. 85.

66 Foto d'epoca del dipinto sono in *La Mostra…* 1935b; *Mostra…* 1935d. L'opera, segnalata con titolo leggermente diverso e con misure 46X32 cm, è stata posta in vendita a € 400,00 da un privato, in località Guidonia Montecelio (RM), nel sito picclick.it. Si veda *GIORGIO GRAZIA…*2024.

67 *Impressioni…* 1935; Marchesini 1937; *Mostra…* 1935d.

68 *Somalia pittoresca…* 1935a; *Somalia pittoresca…* 1935b.

69 L'opera risulta infatti schedata con i seguenti dati: Inventario: BA 0137, Venezia, Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna; Autore: Autore non identificato (Grazia); Soggetto: Ritratto di ragazza, Testa di negra; Oggetto: Dipinto, Olio su tavola, 31,7 x 22,2; epoca: XX, 1934.

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70 Grazia 1938; Mussio 1936; *Mostra…* 1936. Alle fonti precedenti si rifanno i più recenti Colombo 2016; Manfren 2017f.

71 Mussio 1936.

72 Grazia 1938.

73 Su questa tappa B. R. 1937a; B. R. 1937b; Corazza 1937a; *Giorgio Grazia* 1937a; *Giorgio Grazia* 1937b; *Il Corso…*1937; *La chiusura…* 1937a; *La chiusura…* 1937b; *La mostra…*1937a; *La Mostra…* 1937b; *La Mostra…* 1937c; *La mostra…* 1937d; *La prolusione…* 1937; *La Somalia…*1937a; *La Somalia…*1937b; *"La Somalia"…* 1937c; *La Somalia…*1937d; *"La Somalia"…* 1937e; *"La Somalia"…* 1937f; *"La Somalia"…* 1937g; Marchesini 1937; *Mostra…* 1937; *Nella sezione…* 1937; Pelliccioni 1937; *Pittori…* 1937.

74 B. R. 1937b.

75 Marchesini 1937.

76 *La prolusione…* 1937.

77 Corazza 1937a.

78 *La prolusione…* 1937.

79 Marchesini 1937.

80 *La chiusura…* 1937a.

81 *La chiusura…* 1937a; *La Mostra…* 1937c; *"La Somalia"…* 1937f; *"La Somalia"…* 1937g; *Mostra…* 1937.

82 *La mostra…* 1937d.

83 Corazza 1937b; *Un lembo…*1937; Grazia 1938.

84 *Un lembo…*1937.

85 Sulla tappa ferrarese *Alla Mostra…* 1937a; *Alla Mostra…* 1937b; *La chiusura…* 1937c; *La inaugurazione…* 1937; *La Mostra…* 1937e; *La Somalia…* 1937h; *"La Somalia"…* 1937i; *"La Somalia"…* 1937j; *"La Somalia"…* 1937k; P. C. 1937.

86 Grazia 1938.

87 *Mostre…*1938.

88 *Il successo…* 1940; *Esposizioni…* 1940; Vianelli 1971.

89 Grazia 1938.

90 Emiliani 1972, pp. 460- 461.

91 Il dipinto è stato pubblicato in anni recenti nel portale del Catalogo del Patrimonio culturale dell'Emilia-Romagna (PatER) con un semplice titolo descrittivo. In merito si veda *Paesaggio…* 2020.

92 *Somalia pittoresca…* 1935b; *La Somalia…*1937b.

93 È noto un caso dei primi anni Venti, relativo alla mostra di opere a soggetto somalo realizzate dalla contessa Gabriella Fabbricotti: la rassegna – dopo essere stata presentata al Lyceum di Roma – fece parte della Mostra Coloniale Italiana che, con analoghi scopi propagandistici, venne riproposta in forma itinerante nel contesto di alcune importanti fiere campionarie italiane. Tuttavia, il numero di tappe di questa mostra appare nettamente inferiore rispetto a quello raggiunto dalla *Somalia pittoresca* di Grazia. In merito Manfren 2017a; 2020, pp. 63-66.

94 Tortorelli [post 1938].

95 C.C. 1950.

96 *Il 31 marzo…* 1948.

97 In merito si vedano giuri 1948; *Il 31 marzo…* 1948; R. M. 1948.

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98 R. M. 1948.

99 *Mostra…* [1955].

100 Luber 1955; vice 1955. Un altro articolo, relativo a una mostra svoltasi l'anno successivo, segnala invece in maniera più sintetica che in Grazia "non manca di farsi sentire il contrasto tra modernità e tradizione"; in merito si veda *La mostra…* 1956.

101 C. E. 1961; vice 1961. Si segnala che anche in anni successivi l'autore espose nella Sala Peruzzi, sede dell'UCAI in piazza San Domenico; in merito si vedano le brevi notizie in B. L. 1962; *Grazia* 1962; B. L. 1964.

102 d. g. 1964.

103 Vianelli 1971.

104 Si vedano almeno Del Boca 1976-1984; Labanca 2002.

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A Museum on the March: Neighborhood Circulating Exhibitions at The Met, Their Evolution, Reception, and Influence

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Keywords:
The Met; exhibitions; medieval art; neighborhood; New York City

ABSTRACT:

This essay addresses the Met's commitment to reaching local communities through circulating exhibitions. It traces the evolution, reception, and influence of the Neighborhood Circulating Exhibitions program, a series of exhibitions sent to public libraries, settlement houses, and high schools in poorer communities around New York City between 1933 and 1942. It also examines the pivotal role played by museum staff in the program's development and success. The Met's continued dedication to local communities outside its walls is further demonstrated by discussing later circulating exhibition initiatives, including an exhibition focused on medieval art and culture from the late 1940s. This case study illustrates how objects were chosen, displayed, and reviews educational materials sent with the works of art. Finally, a comparison of The Met's activities with other museums situates its endeavors within the larger context of circulating exhibition programs during the twentieth century.

Il saggio affronta l'impegno del Met nel raggiungere le comunità locali attraverso le mostre itineranti. Sono analizzate l'evoluzione, la ricezione e l'influenza del programma Neighborhood Circulating Exhibitions, una serie di mostre inviate a biblioteche pubbliche, case di accoglienza e scuole superiori situate in comunità più povere di New York City tra il 1933 e il 1942. È inoltre esaminato il ruolo fondamentale svolto dal personale del museo nello sviluppo e nel successo del programma. La costante dedizione del Met verso le comunità locali al di fuori delle proprie mura è ulteriormente dimostrata attraverso l'analisi di iniziative successive di esposizioni itineranti, tra cui una mostra sull'arte e la cultura medievale alla fine degli anni Quaranta. Questo caso di studio illustra le modalità di selezione e di esposizione delle opere, nonché i materiali educativi inviati insieme ai manufatti artistici. Infine, un confronto tra le attività del Met e quelle di altri musei colloca i suoi sforzi nel più ampio contesto dei programmi di mostre itineranti del XX secolo.

Opening Picture:

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. View, *Art of the Near East*. Neighborhood Circulating Exhibitions. Shown at the Hudson Park Branch Library, 66 Leroy Street, Manhattan, New York. Photographed ca. February 14, 1934. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [MM6561]

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Introduction

Creating relationships with local communities remains a central goal of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (the Met) into the twenty-first century, just as it was when the museum organized its first series of local circulating exhibitions ninety-two years ago. One need only explore the museum's website to recognize that developing new local audiences continues to drive the Met's online features and programming. This essay focuses on the evolution, reception, and influence of a group of circulating exhibitions, designated *Neighborhood Circulating Exhibitions*, which took place from 1933 to 1942.

In 2020, the Met celebrated its 150th anniversary with the exhibition *Making The Met, 1870–2020*, which addressed the history of the museum in a series of chronological thematic sections. In conjunction with this larger project, a group of museum curators, researchers, and digital specialists curated a small exhibition on the Met's earliest *Neighborhood Circulating Exhibition* program, an initiative that presented exhibitions at venues in communities around New York City. Called *Art for the Community: The Met's Circulating Textile Exhibitions, 1933-42*, the 2020 show emphasized the vital role local circulating exhibitions played in providing historical examples of European textiles for study and inspiration to local students and the working population who could not regularly visit the museum.[1] The display also emphasized how, at the time, Met staff hoped this endeavor would be of service to local manufacturing. A map identifying the thirty-one institutions that participated in the program demonstrates that most venues were in lower income communities.[2] Although the 2020 exhibition closed during the height of the pandemic, materials associated with it are still available on the museum's website, including archival documents that provide an overview of the project.[3] To date, this exhibition was the first attempt in more than fifty years to assess the program's significance and influence.[4]

This essay builds upon the work my colleagues undertook in 2020 by looking further into the factors that contributed to the formulation of the earlier project, the significance of Richard F. Bach's work on industrial arts at the museum during his tenure from 1918 to 1949, and the institution's reaction to the economy of the early 1930s.[5] It also addresses the presses' reception to the circulating exhibition project. The museum successfully utilized newspapers and magazines to publicize their effort to bring art to local audiences and selected references to articles will illustrate how the project was perceived. More specifically I will consider an example of the language used in these articles, including phrases that described the neighborhoods where the museum placed these exhibitions as slums. Other wording described the museum's services as ministering to local populations on the subject of art.[6] Statements contained in letters received by the museum from hosting institutions will also be discussed within the context of the reception of these exhibitions. The influence of these circulating shows to future museum initiatives will also be addressed. A case study from 1946-1947 of the exhibition, *Mediaeval*

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Life: The Creative Spirit of the Middle Ages, will examine the organization of a circulating exhibition focused on medieval European art, including an analysis of the types of objects chosen and the related materials sent to be used alongside the displays. Finally, the circulating program will be compared with similar programs at other local institutions at around the same time. For the purposes of this essay, "circulating" exhibitions are defined as shows organized for continuous movement, while "traveling" exhibitions are shows sent to numerous locations before permanently closing and returning to their origin.

Development of the Program

The Metropolitan Museum of Art's original mission statement declares the institution was created,

> *by a group of American citizens – businessmen and financiers as well as leading artists and thinkers of the day – who wanted to create a museum to bring art and art education to the American people.*[7]

With a mandate similar to that of the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, the founders of the Met fashioned an institution dedicated to promoting art education and to inspiring modern design through the study of historical objects.[8] Refining public taste was a crucial part of the museum's function from its inception, however taking the collection out of the museum to the public was impossible until the collection had grown large enough to accommodate the circulation of original art outside the building. Unlike the Victoria & Albert Museum, an older institution whose collection formed more quickly, the Met needed time to develop a collection that could sustain a consistent lending campaign.

The Met's circulating program was undeniably influenced by its precursor, the Victoria & Albert Museum, which was the first art institution to begin an extensive program of circulating and traveling exhibitions. Its program was developed in the mid-nineteenth century as part of the Design Reform initiative associated with the Government Schools of Design at Marlborough House.[9] Following the museum's 1909 reorganization, a dedicated Circulation Department was created, and each curatorial department transferred objects from its collection to that department for inclusion in circulating exhibitions.[10] The Victoria & Albert Museum had the best facilities for organizing such projects, and their staff was committed to providing service to the community.[11] Although exhibitions were sent to secondary schools, as well as other venues, they were later phased out as educational priorities expanded and changed in the United Kingdom.[12] It is important to note that circulating exhibition programs developed in Canada in the 1920s, however, following the second World War, programs inaugurated in countries around the world, from South Africa to Norway, India and France also proliferated.[13]

The seeds of the Met's plan to send circulating exhibitions to local New York City institutions developed slowly during the tenure of the museum's third director, Edward Robinson (1910–1931). The 2020 ex-

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hibition *Art for the Community* has highlighted that the initial spark for the program emerged out of correspondence with a high school teacher named Jessie L. Clough from Richmond Hill High School in Queens.[14] In September 1913 Clough requested the museum to lend fabrics for use in her classes to be sent "about twice a year for periods of 3 or 4 weeks."[15] Henry W. Kent, Assistant Secretary at the Met, responded that the museum was unable to send textiles to her school, but that she was free to arrange a time to come to the museum.[16] In response, Clough expressed her disappointment, reminding Kent of the Museum of Natural History's policy to lend material. She further stated,

> *I tried to make it clear... that our pupils had heavier expenditures of carfare and time to reach the Museum, than the city children + the interest to make this expenditure, needed awakening.*[17]

Students needed a good reason to spend money to visit the museum. The surest way to accomplish this was to entice them by sending select objects to the schools. The museum had already begun to lend works externally, sending a collection of paintings to the Children's Room at the New York Public Library in 1913.[18] Staff descriptions of these early loans seemed to emphasize aesthetic appreciation over practical applications.

In 1914, the museum lent an exhibition of modern oil paintings and watercolors for display at Washington Irving High School in the Gramercy Park area of Manhattan.[19] A year later, twenty-one paintings by American artists were installed in the Lorillard Mansion in Bronx Park at the headquarters of the Bronx Society of Arts and Letters.[20] In 1916, just three years after the museum was first contacted by Miss Clough, Kent wrote to her with the news that the museum's trustees had authorized "the loan of a series of textiles to teachers like yourself who teach practical design and who make practical use of such objects."[21] These works, however, were not to be used for exhibition "but only for working purposes."[22] Two years later, in 1918, the museum lent eighteen paintings to the New York Public Library's branch at Chatham Square on Lower Broadway, and it later circulated to the Hamilton Fish Park branch on the Lower East Side. In accomplishing this, the Met's goal was to "extend its influence, through its pictures, to a distant part of Manhattan..."[23] The museum's bulletin later published comments by the branch librarian highlighting the popularity of the exhibition both for copying and enjoyment.[24]

There is no doubt that Henry Kent's correspondence with Miss Clough played an influential role in the formulation of a circulating exhibition program geared to local institutions. However, the museum was already well on its way to moving in the direction of developing a program, evaluating the difficulty of organizing exhibitions and documenting their popularity with visitors by sending individual shows to branch libraries, a school in Manhattan, and an arts society in the Bronx.

In 1919, the Met announced its intention to create a circulating loan program when president Robert

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W. de Forest wrote that taking the collection out of the museum and putting objects to work outside the museum was better than keeping them idle in storerooms.[25] De Forest also addressed the potential financial concerns associated with embarking on such a program, arguing that "the expense of circulating exhibitions in New York schools and libraries comes fairly within the Museum's obligations to the City."[26] He also described that other loan exhibitions were administrated and paid for through the American Federation of Arts.[27] It appears, however, that an official program of circulating exhibitions was not begun until more than a decade later. The economic crash of 1929 and the Great Depression would further influence the development of the *Neighborhood Circulating Exhibition* program. With the U.S. unemployment rate at twenty-five percent by the early 1930s, significantly fewer visitors had the financial ability to visit the Met, further illustrating what Miss Clough had already stressed in 1913, that the public needed a reason to spend the money to travel to the Met, whether for enjoyment or practical purposes.

The Neighborhood Circulating Exhibition Program, 1933–1942

Formally begun under the museum's fourth director, Herbert Eustis Winlock (1932-1939), the person at the center of the circulating program was Richard F. Bach (1887–1940). Bach began his career at the Met in 1918, and during his tenure he served as Director of the Department of Industrial Relations and later as Dean of Education. He was instrumental in introducing European modern design to the American public and in advancing coordination between the museum and manufacturers, designers, and craftspeople to promote modern design. Inaugurating the *Neighborhood Circulating Exhibition* program was a logical extension of his initiatives in modern design because of they, "offered a tangible venue for social progress."[28] The exhibition program was, however, focused on education rather than on commercial interest.[29] Designated an "experiment" by Winlock, the program aimed at reaching a larger and more diverse segment of New York City's population, especially those who could not easily travel to the museum.[30] Between 1933 and 1942, exhibitions were sent throughout New York City's five boroughs to settlement houses (fig. 1); to branches of the New York Public library throughout New York (fig. 2); to high schools in the Bronx (fig. 3), Queens, and Staten Island; and to local community centers, such as the Bronx Municipal Building (fig. 4). [31] Settlement houses were institutions located in the poorest areas of a city that provided social services and recreational activities.[32] Indeed, most of these venues were located in poor and working-class communities.[33]

Organized by Bach and his staff, the exhibitions consisted of between 50 and 500 works of art each, including paintings, prints, and objects from the permanent collection. It began with six collections —*Art of China*, *Arms and Armor*, *European Textiles & Costume Figures* (fig. 5), and *Ancient Egypt*, and *Art of the Near East* (fig. 6).[34] One of the goals of the first season was "to collect data which might be of use if in the future if it becomes feasible to estab-

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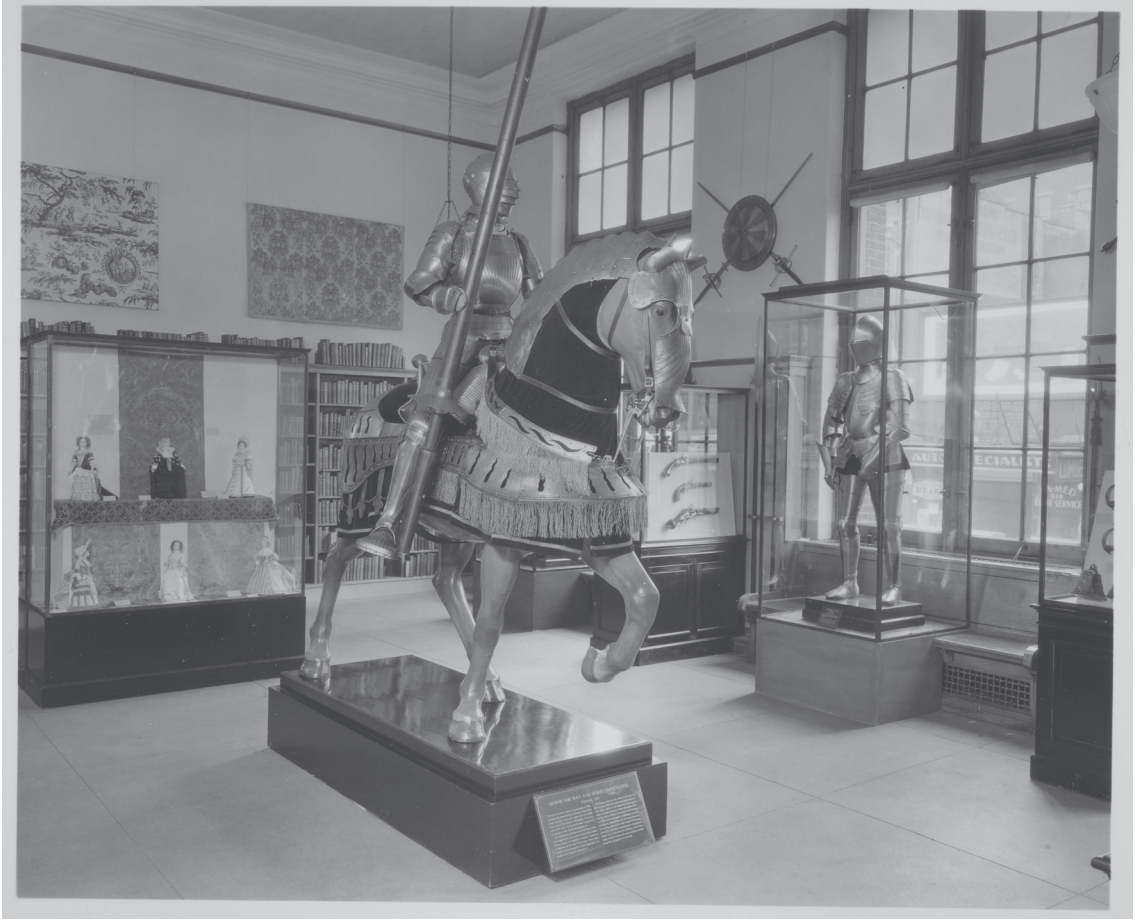
01



02

Fig. 01:
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. View, *The Art of Ancient Egypt*. Neighborhood Circulating Exhibitions. Series of 1934. Shown at the University Settlement House, Manhattan, New York. Photographed ca. March 7, 1934. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [MM6641]

Fig. 02:
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. View, *Arms, Armor and Textiles, 1492–1776*. Neighborhood Circulating Exhibitions, Series of 1934. Shown at the George Bruce Branch, New York Public Library, West 125th Street, Manhattan, New York. Photographed ca. March 8, 1934. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [MM6646]

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Fig. 03: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. A Teacher with a Class, *Arms and Armor*. Neighborhood Circulating Exhibitions, opened February 9, 1939. Shown at Theodore Roosevelt High School, The Bronx, New York. Photographed February 1939. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [MM8746]

lish branch museums in the city."[35] The notion of creating branch museums had been under discussion by museum officials since at least 1925, with the acquisition of the George Grey Barnard Collection of medieval sculpture.[36] Each subsequent and successful season of the circulating program was hailed in the Met's bulletin where the dates, venues, and the number of visitors were regularly published.[37] During the second season of the program, in 1934, 22,377 people visited the exhibition, *Chinese and Japanese Art*, which was displayed for just 49 days.[38]

By 1935, the procedures for sending out a circulating exhibition to local institutions were well-established by the Met and were even described in *The New York Times*.[39] Although the program eventually included all five boroughs it wasn't until 1938 that locations expanded to include locations in the Bronx and Staten Island.[40] The exhibition themes continued to comprise subjects such as arms and armor, ancient Egypt, and Oriental textiles and prints.[41] Circulating exhibitions generally required minimum effort from the host venue's staff, with principal issues such as packing, safe transport, and installation being overseen by the Met.[42] Following receipt of a request, museum staff visited the venue to assess the physical location and lighting capabilities. Occasionally conditions were such that additional construction was required. Frequent rearrangement of materials determined that exhibitions were often quite changed from one venue to the next.[43] One-page flyers were printed for each exhibition, which described the topic, provided an overview of the layout case by case, and offered "good books"

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Fig. 04:
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. View, *Arms, Armor and Textiles, 1492–1776*, Neighborhood Circulating exhibitions, series of 1935, No. II. Shown at the Bronx County Building, The Bronx, New York. May – August 30, 1935. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [SF449]

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Fig 05:
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. View, *European Textiles and Costume Figures*,"Neighborhood Circulating exhibitions. Shown at Union Settlement House, East 104th Street, Manhattan, New York. Photographed ca. October 31, 1936. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [MM7596]

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about the subject.[44] Opening receptions were held at each venue.[45] Expanded hours enabled neighborhood populations to see the displays outside of hectic work and family schedules.[46]

Works of art chosen for circulating exhibitions were referred to as "surplus objects" or "duplicates" to underscore that the museum's treasure remained on site.[47] Yet, in other descriptions, museum staff members were careful to state that works lent, such as a complete suit of armor, were also suitable for display at the museum, if there had been room.[48] The Met's method of identifying objects for loan contrasted with the Victoria & Albert's, where works were deliberately selected to include significant objects, not "throw-outs" or works unworthy of being displayed in the museum.[49] Moreover, objects culled from all the departments of the Victoria & Albert Museum were transferred to the Circulation Department to create a reserve collection of 10,000 works in about 1909, and that grew to 25,000 works of art by 1950, while the Met's circulating collection was much smaller and individual objects remained within the purview of the curatorial department to which it belonged.[50]

Cases and other exhibition materials had to be transported from the museum to a location and then installed. Starting in 1935, the Works Progress Administration provided guards and lecturers on site.[51] Although exhibitions were sent out at no cost to the borrowing institution, museum staff reported the cost was

Fig. 06: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. View, *Art of the Near East*. Neighborhood Circulating Exhibitions. Shown at the Hudson Park Branch Library, 66 Leroy Street, Manhattan, New York. Photographed ca. February 14, 1934. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [MM6561]

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significant. It was later reported that, although the annual allotment of funds never exceeded $5,000 per year, the actual cost to the museum was $15,000 or more per year.[52] The value to the museum was to introduce to the public "the conviction that the Metropolitan is their museum."[53] Most importantly, admission was free.[54] Between 1933 and 1940, exhibitions had been shown at 6 library branches, four colleges (fig. 7), 13 high schools, 1 art high school, 3 settlement houses, 2 YMCA branches, 1 museum and 1 city administration building, with a total attendance figure of 1,999,690.[55] The program was suspended in 1941 when, according to internal Met documents, the pressure of defense requirements associated with World War II had reduced available man power and funds. In addition, the assistance from the WPA was withdrawn.[56]

An analysis of the language used by Richard F. Bach to describe the program provides crucial information about its rationale and goals. In an essay for the museum's bulletin in 1935, two years after the program began, Bach referred to the program as, "this invasion of ours in regions of the Greater City whence but few ever do or can come to the Museum itself…[57] He also likened the circulating exhibitions to temporary branch museums woven into the fabric of local neighborhoods.[58] In another essay, he described having developed a "caravan of art" suggestive of mobile exhibitions on buses, a later phenomenon in museum extension.[59] Moreover, he explained that original museum objects were entering the "circle of daily activities of the people."[60] New Yorkers from poor and working-class neighborhoods in the five boroughs were able to view original works of historical art in person, likely for the first time. The result was that objects in circulating exhibitions inserted the museum directly into the lives of neighborhood residents. At the same time, the objects' movement from the museum to less affluent areas of the city helped to democratize an elitist art collection assembled by the wealthiest robber barons of the previous century.[61] In the final reports of the program, which ended in 1942, more than two million people, nearly a quarter of the New York City area population and mostly from lower income groups, reportedly viewed these exhibitions.[62]

Reception

The *Neighborhood Circulating Exhibition* program received a significant amount of press attention from its inception in 1933 and throughout the nine years it existed. This recognition consisted of announcements or articles repeating text provided by museum staff, and explanations of how the program was perceived. For example, a 1933 article in the *New York World Telegram* proclaimed in its title that art was reaching New York slums.[63] It was one of the only articles to directly acknowledge the exhibitions were sent to areas of urban slums around the city. In 1934, M. D. C. Crawford, a writer for *Women's Wear Daily*, emphasized the utility of the opportunity for a larger population to view historical works generally only available to a small audience.[64] Lloyd M. Crosgrave from Muncie, Indiana, described feeling a type of "mental indigestion" when visiting the museum. Lauding the idea of

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Fig. 07: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. View, *Arms and Armor*. Neighborhood Circulating Exhibitions, through September 6, 1939. Shown at the College of the City of New York. Photographed ca. July 7, 1939. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [MM8935]

smaller branch museums, like the Met's circulating exhibitions, Crosgrave argued the visits would be more of "an endless series of dainty meals instead of a gorge."[65] Viewing fewer works of art installed in a smaller venue was seen as preferable to wandering through a large and intimidating museum with many galleries. Commendation letters received by the museum from staff at host venues illustrate how significant these opportunities were for communities. In a letter to the museum, from the head of the Hudson Guild, a settlement house, expressed that there was no place where carrying the message of art was more needed, because

> *...the neighborhood, which it seems to me, almost more than any other, is in need of the help that you can give.*[66]

Another letter described how important it was to promote the cultural branches of education, especially at a moment when a

> *...lack of employment gives to others more spare time than is conducive for producing healthy minds...*[67]

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Two threads emerge from these examples: the innovative approach to reaching a diverse audience and the exposure of a more distant public to art fulfilling the role of education and refining the taste of visitors to the exhibition. It is important to note that following World War II traveling and circulating programs developed worldwide. An example that is comparable to the Met's program is one implemented in Australia in 1944 with governmental support that brought exhibitions to remote areas of the country, "to diffuse a knowledge of, and an interest in, the visual arts…"[68]

Later Years

In 1943, a year after the close of the *Neighborhood Circulating Exhibition* program, Francis Henry Taylor (1903–1957), the museum's fifth director who took the helm in 1940, produced a confidential preliminary report for museum trustees called, *Where is The Metropolitan Museum Going?*. Under the section "Education and Museum Extension" Taylor described the museum's many years of maintaining "a variety of contacts with the schools, colleges, and institutions of the city…".[69] It was further announced that these initiatives were now part of one administrative unit – the Department of Education and Museum Extension under the direction of Richard F. Bach.[70]

A document outlining the revised circulating exhibition program at the Met from the same year describes an extremely ambitious program of 9 types of exhibitions. Considered the most important series of circulating exhibitions the museum offered, the so-called "interborough" circulations were meant to be similar to the earlier neighborhood circulating program. Additional services included loans to junior high schools connected with the educational curriculum, and a suburban "belt" circuit, which had not yet begun due to wartime shortages. Still others included a labor union circuit, consisting of reproductions, a college circuit, plans for a Mexican circuit, and several other services including original works of art and reproductions.[71] Outreach to schools also included tours and the circulation of visual material, such as lantern slides and small exhibitions.[72] While not all of these programs were put into effect, exhibitions to junior and senior high schools, colleges, and labor unions were sent out. With this considerable number of local circulating exhibitions moving around New York City, it is not surprising that the museum encountered staffing issues in organizing the material, preparing labels, and installing the exhibitions. The result of these activities was a recommendation to add personnel, preferably employed by the city's Board of Education.[73] By this time, the Met had partnered with the New York City Board of Education to send exhibitions to junior and senior high schools.[74] Two museum helpers were sent to install the works, but the truck and driver were paid for by the Board of Education.[75] In a 1946 letter to the museum's president, William Church Osborn (1941-1947), Bach reiterated the importance of giving free exhibitions to schools as a "quid pro quo for the fund annually voted us by the City."[76]

The archival records of these exhibitions indicate that issues concern-

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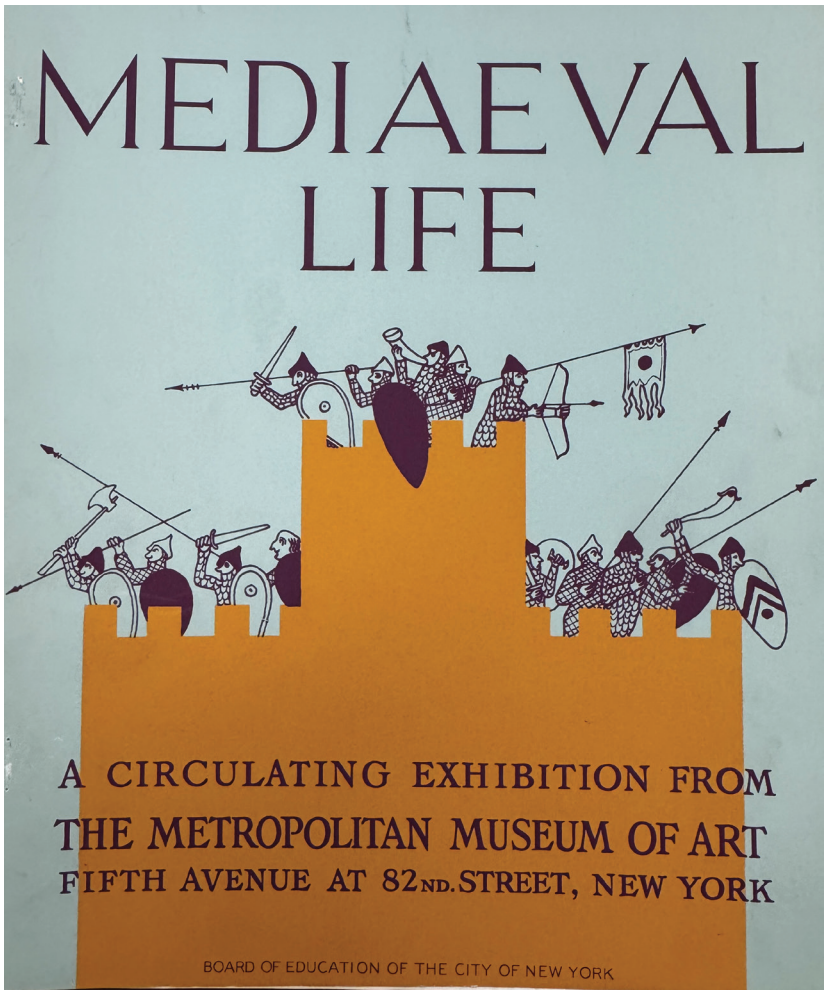

Fig. 08: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Poster for *Mediaeval Life: The Creative Spirit of the Middle Ages*, 1946-1947. Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

ing the condition and security of the works lent were few, but evidence shows problems did exist. An internal memo from 1947 describes that the previous 3 years had witnessed damage to painting frames and "evidence of a lack of careful handling."[77] In late 1947 and early 1948, internal memos specify that paintings, "are standing on the glass tops of cases, leaning against the wall without fastening of any kind" at Midwood Highschool in Brooklyn.[78] At the Bronx High School of Science, paintings were hung in high traffic areas and some even stood on the floor.[79] It was therefore decided that collections had to be displayed in rooms with locks so spaces could be locked when not monitored.[80] In addition, a "special man" was assigned to superintend the movement of paintings exhibitions at each stop.[81] Interestingly, there is no discussion of damage to three-dimensional works of art, which were displayed inside casework.

Case Study

By the late 1940s, three exhibitions were being circulated to thirteen senior high schools and eleven exhibitions were sent to eight junior high schools. Among the exhibitions prepared were *Living Past of China, Ancient Greece, Masterworks*, and two exhibitions focused on the European Middle Ages, *Mediaeval Life: The Creative Spirit of the Middle Ages*, (fig. 8) and "Mediaeval Castle: Its Siege and Defense."[82] A file located in the archives of the department of medieval art at the Met provides a list of objects and black and white photographs showing how the exhibition, *Mediaeval Life: The Creative Spirit of the Middle Ages*, was displayed.[83] Works of art and printed labels in sections were separated by velvet-covered panels. The texts included in the cases no longer survive, but the exhibition contained four cases of original art with 94 objects devoted to the following themes: The Castle (fig. 9), The Town (fig. 10), The Monastery (fig. 11), and The Church (fig. 12). The existing object lists, consisting of about seventy-five objects, and the photographs show a range of works, including plaster casts of ivory mirror cases, diptychs, and game pieces[84]; reproductions of Byzantine and Irish metalwork from other museum collections[85]; and they include original medieval works that can be primarily classified as surplus or works that would ordinarily not be chosen for display in the Metropolitan's gal-

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09

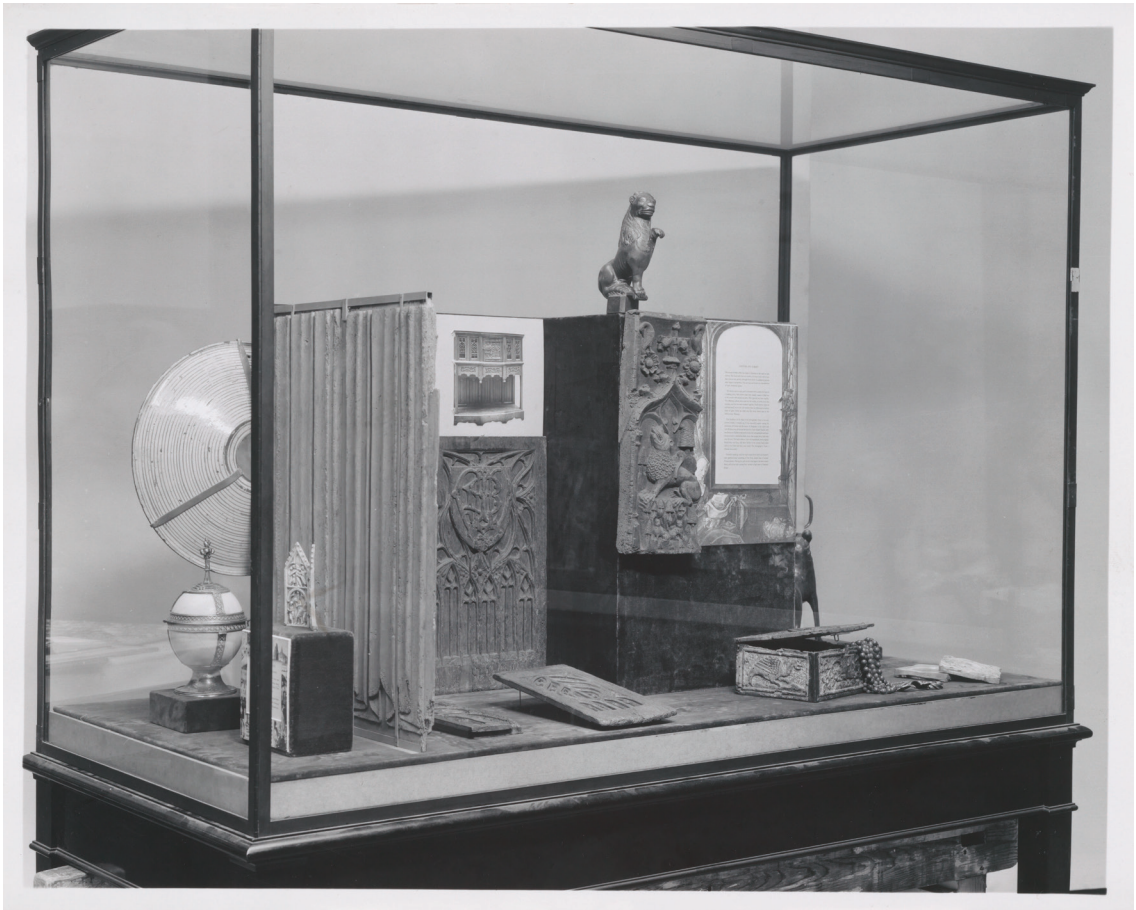

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Fig. 09:
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. View 1, *Mediaeval Life: The Creative Spirit of the Middle Ages*. Circulating Exhibition at Unknown Senior High School, September 1946. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [MM16735]

Fig. 10:
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. View 2, *Mediaeval Life: The Creative Spirit of the Middle Ages*. Circulating Exhibition at Unknown Senior High School, September 1946. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [MM16728]

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Fig. 11: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. View 3, *Mediaeval Life: The Creative Spirit of the Middle Ages*. Circulating Exhibition at Unknown Senior High School, September 1946. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [MM16730]

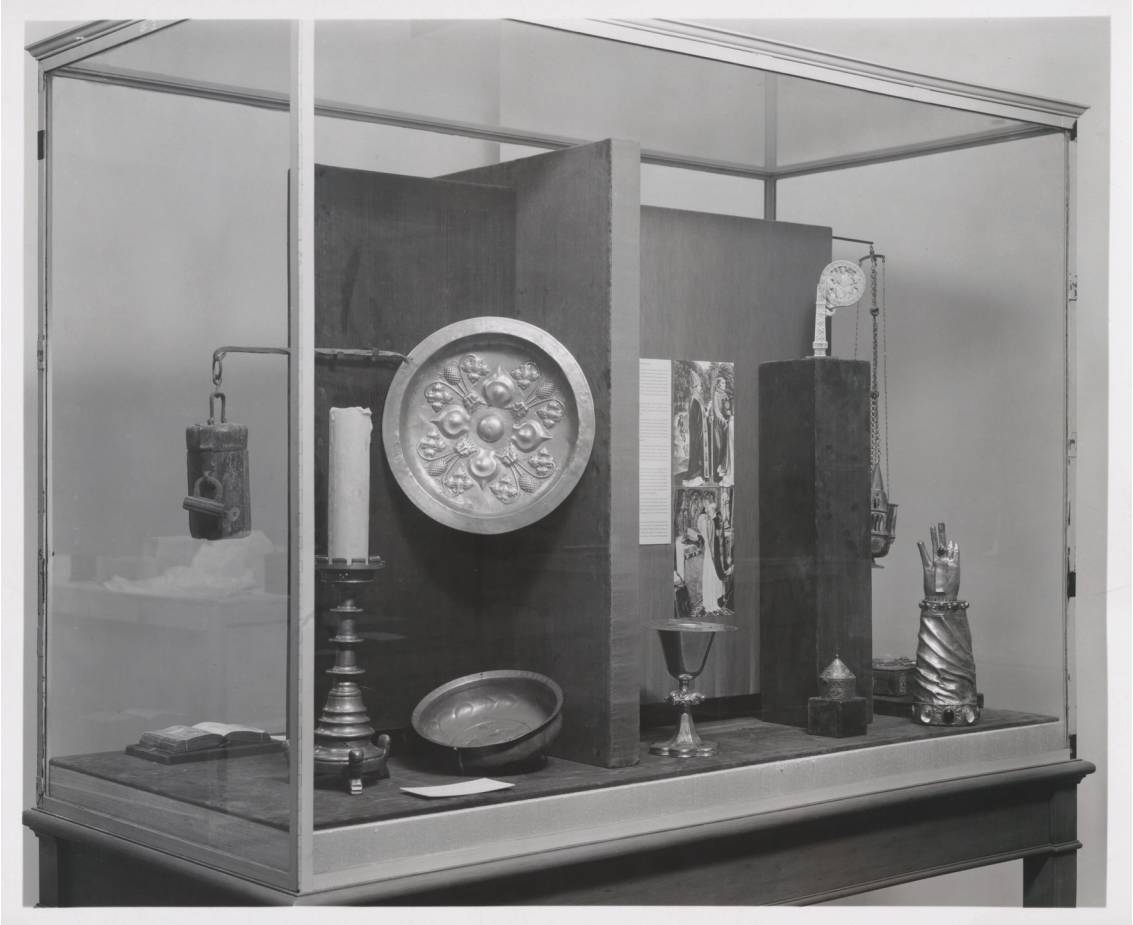

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Fig. 12: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. View 3, *Mediaeval Life: The Creative Spirit of the Middle Ages*. Circulating Exhibition at Unknown Senior High School, September 1946. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. [MM16731]

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leries.[86] Indeed, the woodwork displayed figure 10 was subsequently deaccessioned from the collection and sold. Woven from silk and metal thread, the early sixteenth-century Rhenish chasuble displayed in figure 11 and the various ivory and ceramic works in this exhibition, demonstrate that museum staff sent fragile, breakable, and light sensitive works to schools throughout the five boroughs of New York City.[87]

The educational materials paired with the exhibition included a helmet in the style of the fourteenth century that students could wear, and an example of chain mail. A short film about the Ghent Altarpiece, photographs of The Cloisters in Fort Tryon Park, a set of slides, and an album of music were also included. Readings and recommendations for the use of the exhibition in the curriculum of English, music, and art were also contained in the packet of materials sent along with the works of art.[88] A museum memorandum indicates this exhibition remained among the museum's staple of circulating exhibitions for high schools until the mid-1950s. The education department stored them in the museum's tunnel, underneath the building, while not in circulation.[89] A series of nationally circulating shows was inaugurated in 1947, each containing thirty-five to fifty works and lasting about six weeks. The museum paid for packing, insurance and installed the works of art on site, whereas borrowers assumed the cost of transportation.[90]

By the early 1950s, the Met investigated the feasibility of mobile art exhibitions in motor buses for communities within a fifty-mile radius of the museum.[91] Such discussions continued into the 1960s, citing the possibility of sending mobile displays "in a caravan of three buses" to "members of the armed services in military establishments and hospitals."[92] Although the Met never experimented with a mobile exhibition, other museum in the United States and in Europe did especially in the 1950s and 1960s.[93] Circulating exhibition programs focused on junior and senior high schools and colleges continued at the Met into the 1950s and beyond. For example, in 1951, Francis Henry Taylor, announced that, among other loans throughout the country, seventeen were shown in senior, junior, and vocational high schools in New York City.[94] The museum designed a more streamlined group of exhibitions in the early 1950s, such as the exhibition "Iron," which contained printed images of medieval cathedrals, castles, late medieval half-timbered buildings, and a just few original objects placed in the center of the display (fig. 13).

In 1968, another program was initiated to integrate American art into American history studies in high schools. Like the *Neighborhood Circulating Exhibitions* begun in 1933, this effort aimed at reaching audiences outside the museum's physical building and was intended to support art education in high school curriculums nationally. Exhibitions were sent to thirteen schools involving 400 students – in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Alabama.[95] The project was deemed so successful that a subscription service was initiated to allow more schools to take advantage of the exhibition for teaching purposes.[96] Two circulating exhibitions devoted to historical

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topics were sent to the participating schools for display in their public halls. Rather than displaying original works, however, these shows contained reproductions mounted on both sides of ten panels.[97] The culmination of the program was an overnight trip for students to New York for a reception and visits to several New York landmarks, including Lincoln Center and the American Museum of Natural History.[98] Didactic materials for teachers and students, including films and publications, were sent to facilitate additional student enrichment.[99] The museum's centennial in 1970 provided a time to reflect and the museum's department of education released a report where, once again, the difficulty of bringing students to the Metropolitan Museum was acknowledged. To address this, the museum reminded readers that circulating exhibitions, would, again, be one of two primary activities aimed at high school students.[100]

Fig. 13: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. *Iron*, Circulating Exhibition, 1951–1952. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art [MM22292]

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the Met succeeded in creating a "caravan of art" or a "museum on the march" as described by Richard Bach and others by the mid-1930s with the *Neighborhood Circulating Exhibition* program. It was not the only American museum, however, to embrace circulating exhibitions. For example, the Newark Museum in Newark, New Jersey pioneered neighborhood displays of art, science, and industry with eight branch museums. For example, in 1929, it opened a Polish art exhibit at one of these, the Springfield branch library.[101] The Museum of Modern Art inaugurated a program in 1931, and it also circu-

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lated material through public high schools in New York. They, however, sent reproductions, not original works of art.[102] Like the Met, the Museum of Modern Art published data about its circulating exhibitions to demonstrate its long-standing institutional commitment to reaching more of its community over two decades.[103] Perhaps more important than the tangible statistics published, was the announcement that the Museum of Modern Art circulating exhibition program had transformed the museum into a museum without walls.[104]

In 1951, Francis Henry Taylor stated that, "Despite the fact that more than 2,000,000 persons visited the Metropolitan Museum of Art each year, the museum is constantly seeking new ways and means of making its art treasures available to a greater audience."[105] So, indeed, the Met's mandate to make the collections available to new audiences has been a consistent thread. The Met's mandate to make its collections available to new audiences has been a consistent thread beginning with *Neighborhood Circulating Exhibition* program in 1933 and throughout its history. The theory that art museums should not only serve as repositories, but also as centers for disseminating knowledge to the public through circulating exhibitions – essentially a museum without walls – is the cornerstone behind the Met's first experiment with circulating exhibitions.[106]

The nineteenth-century concept of art museums providing essential educational services directed to new audiences outside the institution, has been a significant part of the Met's focus since the early twentieth century. It was due to Met directors such as Herbert Winlock and Francis Henry Taylor, Met president Robert W. de Forest, and countless other museum staff, but especially Richard F. Bach, that the Met successfully created a museum without walls beginning with the *Neighborhood Circulation Exhibition* program in 1933. More importantly, works of art removed from the walls and storage rooms of the Met were democratized as they moved into communities of poor and working-class populations where they could be woven into the fabric of the neighborhood through displays in schools, civic buildings, and libraries. While they lasted, these free circulating shows benefited more than 2 million students and residents of less affluent areas of New York City. Circulating programs continued to be a priority at the Met beyond its centennial in 1970. Over time, however, these initiatives, in some cases, have come to include fees for exhibition services, and an important aspect of their service to less affluent populations was lost. While today the free circulating exhibitions programs may seem like a project from the New Deal era, their ideals and goals continue to influence the Met's activities, whether in its strategic efforts to engage local communities or to captivate ever diverse audiences near and far.[107]

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Endnotes

1 See https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2020/art-for-the-community, for the exhibition overview, accessed March 3, 2025.

2 See https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2020/art-for-the-community/1930s-exhibition, accessed March 3, 2025, for the map identifying the location of each venue. One archival document identifies thirty venues. See List of Neighborhood Circulating Exhibition Locations, December 27, 1939, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, The Met, New York. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/844358?exhibitionId=%7Bfb098768-39b0-4ccd-w869e-7e911f1b7bd1%7D&oid=844358&pkgids=619&pg=0&rpp=100000&pos=8&ft=*&offset=100000&locale=en, accessed March 3, 2025.

3 See https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/objects?exhibitionId=fb098768-39b0-4ccd-869e-7e911f1b7bd1&pkgids=619, for archival documents, accessed March 3, 2025.

4 Post 2020: https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2020/art-for-the-community, accessed March 3, 2025.

5 I gratefully acknowledge the work of my colleagues, Elizabeth Cleland (Curator), Eva Labson (Manager, Ratti Textile Center), and Stephanie Post (Senior Digital Asset Specialist) on the 2020 exhibition.

6 *Missionary Work*, in "The New York Sun," February 21, Exhibitions Circulating, 1935, Box 28, Folder 5, The Metropolitan Museum of Art historical clippings and ephemera files, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York. For references to these exhibitions serving a missionary role in other museums, see The Museum of Modern Art 1954, p. 5.

7 See the Met's website: https://www.metmuseum.org/press-releases/a-brief-history-of-the-museum-2005-general-information, accessed April 2, 2025.

8 Denis 1997, pp. 107-116. Guglielmo 2008, p. 56.

9 Floud 1950, p. 299. Weddell 2018, p. 147. Weddell 2012: https://research.vam.ac.uk/journals/research-journal/issue-4/room-38a-and-beyond-post-war-british-design-and-the-circulation-department/

10 Weddell 2018, p. 147. Weddell 2012.

11 Weddell 2018, p. 147.

12 Weddell 2018, p. 147. The V&A's Circulation department was closed in 1977, due to government spending cuts. For more information, see Weddel 2012.

13 McCann Morley 1950, p. 264-265. See also several case studies by country. Osborn Courter 1953, p. 11.

14 See The Met 2020, exhibition overview: https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2020/art-for-the-community, Accessed April 4, 2025.

15 Internal memorandum to Henry W. Kent, September 27, 1913, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/844393?exhibitionId=%7Bfb098768-39b0-4ccd-869e-7e911f1b7bd1%7D&oid=844393&pkgids=619&pg=0&rpp=100000&pos=16&ft=*&offset=100000&locale=en, accessed March 3, 2025.

16 Henry W. Kent to Jessie L. Clough, September 30, 1913, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/844392?exhibitionId=%7Bfb098768-39b0-4ccd-869e-7e911f1b7bd1%7D&oid=844392&pkgids=619&pg=0&rpp=100000&pos=15&ft=*&offset=100000&locale=en, accessed March 3, 2025..

17 Jessie L. Clough to Henry W. Kent, October 3, 1913, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/844391?exhibitionId=%7Bfb098768-39b0-4ccd-869e-7e911f1b7bd1%7

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D&oid=844391&pkgids=619&pg=0&rpp=100000&pos=14&ft=*&offset=100000&locale=en, accessed March 3, 2025.

18 Winlock 1933, pp. 183-184.

19 The Met 1914, p. 152.

20 The Met 1915, p. 154.

21 Henry W. Kent to Jessie L. Clough, January 18, 1916, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/844362?exhibitionId=%7Bfb098768-39b0-4ccd-869e-7e911f1b7bd1%7D&oid=844362&pkgids=619&pg=0&rpp=100000&pos=12&ft=*&offset=100000&locale=en, accessed March 3, 2025.

22 Henry W. Kent to Jessie L. Clough, January 18, 1916.

23 Winlock 1933, p. 183.

24 The Met 1918, p. 159.

25 de Forest 1919, p. 190.

26 de Forest 1919, p. 190.

27 de Forest 1919, pp. 190. For more on Met exhibitions handled by the American Federation of Arts, founded in 1909, see de Forest 1920, p. 126.

28 Guglielmo 2008, p. 122. For a description of Bach's position in 1938, see The Met 1938a, p. vi, 18. The Works Progress Administration, or WPA, was one of the programs under the New Deal, which provided work for the unemployed in the wake of the economic crash of 1929 and subsequent Depression. For a comprehensive discussion of Bach's activities in the field of manufacturing and the industrial arts, see Guglielmo 2008 and Eklund, Friedman, Griffey 2020, p. 159.

29 Guglielmo 2008, p. 124.

30 Winlock 1933, p. 183.

31 The Met 1938a, p. 24. For settlement houses, see Museum of the City of New York web feature: https://www.mcny.org/exhibition/settlement-houses, accessed April 2, 2025.

32 See Museum of the City of New York web feature: https://www.mcny.org/exhibition/settlement-houses.

33 See the map of participating institutions, https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2020/art-for-the-community/1930s-exhibition.

34 Winlock 1933, pp. 183-184. Circulating Exhibitions Memo dated April 26, 1943, Circulating Exhibition for N.Y.C. Institutions - 1943, 1947-1949, 1954, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, The Met, New York.

35 Winlock 1933, p. 184.

36 Husband 2013, pp. 18, 29-30.

37 For example, see The Met 1936, p. 119; The Met 1937, p. 201; and The Met 1938b, p. 87.

38 The Met 1934, p. 13.

39 *Under Museum Banners*, in "New York Times," July 28, 1935, Exhibitions Circulating, 1935, Box 28, Folder 5, The Metropolitan Museum of Art historical clippings and ephemera files, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, The Met, New York.

40 Bach 1938, pp. 249-253.

41 Bach 1935b, p. 216.

42 McCann Morley 1950, p. 265.

43 *Under Museum Banners*, in "New York Times," July 28, 1935.

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44 For an example, see handout for the exhibition, *Arms, Armor, Textiles, and Costume Dolls,* Neighborhood Circulating Exhibition No. II, Series of 1935, Arms and Armor, Neighborhood circulating exhibitions - Publicity, 1935-1936, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

45 *Arms and Armor Exhibit Opens in Bronx County Building*, in "The Home News," April 27, 1928, Neighborhood circulating exhibitions - Publicity, 1935-1936, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

46 *250,000 in City See Museum's Circulating Art – Metropolitan's Neighborhood Displays Drawing Record Crowds This Year – 3 Exhibits on View Now – 4 More to be Sent on the Rounds by Bach, Director*, in "New York Herald Tribune," November 18, 1938, Box 31, Folder 4, The Metropolitan Museum of Art historical clippings and ephemera files, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

47 Bach 1935a, p. 45; Bach 1936, p. 149.

48 *Museum Sends Art Treasures on Wide Tours – Metropolitan's Circulating Exhibitions Drew 82,332 Visitors, Report Reveals – 156,974 Objects Loaned – Extension Branch Uses Surplus Items, Duplicates*, in "Herald-Tribune," April 16, 1935, in Box 28, Folder 5, The Metropolitan Museum of Art historical clippings and ephemera files, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

49 Floud 1950, p. 300; Weddell 2012.

50 Floud 1950, p. 300.

51 Circulating exhibitions report, April 26, 1943, Circulating Exhibition for N.Y.C. Institutions - 1943, 1947-1949, 1954, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

52 Circulating exhibitions report, April 26, 1943.

53 Bach 1938, p. 252.

54 Exhibition invitation, 1938, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/844359?exhibitionId=%7Bfb098768-39b0-4ccd-869e-7e911f1b7bd1%7D&oid=844359&pkgids=619&pg=0&rpp=100000&pos=9&ft=*&offset=100000&locale=en, accessed March 12, 2025.

55 See document outlining attendance figures between 1933 and 1940, Neighborhood circulating exhibitions - Attendance, 1939-1940, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

56 Circulating exhibitions report, Circulating Exhibition for N.Y.C. Institutions - 1943, 1947-1949, 1954, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

57 Bach 1936, p. 148.

58 Bach 1935b, pp. 215-216. *Metropolitan Goes Visiting. Traveling Exhibits Shown in Fourteen Districts*, in "New York Sun," November 23, 1935, Box 28, Folder 5, The Metropolitan Museum of Art historical clippings and ephemera files, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

59 *250,000 in City See Museum's Circulating Art – Metropolitan's Neighborhood Displays Drawing Record Crowds This Year – 3 Exhibits on View Now – 4 More to be Sent on the Rounds by Bach, Director*, in "New York Herald Tribune," November 18, 1938.

60 Bach 1936 p. 149.

61 See Tomkins 1970.

62 Moske 2020, p. 15.

63 *East Side Art: Children's Center to be Opened in Slums*, in "New York World Telegram," November 4, 1933, Exhibitions Circulating, 1933, Box 26, Folder 7, The

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Metropolitan Museum of Art historical clippings and ephemera files, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

64 M. D. C. Crawford, *Metropolitan Museum of Art Circulating Series of Exhibits – showing Clothing, Textiles, etc. of China, Japan, Egypt in 3 different locations*, in "Women's Wear Daily," March 12, 1934, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/844361?exhibitionId=%7Bfb098768-39b0-4ccd-869e-7e911f1b7bd1%7D&oid=844361&pkgids=619&pg=0&rpp=100000&pos=11&ft=*&offset=100000&locale=en, accessed March 3, 2025.

65 Lloyd M. Crosgrave, *Small Art Exhibitions*, in "New York Times," November 19, 1933, Exhibitions Circulating, 1933, Box 26, Folder 7, The Metropolitan Museum of Art historical clippings and ephemera files, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

66 John L. Elliott, Head Worker, Hudson Guild to Mr. Ivans, The Met, April 26, 1934, Commendations - Letters of - Neighborhood circulating exhibitions, 1934-1936, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

67 Joseph A. Palma, President, Borough of Richmond to Mr. H.E. Winlock, Director, March 25, 1935, Commendations - Letters of - Neighborhood circulating exhibitions, 1934-1936, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

68 Osborn Courter 1953, p. 12, note 2.

69 Taylor 1941, p. 53, Where is the Metropolitan Museum going? : a report by the director to the Trustees / [Francis Henry Taylor] - Metropolitan Museum of Art Publications - Digital Collections from The Metropolitan Museum of Art Libraries, accessed March 12, 2025.

70 Tomkins 1970, p. 291. Sterling Callisen replaced Richard Bach. Callisen was followed by Thomas M. Folds, formerly of Northwestern University, who had experience as the author-designer of circulating exhibitions. See The Met, "Thomas M. Folds, Chairman of Art Department at Northwestern University, is Appointed New Dean of Education for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, February 18, 1960, Metropolitan Museum of Art Press Releases, Thomas M. Folds, Chairman of Art Department at Northwestern University, is appointed new Dean of Education for the Metropolitan Museum of Art - Metropolitan Museum of Art Press Kits and Press Releases - Digital Collections from The Metropolitan Museum of Art Libraries, accessed March 12, 2025.

71 Where is the Metropolitan Museum Going?, Taylor 1943, p. 53, Francis Henry Taylor Records, https://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16028coll20/id/10817/rec/315, accessed March 15, 2025. For the complete list see, Circulating exhibitions report, April 26, 1943.

72 Taylor 1941, pp. 179-181.

73 Richard F. Bach to William Church Osborn, April 26, 1943, and Circulating exhibitions report, Circulating Exhibition for N.Y.C. Institutions - 1943, 1947-1949, 1954, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

74 Exhibitions. Circulating, 1947-1948, Francis Henry Taylor Records, Box 4, Folder 4, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York, Exhibitions. Circulating. 1947-1948 - Francis Henry Taylor Records - Digital Collections from The Metropolitan Museum of Art Libraries, accessed March 12, 2025.

75 Exhibitions. Circulating, 1947-1948, Francis Henry Taylor Records, Box 4, Folder 4.

76 Richard F. Bach to William Church Osborn, April 26, 1943, Circulating Exhibition for N.Y.C. Institutions - 1943, 1947-1949, 1954, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

77 Memo to Mr. Knotts from Mr. Bach, September 23, 1947, Circulating Exhibition for

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N.Y.C. Institutions - 1943, 1947-1949, 1954, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

78 Memo from Mr. Sugden to Mr. Loughry, December 11, 1947, Circulating Exhibition for N.Y.C. Institutions - 1943, 1947-1949, 1954, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

79 Memo from Mr. Loughry to Mr. Bach, [February 17, 1948, Circulating Exhibition for N.Y.C. Institutions - 1943, 1947-1949, 1954, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

80 Memo to Mr. Knotts from Mr. Bach, September 23, 1947.

81 Memo from Mr. Sugden to Mr. Loughry, December 11, 1947.

82 Record of Press Releases issued by the Museum for 1945, 1946, 1947, p. 3, Metropolitan Museum of Art Press Releases, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

83 The location of the exhibition is unknown, but it could have been one of the following: Fort Hamilton, Theodore Roosevelt, Bryant High School, New Utrecht High School, Girl's High School, James Monroe, or Franklin K. Lane. For a description of this exhibition and a comprehensive report of the overall program, see The Museum-High School Program, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Summary Report: 1944–1948, Circulating Exhibition for N.Y.C. Institutions - 1943, 1947-1949, 1954, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

84 See acc. no. 13.170.10: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search?q=13.170.10, accessed March 13, 2025.

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Postwar Cultural Diplomacy: V&A Contributions to Loan Exhibitions in the United States, 1945-1947

Laura Elliott

Keywords:
Victoria and Albert Museum; Cultural Diplomacy; Loan Exhibitions; Transatlantic Exchange; Postwar Museum Modernisation

ABSTRACT:

This article examines the Victoria and Albert Museum's (V&A) contributions to three loan exhibitions of British art staged in North America (1945-1947). These were paralleled by the V&A's own temporary exhibitions, which tested new display methods in preparation for its postwar gallery reorganisation. Drawing on primary source research, and case studies of exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, and the Art Institute of Chicago, the article explores how these efforts anticipated the V&A's transformation and reinforced its transatlantic role in cultural diplomacy. Challenging prevailing narratives of the V&A's detachment from international museum developments, the article highlights its engagement with wider patterns of postwar reconstruction and cultural exchange. It argues that temporary exhibitions—both at home and abroad—served as laboratories for curatorial innovation and diplomacy, reflecting the V&A's adaptability and global relevance.

Questo articolo analizza il contributo del Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) a tre mostre itineranti d'arte britannica allestite in Nord America tra il 1945 e il 1947. Tali iniziative furono affiancate da esposizioni temporanee al V&A stesso, che sperimentarono nuovi metodi espositivi in vista della riorganizzazione postbellica delle gallerie permanenti. Basandosi su fonti primarie e studi di caso relativi a mostre presso il Metropolitan Museum of Art, il Museum of Modern Art e l'Art Institute of Chicago, l'articolo esplora come tali attività anticiparono la trasformazione del V&A e ne rafforzarono il ruolo nella diplomazia culturale transatlantica. Contrastando le narrazioni dominanti che vedono il V&A distante dagli sviluppi museali internazionali, l'articolo evidenzia il suo coinvolgimento nei processi di ricostruzione e scambio culturale del dopoguerra, sostenendo che le esposizioni temporanee furono laboratori per innovazione curatoriale e strumenti diplomatici.

Opening Picture:

Artworks arriving by truck for *Masterpieces of English Painting* (Art Institute of Chicago), 1946. Courtesy The Art Institute of Chicago. The Art Institute of Chicago / Art Resource, NY/ Scala, Florence.

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Opening Picture: Artworks arriving by truck for *Masterpieces of English Painting* (Art Institute of Chicago), 1946. Courtesy The Art Institute of Chicago. The Art Institute of Chicago / Art Resource, NY/ Scala, Florence.

The V&A's Postwar Role in Transatlantic Cultural Diplomacy and Exchange

The immediate postwar period saw museums across the Atlantic in flux, many facing major gallery modernisation before their collections returned from wartime storage.[1] The war had also shifted global cultural leadership to the U.S., a transition signalled by the openings of MoMA's new building in 1939 and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. in 1941, as Europe's great institutions were devasted by the conflict. As Kathleen Burk and David Reynolds note, this moment marked the beginning of a broader realignment in cultural authority.[2]

Against this backdrop, major U.S. museums such as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC), and the Metropolitan Museum of Art (the Met) organised a series of international loan exhibitions that reflected an emerging commitment to cultural exchange and institutional modernisation.[3] This momentum was reinforced by a 1947 UNESCO meeting on international art exhibitions, hosted at the AIC, which preceded the founding of UNESCO's Commission for Museums and Monuments in 1948.[4]

However, museologist Kathleen Berrin identifies a persistent lack of scholarship on what she terms "National Diplomacy Exhibitions" in postwar U.S. museum history.[5] These included exhibitions of British art, which— due to legal constraints before the war (discussed in the next section) —remained relatively unfamiliar to American audiences. While Berrin examines collaborations with British institutions

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such as the National Gallery and Tate Gallery, the Victoria and Albert Museum's (V&A) contributions remain under-researched. Similarly, the V&A's role postwar museum redevelopment is largely absent from studies by Brandon Taylor, Ana Baeza Ruiz, and David McCann who have focussed on the National Gallery and director Kenneth Clark or his successor, Philip Hendy, or the Tate Gallery under director John Rothenstein.[6] This article argues that such omissions reflect a prevailing narrative, advanced by scholars such as Christopher Wilk and Tim Barringer, casting the V&A as insular and detached from international museological developments in the 20th century.[7]

Challenging that view, this article examines three U.S. loan exhibitions between 1945 and 1947 in which the V&A played a key role: *English Domestic Needlework of the XVI, XVII, and XVIII Centuries*, staged by the Met (Nov 5–Dec 2, 1945); *Masterpieces of English Painting: Hogarth, Constable and Turner*, exhibited at the AIC (Oct 15–Dec 22, 1946), the Met (Jan 15–Mar 16, 1947), the Art Gallery of Ontario (Apr 3–May 11, 1947), and London's Tate Gallery (Aug 21–Sep 30, 1947); and *Henry Moore*, exhibited at MoMA (Dec 17, 1946–Mar 16, 1947), the AIC (Apr 17–May 18, 1947), and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (Jun 8–Sep 7, 1947).

Although differing in scale, curatorial approach, and subject matter, these exhibitions each served as platforms for cultural diplomacy and curatorial experimentation. Together, they provide a comparative framework for examining how British art was interpreted and positioned within American art historical narratives, while also situating these efforts within broader discourses of early Cold War cultural alignment and institutional modernisation.

To better understand the V&A's postwar role, this article draws on conceptual frameworks that illuminate the mechanics of cultural influence and diplomacy. Joseph Nye's notion of "soft power,"[8] although primarily associated with statecraft and foreign policy, offers a useful lens for examining how museums like the V&A shaped international relations through cultural appeal. Richard Arndt's theory of "cultural diplomacy"[9] likewise underscores the strategic function of institutional exchange in advancing national interests. Through these frameworks, the article explores how the V&A's involvement in U.S. loan exhibitions enhanced transatlantic ties. Though temporary, such exhibitions became sites of collaboration, cultural signalling, and curatorial testing amid postwar reinvention and Cold War realignment. Recent work by Holger Nehring, Samuel J. M. M. Alberti, and Jessica Douthwaite further emphasises how cultural institutions were embedded in geopolitical strategy, particularly in relation to identity formation and global diplomacy.[10] These initiatives, the article argues, reflected Britain's shift to a supporting role in America's cultural ascendancy and signalled a redefinition of the V&A's international influence.

Drawing on under-researched primary sources, this article argues that the V&A used both its transatlantic collaborations and domestic temporary exhibitions as testing grounds

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for curatorial approaches that informed its gallery redevelopment. In doing so, it asserted both continued relevance and strategic realignment with evolving global museological practice. This reframing aligns with its origins as the South Kensington Museum (1857-1899), long recognised as a pioneering model for an international museum movement dedicated to industrial design reform through public education. Scholars including Michael Conforti, Arindam Dutta, Andrew McClellan and Kathleen Curran have traced its formative influence on American museum culture.[11] Curran, in particular, explores how American museums adapted European models—especially those rooted in decorative art and educational missions—from institutions like South Kensington. Likewise, Steven Conn frames American museums as civic spaces entangled in national narratives, making them fertile ground for mid-century cultural diplomacy.[12]

As Jennifer Van Horn has shown in her study of 18th-century British American material culture, domestic objects such as embroidery, portraiture, and dressing furniture functioned not merely as signs of refinement but as tools through which elite Americans constructed a civilised identity aligned with British imperial values.[13] This historical dynamic offers a useful lens for interpreting how the postwar loan exhibitions, such as the Met's *English Domestic Needlework*, revived and recast shared cultural traditions as a basis for renewed Anglo-American alignment through curatorial programming.

The V&A's historical promotion of contemporary work by living artists and manufacturers such as William Morris, later hailed as a "pioneer" of the modern movement, underscore its foundational significance to the histories of both visual culture and transnational museum exchange.[14] In the 20th century, however, the museum shifted focus towards historical connoisseurship, relocating most "modern" collections to other institutions.[15] Yet it retained key holdings by figures such as Morris, Constable, and Turner, and continued actively collecting and displaying works by international modern sculptors, including Rodin, Meštrović, and Henry Moore.

Reconsidering the V&A's participation in mid-century U.S. exhibitions not as isolated gestures but as part of this longer institutional trajectory reveals a sustained and strategic internationalism. Collaborating with American institutions not only affirmed the museum's cultural relevance but also reflected its renewed curatorial orientation before major gallery redevelopment (c.a. 1949-1957). These exhibitions exemplify the bi-directional influence between temporary overseas programming and domestic institutional reform.

From the UK to the US: A background to transatlantic loan exhibitions

As historian Jonathan Conlin notes, loan exhibitions, initiated by the British Institution (1805) and later popularised by international expositions, broadening the scope of public art education.[16] Francis Haskell further emphasises their importance in fostering public en-

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gagement and expanding museum collections.[17] The practice was central to the V&A: its South Court—a grand, richly decorated space, specifically designed and built in the mid-1860s for exhibiting loan exhibitions of private collections—often led to gifts and donations. This directly influenced the Met's adoption of loan exhibitions, as evidenced by its early historians, Winifred Howe, and George Fisk Comfort.[18] Both institutions continued the practice into the early 20th century, for example, simultaneously exhibiting different parts of the Morgan loan collection of decorative art.[19]

However, the V&A generally refrained from loaning works to overseas exhibitions due to the *National Gallery (Loan) Act* (1883-1935).[20] While not formally bound by the Act, the museum largely conformed to its restrictions. Enacted to safeguard national treasures, the legislation severely limited national collections' participation in overseas exhibitions. This isolationist stance drew criticism in the 1930s when the Royal Commission on National Museums and Galleries (1927–1931) acknowledged the "Unfortunate Consequences of the Present Position,"[21] stating: "A nation which welcomes great international exhibitions in its capital city, and fails to reciprocate, cannot escape from the charge of churlishness." It further observed that "We have ourselves been impressed by the lamentable inadequacy of its (British art) representation in the great galleries of Europe…" asserting that "At the present time, the inspired achievements of the British School of Painting are actually little known outside this country and the United States of America.[22]

Even in the U.S., British painting was mainly limited to a few collections such as The Met's holdings, rather than through loans from Britain's national museums. The need to disseminate British art more widely abroad led to the *National Gallery (Overseas Loans) Act* (1935), which permitted such loans. By then, however, the rise of totalitarianism and the growing threat of war discouraged international lending.

After the war, Britain's national museums adopted a more flexible interpretation of the 1935 Act, actively participating in overseas loan exhibitions. These efforts were supported by the British Foreign Office, British Council and the newly formed Arts Council of Great Britain; organisations that played a critical role in coordinating diplomacy, providing funding, and managing logistics with American partners.[23] Crucially, the founding of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 1946 provided a global framework for intercultural cooperation. Its resolutions promoted international loan exhibitions as essential to "the advancement and dissemination of knowledge."[24]

Ashton, who served during the war in the Ministry of Information and was an experienced orientalist, had curated international exhibitions in the 1930s, including Chinese art shows at the Royal Academy and the V&A.[25] Appointed the V&A's Director in early 1945, he embraced the principle of overseas loans, especially to the U.S., whose museum culture he had long studied and admired.[26] In preparation for his role, he undertook an eight-week study tour of U.S. museums in the winter of 1945, arranged by the Ministry

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of Information. [27] Ashton played a pivotal role in facilitating postwar loans, chairing two lending committees (explored in the second and third case studies) alongside John Rothenstein (Tate Gallery), and Philip Hendy (National Gallery). He also resisted proposals from "The Standing Committee on Museums and Galleries" (1946 "Massey Report)"[28] of which he was a member, to relocate the V&A's oil paintings to the Tate Gallery and National Gallery, including major works by Constable and Turner. Ashton referenced his recent American trip to argue that American audiences expected to find objects exhibited in the museums with which they were historically associated.[29] His stance helped preserve the V&A's curatorial autonomy and enabled its participation in postwar U.S. exhibitions.

This arrangement was reciprocal, with American museums contributing to British loan exhibitions such as Tate Gallery's *American Painting: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present Day* (1945), which "The New York Times" described as an "unprecedented showing" of 240 paintings from American galleries.[30] In a letter to "The Times," Rothenstein lamented that previous restrictions had prevented exhibiting British and American art from being displayed together, denying audiences the experience of "comparing and enjoying; in one place, the best examples in this country of the art of Whistler and Sargent with those from American collections."[31] The exchange of loan exhibitions marked a turning point in transatlantic museological relations and supports Berrin's argument that such cultural diplomacy advanced soft power by strengthening alliances through artistic exchange. At the outset of the Cold War, exhibitions played a key role in fostering mutual recognition and ideological alignment between the U.K and the U.S.

Similarly, the U.S. loan exhibitions examined in this article—featuring V&A loans of Elizabethan embroidery, 19th century master painting and modern sculpture—enriched American audiences' understanding of British art and redefined transatlantic artistic relations. The following case studies examine how these exhibitions built on earlier institutional links between V&A and U.S museums, such as MoMA's *Henry Moore* show (1946), and how they helped shape postwar curatorial and collecting strategies.[32]

Together, these developments suggest that the V&A's international collaborations were not peripheral but central to its modernisation. The exhibitions examined here prefigured institutional reform, contributing to curatorial renewal and rethinking of the museum's identity and public role during a period of significant transformation.

The V&A's contributions to postwar cultural diplomacy: Case studies of U.S. loan exhibitions, 1945–1947

1. English Domestic Needlework of the XVI, XVII and XVIII Centuries: A Loan Exhibition

In January 1945, as World War II was nearing its end, Leigh Ashton, soon to be Director of the V&A, wrote to Maurice Holmes, Secretary of the Board of Education:

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> *I have been approached by the Metropolitan Museum of New York to help them in borrowing three or four pieces of English needlework for the great exhibition they are going to hold in the winter. I am on good terms with the Metropolitan and am particularly anxious to do everything I can to help them more particularly as the Director, Francis Taylor who was specially sent to Europe by President Rooseveldt (sic) is extremely interested in keeping up Anglo-American good relations. I should like, therefore, to press strongly for relaxing our normal regulations and I have in mind a set of four small Elizabethan pillow cases which are of a type of which they have none in the States."*[33]

Ashton's request underscored the exhibition's diplomatic significance, aligning with broader efforts to strengthen cultural ties between Britain and America during the uncertainty of the postwar period. His experience in the Ministry of Information, managing British propaganda, informed his appreciation of cultural diplomacy's potential to foster goodwill and influence public opinion.[34] The Board of Education approved Ashton's proposal, and with support from the British Embassy in Washington, D.C., works from the V&A, Queen Mary, and other British collections were assembled and loaned to the Met.

The resulting exhibition, *English Domestic Needlework of the XVI, XVII and XVIII Centuries*, marked the first major display of its kind in the U.S., featuring 250 distinguished items from American and British collections.[35] Ashton personally accompanied the British loan objects to New York, and gave two lectures on the exhibition, promoting British decorative art and the V&A's world class collections on an international stage.

This exhibition came at a transformative moment as both the V&A and the Met prepared for major rearrangements of their public galleries.[36] Each museum planned new galleries dedicated to English decorative art—a first for the V&A (opened ca. 1951) and a significant addition at the Met (opened 1954).[37] *English Domestic Needlework* was prescient of these developments, exemplifying the institutions' mutual investment in English decorative art and setting the stage for future gallery developments. It symbolised the growing prominence of English decorative art in both institutions and paved the way for their mid-century gallery developments and later dedicated "British Galleries."[38]

The exhibition also reflects the evolving rationale behind Anglo-American museum relations, increasingly centred on gallery development and modernisation. Earlier in 1945, Ashton had undertaken an eight-week study visit to American museums, consulting with Francis Henry Taylor, Director of the Met, to explore innovative models of gallery arrangement, display, and technology.[39] While no direct link between this visit and *English Domestic Nee-*

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dlework has been documented, its subject matter and timing strongly suggest close collaboration. The show thus served both as a practical experiment and symbolic gesture in redefining postwar transatlantic museum practices.

Occupying three galleries at the Met, the exhibition followed a largely chronological layout, guiding visitors from Elizabethan to Georgian embroideries.[40] Preston Remington, the Met's Curator of Renaissance and Modern Art, acknowledged in the accompanying publication the challenges of strict chronological arrangement. To balance periods with fewer objects, key highlights were prominently showcased.[41] One such highlight, noted in a small exhibition pamphlet, was a table carpet, described as "among the most prized survivals of Elizabethan needlework, and that lent by the Victoria and Albert Museum is one of the finest."[42] The detailed description evoked scenes of historic English aristocratic life: "… ladies and gentlemen are shown walking near a great country house while various hunting episodes appear in the distance. The entire carpet is in a remarkable state of preservation and vibrant with its original brilliance of color (*sic*)."[43]

In foregrounding English domestic embroidery, the Met's exhibition exemplifies the longer Anglophone tradition of transatlantic alignment through objects Van Horn suggests. In this light, the V&A's loans contributed not only to postwar diplomacy but to the reaffirmation of a shared heritage embedded in material forms of domesticity.

Other highlights from the V&A included a "superb Georgian dress" and an 18th century bed coverlet with "matching pillows of satin worked in silk and silver-gilt thread."[44] In such illustrious company, the Met exhibited some works from its own collection, including a hanging from Treago, Herefordshire, and a recently acquired "fabulous Queen Anne waistcoat."[45] However, the V&A's contributions went beyond loaning objects. In the catalogue's foreword, Remington referred readers to the bibliography and expressed deep gratitude to generations of V&A scholars, acknowledging their pre-eminence in the field.[46] This suggests the exhibition narrative drew strongly on the V&A's subject expertise, a dynamic relevant to the other case studies.

By presenting a lineage of English decorative art, the exhibition projected shared cultural values and reinforced transatlantic narrative of continuity and refinement, positioning English work as both historically significant and internationally prestigious. As previously touched upon, it also signalled the Met's long-term investment in British decorative art, including the creation of new dedicated galleries as part of its postwar West Wing redevelopment.[47] Crucially, these efforts paralleled the V&A's first galleries for English decorative art under Ashton's tenure—a museum first.[48] Together, these new galleries in the UK and the US set a trajectory that continued with the V&A's British Galleries (2001), and the Met's British Galleries renovation (2020), both reframing collections through narratives of global trade and colonialism.[49]

Ashton's leadership in facilitating the V&A's collaboration with the

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Met underscored a shared commitment to Anglo-American cultural diplomacy and the reappraisal of British art history. The exhibition's emphasis on highlights, such as the Elizabethan table carpet, anticipated a broader postwar shift at the V&A towards prioritising quality in displays. This approach directly informed the museum's gallery reorganisation. As Charles Harvard Gibbs Smith, the first Keeper of the museum's new Department of Extension Services (1947-1971) later explained in *The Sphere* (1953), the decision was taken in 1945 to diverge from the traditional materials-based display that prioritised the scholar, and instead focus on the general visitor by adopting what he described as a "broader, more humanistic" approach: "This scheme comprised taking the pick of the Museum masterpieces—over 10,000 objects of every description—and placing them in a special series of galleries called the Primary Collections.[50]

More broadly, the exhibition demonstrated how loan exhibitions could serve as platforms for curatorial innovation and international collaboration. The V&A's contributions reflected its evolving role in shaping curatorial strategies, enhancing Britain's international cultural standing, and laying the groundwork for its domestic gallery redevelopment.

2. Masterpieces of English Painting: Hogarth, Constable, and Turner

The exhibition, *Masterpieces of English Painting*, marked another milestone in the presentation and reception of British art across the Atlantic. Whereas the previous exhibition showcased the decorative art of needlework as a largely amateur female craft practiced inside stately homes, *Masterpieces* positioned British painting within the European tradition of master painting—a traditionally male dominated artform associated with the Continent. The exhibition highlighted Britain's contributions to artistic modernity: Hogarth's social satire, Constable's pastoralism, and Turner's experimental abstract landscapes projected a sophisticated vision of British life and art that rivalled European contemporaries.

Organized by the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC) in collaboration with Britain's national collections—including the V&A, National Gallery, and Tate Gallery—the exhibition was facilitated by Britain's Foreign Office and the British Embassy in Washington, D.C.[51] The Earl of Halifax, Britain's Ambassador to the U.S., played a pivotal role in supporting the Anglo-American loan negotiated in July 1946, which underscored the exhibition's cultural mission to strengthen bilateral ties during global reconstruction and the looming Cold War.[52]

Art historian Tim Batchelor describes *Masterpieces of English Painting* as one of the postwar era's most successful shows, marking a transformative moment in popularising British painting, previously undervalued both domestically and abroad.[53] After debuting at the AIC, and contributing to an "outstanding attendance record for 1946,"[54] the show travelled to the Met and later Canada's Art Gallery of Ontario which recorded over 76,575 visitors, the highest attendance since its opening in 1926.[55] At the same

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time, rising tensions from Ottawa's Soviet defection and espionage scandal (1945-1946), underscored the exhibition's role in reinforcing Western cohesion through cultural alliances.[56] It also reflected Canada's transforming relationship with Britain from Dominion status to Commonwealth member, intertwining cultural diplomacy with questions of national identity and geopolitical strategy. To coordinate the British loans, Britain's Foreign Office appointed a "Committee of Organization on the Exhibition," chaired by Ashton and including Hendy, and Rothenstein. The committee secured loans including from the Royal Collection, Royal Academy, and private collectors-totalling 61 works valued at £7,000,000— 12 Hogarths, 36 Constables (including 26 sketches), and 13 Turners. Ashton accompanied the works aboard the *Queen Mary* alongside 240 American paintings being repatriated after the Tate Gallery's exhibition, showing the reciprocity of transatlantic exchange.

Kenneth Clark wrote the accompanying catalogue's introduction, authored by Daniel Catton Rich, the AIC's Director of Fine Arts, and delivered public lectures.[57] Clark's introduction emphasised the experimental, non-conformist nature of Britain's 19th century "Masterpieces," resonant of heightened postwar values of artistic freedom in the West. These themes were echoed in The Met's "Bulletin" (1947), which singled out the V&A's loan of Constables sketches as "so fresh, so vigorous and powerful."[58] Constable and Turner were described as "popular and revolutionary painters," while Hogarth was portrayed as a "professional rebel," and "resolutely anti-classical" in his rejection of academic drawing from life.[59] This emphasis on individuality and anti-academic expression also anticipated the appeal of British Neo-Romantic painters like Graham Sutherland and John Piper to North American audiences after the war, admired for their emotional intensity and abstraction.[60]

Clark further argued that between 1800 and 1840, English painting "… shot into the mainstream of European art"[61] a significant assertion given the exhibition's novelty for American audiences. As the *New York Times* noted, "Many of the paintings have never before been sent out of the British Isles, and none have been shown in this country previously," enhancing its novelty appeal.[62] While select works by Hogarth, Constable, and Turner already featured in American public and private collections, notably the Met's, the exhibition offered U.S. audiences a rare opportunity to see major loans from British national collections. It is, therefore, highly plausible that it drew on the work of British scholars such as Arthur Graham Reynolds, the V&A's Curator of Paintings, and leading expert on Constable.[63]

Reynolds, like several curators in Britain's national art institutions, was deeply involved in curating temporary exhibitions of Constable and other English artists in V&A's paintings collections. One such exhibition curated by Reynolds brought together, for the first time at the V&A, Constable paintings from several collections, displayed with new frames and mounts.[64] *The Times* observed: "Students who had been familiar with them for years have been astonished at the revela-

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tion of their superb quality by the simple but effective methods of display that have now been adopted."[65] This shift—from hanging pictures closely together in clusters to more spacious display of pictures hung in single or double rows at eye level—marked a significant development in the V&A's postwar curatorial presentation.

This modern approach paralleled similar developments at the National Gallery and Tate Gallery and was mirrored by the AIC's *Masterpieces of English Painting*, which combined loaned works from several collections to construct a cohesive narrative of English painting. At the Met, the exhibition was paired with a complementary display of the museum's Hogarth, Constable, and Turner prints, enriching its narrative and reinforcing Anglo-American artistic bonds.[66] Upon returning to London, the exhibition's final Tate Gallery show included additional works by William Blake, expanding its scope and significance in re-evaluating British art history.

The exhibition's critical and popular success in North America paved the way for future similar collaborations. Notably, the Met's newly refurbished Paintings Galleries, opened in 1954, incorporated British master paintings into historical, rather than national, groupings. Sanka Knox, *The New York Times* art critic, noted that "The (Met's) picture collection, the first to bear the stamp of the new order, is no longer shown as in the past, within national boundaries (grouped by national schools), but according to historical periods."[67] In planning the galleries, Taylor prioritised showcasing "the high points of the collections," arguing that "Instead of putting everything on the front line with the result that nobody sees anything we should place the greatest things where they demand attention and classify the bulk of the collections for the student's use."[68]

At the galleries' opening, Ashton gave a speech highlighting the Met's progress alongside "advances made in English museums," particularly the V&A's ongoing gallery "modernisation" as he put it.[69] Yet, the V&A's new Paintings Galleries opened in 1957 after Ashton's tenure. These focussed on British work where, for the first time, pictures by Constable and Turner were presented in historic sequence rather than displayed separately due to the conditions of individual bequests.[70]

This development directly followed another U.S. loan exhibition, *Masters of British Painting: 1800–1950* (1956) staged by MoMA, which drew on the same British lending committee structure as the AIC's 1946 exhibition, and borrowed works from many of the same institutions, including the V&A. Among the committee members was Herbert Read, formerly a V&A curator from 1922 until the 1930s, whose writings on Henry Moore especially, established him as an influential art critic on both sides of the Atlantic. His involvement reflected continuity with the V&A's scholarship and ongoing support for modern art, relevant to MoMA's extended survey of British painting into mid-20th century modernism. Furthermore, MoMA's signature modernist display techniques—pictures spaciously arranged at eye level against plain pale walls—reinforced British painting's international relevance.

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This trajectory later found fulfilment in MoMA's *Turner* retrospective (1966), curated by Lawrence Gowing, recasting the artist within a modernist framework of formal abstraction.

Together, these exhibitions illustrate how postwar British and American institutions incrementally shifted the narrative of British painting—from an isolationist national school to part of a broader international movement with historical depth and contemporary relevance—thus extending the diplomatic and institutional legacy of earlier collaborative models in which the V&A played a key role.

3. Henry Moore

MoMA's retrospective, *Henry Moore* (December 1946-March 1947) both represented a shift towards presenting contemporary British art to American audiences and affirmed the artist's global significance. Curated by James Johnson Sweeney, *Henry Moore* was MoMA's first solo exhibition dedicated to a living British artist. The retrospective was organised by MoMA in collaboration with the AIC and the San Francisco Museum of Art (SFMOMA) to where it later toured, with loans arranged from Britain's national art institutions, that were once again overseen by a "Committee of Organisation" assembled by the British Foreign Office, chaired by Ashton alongside Rothenstein, and Hendy.

To this exhibition, the V&A loaned a small but significant sculpture: *Reclining Figure* (1939), an experimental lead cast that Ashton had acquired for the V&A in 1940.[71] After the war, he included the sculpture in his exhibition *Style in Sculpture* (1946), a survey of the history of sculpture from the Eighth century to the mid-20th century that culminated in *Reclining Figure*. One review praised the exhibition's fresh approach, describing the exhibits as noting: "The exhibits are few but selected with discriminating care, and each is a masterpiece of its own period. In scope, they are restricted to works on a small scale, but they are fully representative of sculpture at large."[72]

This exhibition marked a significant departure from the V&A's traditional display organisation of grouping works by materials such as metalwork, woodwork, ceramics or glass. Whereas the materials arrangement was intended for specialists—artisans, students and manufacturers of art and design— the new thematic arrangement of artworks, represented democratising aims. As Ashton himself explained in the exhibition catalogue, *Style in Sculpture* was "… in the nature of an experiment […] not intended as a work of research for students; it is meant as a general introduction which may help the ordinary person to a wider appreciation of sculpture."[73] Such temporary exhibitions were vital in the postwar reconstruction, not only in showcasing the V&A's collections to a generation of children and young people denied access to them during the war, but also to informing the reorganisation of its permanent galleries from 1949 to the mid-1950s, reflecting its adaptability in responding to postwar cultural shifts.

Although a detailed comparison of display techniques is limited here by the lack of surviving visual documentation of the V&A's postwar displays, including *Style in Sculpture*,

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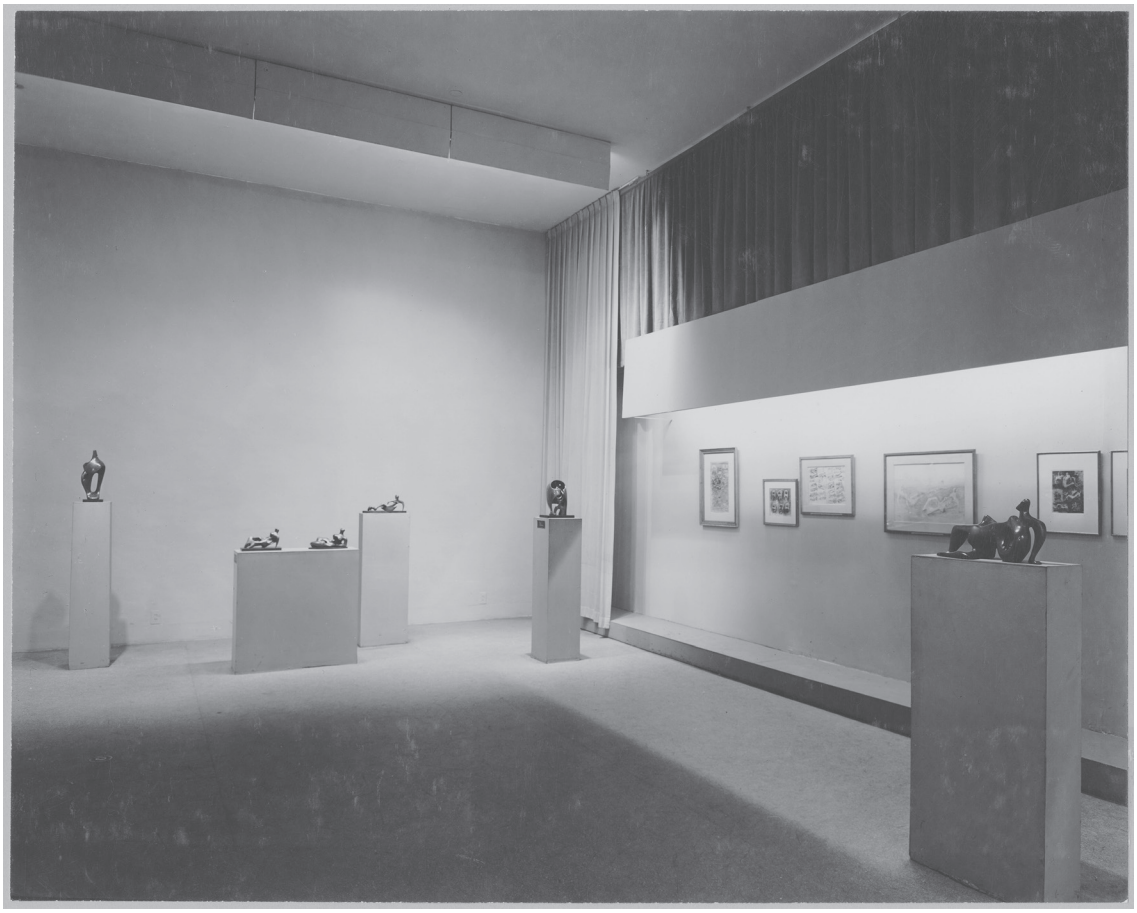

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compared with several installation photographs from MoMA's *Henry Moore* retrospective. Reviews and exhibition publications offer insights into their contrasting display approaches. This case study, therefore, foregrounds the V&A's early role in promoting Moore's work internationally—a role that highlighting formative institutional links with MoMA that continued postwar.

Through early acquisitions, correspondences, and exhibitions, the V&A helped lay the groundwork for Moore's international reception, especially the diplomatic function his work served during the early Cold War, when his avant-garde style and rising international reputation positioned him as a key figure in modern sculpture. While MoMA's retrospective undoubtedly reinforced Moore's symbolic value within the Anglo-American cultural alliance, measuring the precise impact of such "soft power" remains difficult, particularly given Moore's already significant reputation in the U.S. by 1946, having featured in the renowned Curt Valentin Gallery (1937-1954)[74] The V&A's contribution is therefore best understood in terms of shaping the institutional relationships and cultural infrastructure that enabled his broader transatlantic prominence. This analysis focuses on how Anglo-American institutions promoted Moore's work within a broader strategy of cultural diplomacy, rather than suggesting any personal artistic deference by Moore to American modernism.

The V&A loaned *Reclining Figure* after MoMA's Curator of Painting and Sculpture, Dorothy C. Miller (1943-1947) wrote to Ashton in August

Fig. 02: Installation view of the exhibition *Henry Moore*. MoMA, New York, December 17, 1946-March 16, 1947. Digital image, The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence.

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1946, outlining the show's importance in the U.S. and internationally:

> *This will be the first extensive showing of Henry Moore's work in the United States. It is planned as the major exhibition of the New York 1946-1947 season and the most ambitious exhibition of contemporary sculpture ever undertaken by the Museum of Modern Art... Mr. Moore's eminence in the field of contemporary art makes this a proud occasion for us and one of international importance in bringing our two nations together on such a high level of artistic presentation.*[75]

In addition to 58 pieces of sculpture, Miller wrote that the retrospective would include approximately forty-eight drawings Moore made of London's wartime Blitz. Most of the sculptures and drawings, she explained, had been sent from England. Additionally, four museums and several private collectors in the U.S. also loaned examples, including two sculptures and three drawings from MoMA's holdings.

Despite its modest size, the V&A's loan of *Reclining Figure* to MoMA reflected the British institution's foundational role in promoting Moore's work nationally and overseas decades before *Style in Sculpture*. Art historian Rona Roob credits an un-named V&A curator with introducing Alfred H. Barr Jr., MoMA's founding Director, to Moore's work during the 1920s.[76] Likely contenders include Ashton, his predecessor, Eric Maclagan, or Herbert Read, a renowned critic and expert on Moore. All three were deeply engaged in promoting Moore's work from the early 1920s through to the postwar period, reflecting the V&A's commitment to modern work.

Art historian, Courtney J. Martin notes that Sweeney relied on Read's book on Moore as his primary source for images and information.[77] However, Burton suggests that Read's advocacy for modern art was itself influenced by his formative curatorial career at the V&A, working with its collections and scholars like Maclagan, who introduced him to Moore and several other leading modern artists.[78]

Comparing the displays of *Reclining Figure* exhibited at MoMA and the V&A reveals a rather curious, though not incidental, exchange of approaches. MoMA's exhibition explored Moore's work by arranging his sculptures by material —stone, wood, lead, bronze and concrete— echoing the V&A's pre-war material display, whereas the V&A's *Style in Sculpture* exhibited *Reclining Figure* within a survey of period styles dating from the Eighth to the mid-20th century. It is a measure of how far the V&A had changed that its new thematic approach on this occasion contrasted with MoMA's material arrangement, a system the V&A had recently moved away from.

Henry Moore reportedly attracted 158,000 visitors at MoMA (where it was open 17 December 1946 - 16 March 1947). While visitor figures for shows at the AIC (17 April - 18 May 1947) and SFMOMA (18 June - August 1947) were not found by this research, the exhibition's widespread popularity is evident from Hendy's 1956 reflections on its the

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success, highlighting Moore's rising global reputation:

> *The work of Henry Moore, though already appreciated in the United States, where it had been given a special exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1946, was then almost unknown on the Continent. This only made the more significant the award to him by the international jury of the Italian Government's international prize for sculpture, and the subsequent choice of Henry Moore as the first foreign sculptor to have a one-man exhibition in the Musee d'Art Moderne in Paris. Since then demands for exhibitions of his work have poured in to the (British) council from every part of the world.*[79]

As Pauline Rose observes, the success of *Henry Moore* in the U.S. helped engage a broader international public with contemporary art. She suggests this was largely due to Moore's nationality and background in coming from a coal mining family in northern England that made his work relatable to American audiences. She notes, "in the context of the ensuing Cold War, the very persona of Henry Moore would challenge the generalized American fear of the "enemy within," as well as the perception that most contemporary artists were likely to be communists."[80] This context underscores the significance of the V&A's evolving curatorial strategy.

Through lending *Reclining Figure* to MoMA's loan exhibition—so soon after Ashton selected the piece for his V&A exhibition *Style in Sculpture* and following his earlier acquisition of the work—the V&A demonstrated its enduring influence and relevance to modern and contemporary art internationally. Rose also highlights MoMA's longer-term promotion of Moore's work in the growing Cold War context in staging its exhibition, *Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art* (1948), which included four of Moore's sculptures.[81] She notes:

> *In the catalogue it was argued that the museum and its collection had played a crucial role during the war in protecting America's cultural life, its economy and political structures. Representing the work of artists from many countries, the collection could be positioned as symbolic of both individual freedom as well as the freedom of nations to place value on the artistic products of diverse cultures, and a means through which to encourage positive international relationships.*[82]

During the 1950s, several sculptures by Moore were installed in prominent locations in the U.S.[83] His increasingly emblematic global status culminated in the 1956 commission of a large-scale variant of *Reclining Figure* at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris (installed 1958).

These initiatives, aligning with transatlantic trends in museum innovation, positioned the V&A as a leading contributor to the evolution of museum practices and the international reception of modern art.

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Its early promotion of Moore work and exhibition innovation reflected the museum's impact in reshaping transatlantic cultural exchange.

Conclusion

The V&A's postwar contributions to U.S. loan exhibitions staged by MoMA, the Met, and the AIC positioned it as more than just a lender—it played a central role in shaping the international reception of British art. The three case studies—*English Domestic Needlework*, *Masterpieces of English Painting*, and *Henry Moore*—demonstrate how these exhibitions drew on the V&A's curatorial expertise and institutional leadership, evident in its deep scholarship on English decorative art, its protection and strategic deployment of its painting collections, and sustained promotion of modern work, including Moore's work. Much of this direction stemmed from Ashton's leadership, whose postwar vision positioned the V&A as an active cultural agent. Together, the exhibitions projected British art into the international arena at a time of significant geopolitical realignment, establishing a transatlantic framework for cultural diplomacy through the exhibition format.

The Met's subsequent investment in permanent galleries for British decorative art and painting mid-20th century, mirrored by the V&A's own gallery modernisation, illustrates how these exhibitions anticipated lasting institutional change on both sides of the Atlantic. The AIC's *Masterpieces of English Painting* (1946) prepared the way for MoMA's *Masters of British Painting* (1956), which reinterpreted works by Constable and Turner in relation to the modern canon's evolution. The following decade, MoMA's *Turner* retrospective reframed Turner as a proto abstractionist. Meanwhile, MoMA's *Painting and Sculpture* exhibition (1948), embedded Moore's work into Cold War narratives of freedom and artistic expression, affirming the power of display as a diplomatic tool.

Together, these developments signalled a broader pattern of transatlantic exchange—one in which the V&A played an essential, though often under-acknowledged, role. While American museums reaped significant cultural capital from exhibiting British art, the V&A also advanced its international profile, leveraging exhibitions as instruments of "soft power." The subject expertise and leadership of figures such as Ashton, Read, and Reynolds were critical to this repositioning. Contrary to claims that the V&A's gallery modernisation simply emulated MoMA's white cube, this study has shown the museum actively shaped modern curatorial practice through reciprocal dialogue and strategic lending.

Notably, the V&A's emphasis on "highlights" in postwar displays was not simply a logistical response to limited access to collections, but part of a wider philosophical shift adopted in its permanent galleries, which prioritised select masterpieces for general visitors, supplemented by study collections for specialists.

This article has focused on curatorial intention and institutional collaboration aligned with governmental priorities for promoting British art. It is also important to recognise that the content of postwar exhibitions

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was shaped in part by the availability of objects following wartime dispersal and conservation challenges. Further research might explore how such logistical constraints intersected with curatorial agency during this formative period.

This history also invites reflection on the asymmetries within cultural diplomacy. Britain's role in the Anglo-American partnership was not one of equal influence, and the V&A's participation often reinforced U.S.-led frameworks of cultural authority. Yet these exhibitions also reveal American reliance on the rich curatorial expertise and collections of British institutions. Hence, a more complex dynamic emerges: one of mutual benefit and shared investment in redefining British art for a global stage. The V&A's role reasserted its leadership at a time when national prestige and international influence were increasingly negotiated through museum display.

As museums in the 21st century confront Cold War legacies of colonialism, and globalisation, the V&A's mid-20th century strategies offer a model for transnational collaboration, but also a cautionary note. Institutional autonomy, curatorial agency, and the politics of cultural representation remain contested terrain. Future research may explore how the transatlantic loan exhibition evolved in later decades and whether it would be desirable for museums today to build on—or break from—these precedents to foster more equitable and inclusive forms of global exchange.

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Endnotes:

1 Brennen notes how American museums like the Met also evacuated collections to safe storage during the war.

Brennen 2021, https://www.metmuseum.org/articles/met-collection-world-war-ii.

2 Burk 2007; Reynolds 1995, pp. 7–9; Porciani 2018, pp. 373–397; Knell, MacLeod, Watson 2007; Pearson 2017.

3 Examples include MoMA's *Modern China* (1946)*;* the Art Institute of Chicago's *Porcelain Portraits* (1945-1946); and the Met's *The War's Toll of Italian Art* (1946).

4 Saunders 1999, esp. chap. 2; UNESCO 1945; Rouquié 1959, pp. 20–35; Public Law 565 (80th Congress), 1948.

5 Berrin 2021, Preface. Berrin emphasises the wartime emergence of national arts policy in the United States that leveraged "national diplomacy exhibitions" used to enhance international cultural relations and especially "to resolve America's lagging art status and difficulties with 'the foreign.'"

6 Taylor 1999, pp. 169, 174; Baeza Ruiz 2017; McCann 2023.

7 Wilk 2006 pp. 133-145, 134; Barringer 2006, p. 134.

8 Nye 1990; 2004.

9 Arndt 2005, p. xviii.

10 Douthwaite, Nehring, Alberti., 2024

11 Conforti 2000, pp. 250–263; Dutta 2007, p. 94; McClellan 2008, chaps. 1–2; Curran 2016, pp. 9–11, 22, 52, 174; Conn 1998, chap. 6; Baker, Richardson 1997, pp. 11, 23, 42.

12 Conn 1998.

13 Van Horn 2017

14 Pevsner 2005; Bauhaus Imaginista 2018–2021; William Morris Gallery 2020.

15 Conforti 2000, p. 46; Burton 2015, https://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/summer15/burton-on-first-generation-of-scholars-at-victoria-and-albert-museum.

16 Conlin 2006, pp. 40–41; Eatwell 2000, pp. 21–28; Eatwell 1994, pp. 25–30; Graves 1918, p. V.

17 Haskell 2000, pp. 1-2.

18 Comfort 1870, p. 12; Howe 1913, p. 114; *The Loan Collection*, in "The New York Times," 29 November 1874, p. 10.

19 Gennari Santori 2015; Breck, Rogers 1925, pp. xix-xx.

20 The National Gallery Act 1856; National Gallery (Loan) Act 1883; Treasury Minute, 24 March 1917; Treasury Minute, 6 July 1920; National Gallery (Overseas Loan) Act 1935, pp. 193–194; WORK 54/83, TG 1/1/1; T 162/337/2, 1930–1934.

21 Royal Commission on Museums and Galleries 1930, ZLIB 29/780, TNA.

22 Royal Commission on National Museums and Galleries 1929, p. 35.

23 Upchurch 2016; Pollen 2024.

24 ICOM 1950, p. 5.

25 Ashton contributed to *The International Exhibition of Chinese Art* (1935-36), at the Royal Academy, and curated the *Exhibition of Chinese Art* (1936) at the V&A. *Exhibition of Chinese Art…* 1936; Steuber 2006.

26 V&A Archive: "Official Visits Abroad by Keepers of the Museum with Reports on Foreign Museums, Collections, etc: 1921-1933" ED 207 1921-1933 "REPORT ON MUSEUMS IN AMERICA" by A. L. B Ashton 3/11/1923

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27 The National Archives (TNA): Letter to C. G. Sugden, Ministry of Education from W. L. Wilson of the Foreign Office, Feb 6, 1945, FO 371/41001/1. UE 141/141/77. Telegram from the British Embassy in Washington DC. to the Foreign Office.

28 The Massey Commission (1946), chaired by the Canadian diplomat Vincent Massey, recommended the purchasing of artworks for Britain's national art institutions using the Chantrey Bequest. The report advocated a clearer division between national art collections and was instrumental in distinguishing the postwar collection policies of the National Gallery and the Tate Gallery. See also: "Massey Report on Oil Paintings and Watercolours," V&A Archives, ED 84/155; "Correspondence and Papers Relating to the Massey Report," V&A Archives, MA/46/6/8 (1946); Upchurch 2016.

29 V&A Archive: "Victoria and Albert Museum Advisory Council Minutes 1937-1946." 16 May 1945 Advisory Council Minutes No. 69, 1.

30 "Queen Mary Brings Fortune in Art; 240 U.S. Masterpieces Returned" *The New York Times*, September 4, 1946, p. 20.

31 John Rothenstein, *American Painting*, in "The Times," April 19, 1945, p. 5.

32 *Paul Mellon's Legacy*, 2007. American collector and philanthropist, Paul Mellon's sustained commitment to British painting was formalised in the U.S. through the founding of the Yale Center for British Art (1977) and earlier in London's Paul Mellon Centre (1970). Although Mellon's collecting interests were already well established by the mid-1940s, the AIC's *Masterpieces of English Painting* exhibition may be seen as part of a wider cultural moment that affirmed and expanded American appreciation of British art.

33 V&A Archive, MA/1/N402, Letter from Leigh Ashton to the Department of Education, 16 July 1945.

34 Sorensen n.d., https://arthistorians.info/ashtonl. Ashton served as Director of the Neutral Countries Division of the Ministry of Information during the war, and later at the British Embassy in Ankara, Turkey, managing British propaganda to maintain Turkish neutrality.

35 The Met 1945, http://library.metmuseum.org/record=b1044782. Retrieved 3 May 2018.

36 V&A Archives, Advisory Council Subcommittee Memorandum, 2 June 1944; Met: Francis Henry Taylor papers, FHT-14-02_057: 28.

37 FHT-14-02_057: 28. "Committee on architectural rearrangement." The Met's rearrangement was by architects Robert B. O'Connor and Aymar Embury II at a cost of $9 million to newly install and modernise 135 galleries, including newly laying out 30 European decorative art galleries, with sections devoted to English decorative art, completed in 1954.

38 "British Galleries" opened at the Met in the 1980s, followed by the V&A's "British Galleries" in 2001. Heckscher 1995, pp. 34–36; The Met 2020, https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2020/british-galleries; Elliott 2025, pp. 289–290.

39 V&A Archive: Box 10, Folder 22. 1943-1954. Leigh Ashton to Francis Henry Taylor, 5th December 1944. The National Archives (TNA): Letter to C. G. Sugden, Ministry of Education from W. L. Wilson of the Foreign Office, Feb 6, 1945, FO 371/41001/1. UE 141/141/77. Telegram from the British Embassy in Washington DC. to the Foreign Office.

40 The Met 1945. Exhibits included book bindings, bed hangings, coverlets, table covers, carpets, wall hangings, samplers, costumes, furniture, furnishings, boxes and baskets. They were generally arranged chronologically "so that the visitor will first come upon the work of the Elizabethan period and, proceeding through the exhibition, arrive eventually among the embroideries of the Queen Anne and Georgian eras. Among the American collections were loans from Judge Untermyer and Mrs. Myron Taylor and books came from the Pierpont Morgan Library.

41 Remington 1945, Foreword.

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42 Met 1945.

43 Remington 1945, Foreword.

44 Remington 1945, Foreword.

45 Remington 1945, Foreword.

46 Remington 1945, Foreword. He includes the following V&A publications in the bibliography: Victoria and Albert Museum. A Picture Book of English Embroideries: [Part 1] Elizabethan and Stuart; Part 11, Stuart; Part in, Georgian. London, 1926-1928; *A Picture Book of Flowers in English Embroidery.* London, 1932. See also: Nevinson 1938.

47 The West Wing redevelopment by architects Robert B. O'Connor and Aymar Embury II reorganised the entire collection of European painting from the 13th to the 20th centuries. See: Heckscher 1995, pp. 34–36; The Met 2020, https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2020/british-galleries; Elliott 2025, pp. 289–290.

48 Wilk, Humphrey 2004, pp. 1–17; Benton 1997, p. 317.

49 The Met's 2020 British Galleries redevelopment was a $22 million project that also strengthened 19th-century painting and sculpture, where the museum's collections had historically been considered weaker than the decorative arts. For the V&A's British Galleries development see: Wilk, Humphrey 2004; Burchard 2020.

50 Gibbs Smith C. H., *Revolution at the V. and A.*, in "The Sphere," 14 February 1953, p. 230. See also: Burton 1999, pp. 196-197.

51 Other loans came from the Royal Collections, the Royal Academy; Col. T. Sheepshanks, Arthington Hall, Leeds and the South London Art Gallery, Camberwell. See: Batchelor: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/william-hogarth-265/essay/exhibitions-displays. Retrieved 2 September 2022

52 Colvill 2004, p. 321, see also: Dutton, 2004, p. 88

53 Batchelor: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/william-hogarth-265/essay/exhibitions-displays Retrieved 2nd September 2022.

54 Press Releases from 1947 | The Art Institute of Chicago. Retrieved 14 January 2024.

55 Batchelor: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/william-hogarth-265/essay/exhibitions-displays Retrieved 2nd September 2022.

56 Knight 2006. The Gouzenko Affair (1945-1946) involved the defection of a clerk, Igor Gouzenko, from the Soviet Embassy in Ottowa to Canada with evidence of Soviet spying in the West, leading to Canada taking an anti-soviet stance in foreign policy.

57 Rich 1946, p. 8, https://www.artic.edu/assets/9dfa9662-880c-280b-d279-5ddbbfc96ed0, retrieved 7 May 2019.

58 Rich 1946, p. 9.

59 Rich 1946, p. 9.

60 Finlay 1994, pp. 43–59.

61 Rich 1946: 9

62 *Queen Mary Brings Fortune in Art*, in "The New York Times", September 4th, 1946, p.20

63 Reynolds joined the V&A in 1937 becoming Keeper of the department of Prints and Drawings and of Paintings. Kauffmann 2014, pp. 405–414. Retrieved 14 May 2021, https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/1495/18_Reynolds_1808.pdf.

64 V&A Press View, 31 Jan 1946, MA/49/1/59, p. 187.

65 V&A Press View, 31 Jan 1946, MA/49/1/59, p. 187.

66 Gardner 1965, p. 12

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67 Knox, "The New York Times," 9 January 1954.

68 FHT-14-02_057: 59.

69 "The New York Times," 8 January 1954, p. 19.

70 "The Sphere," 23 November 1957, p. 290. The paintings galleries were installed in the V&A's North Court in 1957.

71 V&A Archives, Memo to the Director, 8 Feb 1940, MA/1/BB819/3; Correia 2015.

72 *Cavalcade:* 213, V&A Press Cuttings, MA/ 49/1/59.

73 Ashton 1946, pp. 3-4.

74 MoMA Archives, Curt Valentin Papers, 1908–1956.

75 V&A Archive: Miller to Ashton, 12 August 1946, MA/1/N406

76 Roob 1987; Rose 2015.

77 Martin 2015, Sweeney, 1946, p. 6

78 Taylor 1968, p. 462; Gale 1994. Herbert Read joined the V&A in 1922 as Assistant Curator of the Ceramics Department. Ian Gale, an art critic, notes that 1929 was "Read's annus mirablis" when he became Personal Assistant to Maclagan, providing him with an opportunity to publish in *The Listener* magazine and other publications. Gale describes how Maclagan introduced Read to prominent artists such as Moore, who introduced Read to other prominent modern artists like Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth, and émigrés from occupied Europe, Walter Gropius, Piet Mondrian, and Moholy-Nagy.

79 *Recognition of British Art Abroad, an Achievement of the last 10 years*, Sir Philip Hendy, "The Times," 25 April 1956.

80 An observation that overlooked Moore's left-wing politics. Rose 2011, p. 32

81 Four of Moore's sculptures were included in MoMA's 1948 exhibition titled, *Painting and Sculpture in the Museum of Modern Art*.

82 Rose 2015.

83 Moore's sculptures included *Family Group* (1949-1950), Wichita Art Museum, Kansas; *Three Standing Figures* (1953) Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas; and *Draped Reclining Figure* (1952-1953) Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.

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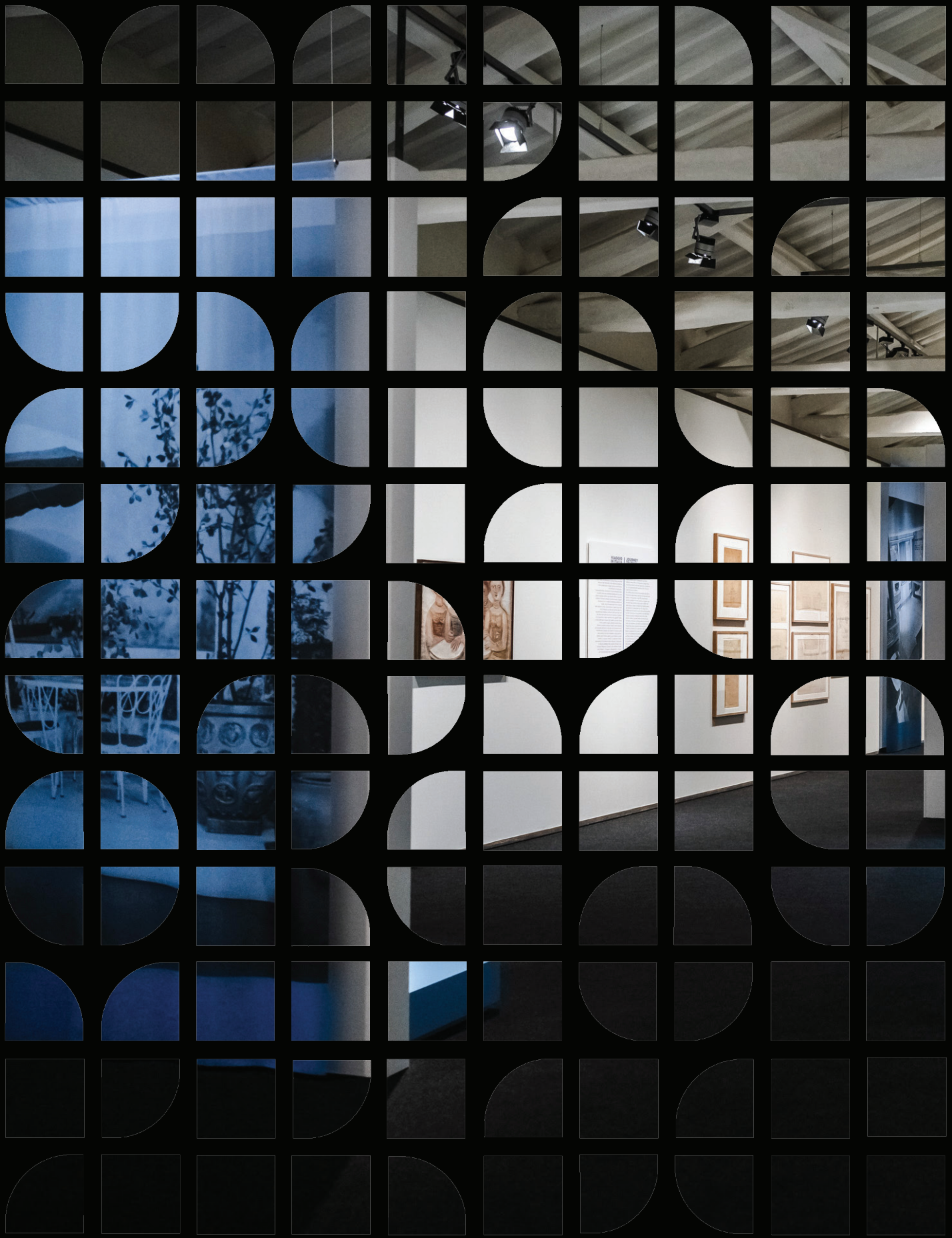

sections.

Made in Italy in mostra: intervista a Paola Cordera e Davide Turrini

Alessandro Paolo Lena

Keywords:
Made in Italy; Traveling Exhibitions; Display; Mediation

ABSTRACT:

In light of the thematic dossier on traveling exhibitions, the *Experience and Publics* section features an interview with Paola Cordera and Davide Turrini, curators of the exhibition *Made in Italy. Destination America 1945-1954*, held at the Fondazione Ragghianti in Lucca (April 5-June 29, 2025). The show reconstructed the network of postwar exhibitions that contributed to shaping Italy's international image. Through an interdisciplinary research project and critical reflection on the tools of cultural export, the exhibition highlighted archival sources, domestic collections, and non-traditional research practices. The interview explores curatorial and display choices, revealing tensions between tradition and modernity in the construction of the Made in Italy narrative.

Alla luce del dossier tematico dedicato alle mostre itineranti, la sezione *Experience and Publics* ospita un'intervista a Paola Cordera e Davide Turrini, curatori della mostra *Made in Italy. Destinazione America 1945-1954*, allestita presso la Fondazione Ragghianti di Lucca (5 aprile – 29 giugno 2025). La mostra ha ricostruito la rete di esposizioni che nel secondo dopoguerra contribuì alla costruzione dell'immagine internazionale dell'Italia. Attraverso un progetto di ricerca interdisciplinare e un approccio critico ai dispositivi dell'esportazione culturale, il percorso ha valorizzato fonti archivistiche, collezioni domestiche e pratiche di indagine non convenzionali. L'intervista approfondisce le scelte curatoriali e allestitive, mettendo in luce le tensioni tra tradizione e modernità nella definizione del Made in Italy.

Opening Picture:

Veduta dell'allestimento della mostra *Made in Italy. Destinazione America 1945-1954*, Lucca, Fondazione Ragghianti, 2025. Foto Alcide.

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Paola Cordera

Paola Cordera è professoressa associata al Politecnico di Milano. È stata Leon Levy Fellow presso la Frick Art Reference Library di New York e visiting scholar presso l'American Academy in Rome. Basate su fonti primarie, le sue ricerche si concentrano sulle pratiche espositive, sul collezionismo e sulla circolazione delle arti decorative e del design tra XIX e XX secolo. I suoi studi più recenti esplorano l'artigianato e la produzione industriale italiana del dopoguerra, le narrazioni e le esposizioni del patrimonio transnazionale, e la costruzione visiva dell'identità nazionale.

Davide Turrini

Davide Turrini è professore associato di disegno industriale presso l'Università degli Studi di Firenze.La sua attività di ricerca riguarda le aree tematiche della storia e della critica del design (con particolare riferimento alle fenomenologie identitarie del design italiano); del rapporto tra design e manifattura; della relazione tra design e materiali, dalla prospettiva storica agli scenari dell'innovazione contemporanea; del design per la sostenibilità sociale e ambientale.

Alla luce del dossier tematico dedicato alle mostre itineranti, la sezione *Experience and Publics* ospita un'intervista a Paola Cordera e Davide Turrini, curatori dell'esposizione *Made in Italy. Destinazione America 1945-1954*. Allestita dal 5 aprile al 29 giugno 2025 presso la Fondazione Ragghianti di Lucca – istituzione diretta da Paolo Bolpagni e presieduta da Alberto Fontana – l'iniziativa ha ricostruito la rete delle esposizioni itineranti che, nel secondo dopoguerra, contribuirono alla costruzione dell'immagine internazionale dell'Italia, attraverso una riflessione critica sui linguaggi, i materiali e i dispositivi dell'esportazione culturale.

Nel secondo dopoguerra, infatti, l'Italia intraprese un percorso di ricostruzione non solo materiale, ma anche simbolica: il Paese era chiamato a ridefinire la propria immagine pubblica sul piano internazionale. In questo contesto, le esposizioni itineranti organizzate tra il 1945 e il 1954 negli Stati Uniti giocarono un ruolo centrale nella costruzione di un "immaginario italiano" capace di coniugare tradizione artigianale, modernità produttiva e aspirazioni democratiche. La mostra *Made in Italy. Destinazione America 1945-1954* ha inteso restituire questo passaggio storico e culturale attraverso un ambizioso progetto espositivo e di ricerca: frutto di un dialogo tra università, istituzioni culturali e archivi pubblici e privati, italiani e internazionali, la mostra non si è limitata a documentare un singolo evento, ma ha ricostruito un'intera costellazione di esposizioni, da *Italy at Work* al più ampio circuito di mostre che contribuirono alla definizione del "mito" del Made in Italy. Accanto a un rigoroso lavoro archivistico, il progetto ha integrato anche altre metodologie meno tradizionali, quali l'impiego dei social media come strumenti di indagine, dando voce anche a collezioni domestiche e memorie private. L'intervista a Paola Cordera e Davide Turrini offre una riflessione approfondita sulle scelte critiche, curatoriali e allestitive che hanno guidato il progetto.

Intervista realizzata il 9 luglio 2025.

Quali sono le premesse teoriche e storiche che hanno orientato la concezione della mostra *Made in Italy. Destinazione America 1945-1954*, e in che misura essa intende offrire una rilettura critica del rapporto fra cultura materiale italiana e pubblico internazionale nel secondo dopoguerra?

Paola Cordera:

La mostra è nata come esito di una serie di studi e riflessioni sviluppati in sedi diverse – Università di Firenze, Università di Ferrara e Politecnico di Milano – che si sono inizialmente svolti in modo autonomo, ma che hanno trovato un momento di confronto, messa a fuoco e sistematizzazione anche attraverso alcune pubblicazioni. La Fondazione Ragghianti ha poi offerto un terreno particolarmente fertile per dare forma concreta a questa riflessione, grazie al suo legame storico con Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, che fu presidente della CADMA (Commissione Assistenza Distribuzione Materiali Artigianato), una delle prime istituzioni a occuparsi della promozione della produzione italiana nel secondo dopoguerra. La Fondazione

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disponeva quindi sia degli archivi necessari, sia dello spazio espositivo per ospitare una mostra che affrontasse questi temi.

La sfida principale è stata concepire una mostra che non rappresentasse un singolo evento espositivo, ma che desse conto di un'intera costellazione di mostre, di cui in molti casi era difficile recuperare materiali originali, soprattutto per la complessità dei prestiti internazionali. Si è così scelto di proporre uno sguardo che non si limitasse all'esperienza americana, ma che mettesse in relazione le dinamiche transatlantiche con il contesto italiano, mostrando il passaggio dall'unicità dell'oggetto alla sua riproducibilità e valorizzando oggetti e manufatti ancora presenti sul territorio italiano, capaci di evocare quell'universo materiale.

Nel progetto di ricerca FARB *VO Project | Voices of Objects*, finanziato dal Dipartimento di Design de Politecnico di Milano, sono stati integrati metodi di indagine tradizionali – ricerca d'archivio e studio bibliografico – con pratiche meno convenzionali, come l'utilizzo dei social media non solo come strumento di promozione, ma come veri e propri strumenti di indagine. Questi canali hanno permesso di interagire con altri attori non istituzionali, come collezionisti privati o famiglie con archivi domestici, spesso non mappati, offrendo un'apertura importante nella ricostruzione della rete materiale e immateriale legata alla cultura dell'epoca. Non si può dire con certezza che questo approccio sia stato "innovativo", ma sicuramente è stato non convenzionale rispetto agli standard delle ricerche su questi temi.

Un'ulteriore complessità è derivata dalla necessità di proporre una sintesi in grado di integrare ambiti diversi: artigianato, design, storia dell'arte "maggiore". Questa integrazione è stata però anche uno degli aspetti più interessanti del progetto, che ha cercato di restituire la pluralità delle mostre del dopoguerra, non solo descrivendole nel loro contesto storico, ma riconducendole anche all'oggi. Molti visitatori, infatti, riconoscevano negli oggetti esposti elementi familiari: "ce l'ho anche io a casa mia", dicevano spesso, riferendosi a bambole o oggetti d'arredo. Questo ha guidato anche la selezione dei materiali, privilegiando oggetti di qualità che potessero rappresentare un immaginario collettivo condiviso.

Davide Turrini:

La mostra è stata, in primo luogo, una mostra di ricerca, un elemento oggi tutt'altro che scontato. Le traiettorie da cui nasce non sono frutto di un progetto estemporaneo, ma di percorsi che affondano le radici in ricerche già avviate e portate avanti in modo autonomo dai curatori, e che si sono incrociate già prima della mostra, grazie al grande progetto FARB di Paola Cordera *VO Project / Voices of Objects*, dove sono state messe a sistema competenze e risorse provenienti da sedi diverse, italiane e non solo.

Questa mostra si è confrontata con una complessità particolare, legata soprattutto all'eterogeneità delle fonti. Il lavoro documentario è stato vasto: non ci si è limitati a oggetti e manufatti, ma abbiamo rivolto la nostra attenzione anche alle testimonianze e ai documenti, che la mostra e il catalogo in buona parte restituiscono. Se si guarda alla se-

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zione dei crediti, si nota il coinvolgimento di un numero imponente di archivi pubblici e privati, sia italiani sia internazionali. A differenza di molte mostre che si concentrano su una singola collezione, o su un fondo d'archivio, qui si è costruita una tessitura articolata e trasversale di fonti provenienti da luoghi diversissimi, che ha richiesto un lavoro complesso anche sul piano gestionale e amministrativo.

Un aspetto importante, già sottolineato, è stato l'uso strategico dei social media come strumento attivo di ricerca. Non si è trattato di un semplice canale comunicativo o promozionale, ma di uno strumento che ha permesso di mappare e di trovare archivi e materiali inediti, includendo contesti altrimenti invisibili. Questo approccio ha aggiornato radicalmente la nostra "geografia delle fonti", affiancando al metodo classico della ricerca d'archivio logiche differenti, più dinamiche e collaborative, che hanno dato chiavi d'accesso molto immediate ai luoghi dove si trovavano i materiali e i documenti.

Inoltre, è opportuno sottolineare che si è trattato di una "mostra di

Fig. 01:
Veduta dell'allestimento della mostra *Made in Italy. Destinazione America 1945-1954*, Sezione *Vivere all'italiana*, Lucca, Fondazione Ragghianti, 2025. Foto Alcide.

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mostre", in cui le esposizioni storiche sono state rimesse in scena attraverso una ricostruzione attenta sia degli oggetti originariamente presentati, sia degli allestimenti, spesso poco documentati.

A questo proposito, la mostra riflette la costruzione dell'immagine dell'Italia attraverso una serie di grandi esposizioni itineranti negli Stati Uniti, come *Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today* (1950–1953).[1] Come avete affrontato il lavoro di ricostruzione di queste mostre storiche, sia in termini di oggetti sia di allestimenti, e quali criteri hanno guidato le vostre scelte curatoriali?

Davide Turrini:

Il nostro intento è stato quello di restituire la complessità delle esposizioni dell'epoca, valorizzando non solo gli oggetti che le componevano, ma anche le soluzioni espositive che le caratterizzavano. Abbiamo ricostruito le mostre del secondo dopoguerra, in particolare quelle organizzate negli Stati Uniti tra la fine degli anni '40 e i primi anni '50, attraverso una selezione dei materiali originariamente esposti e un attento lavoro sugli allestimenti. In questo senso, l'operazione è paragonabile a quella del "cinema nel cinema": *Made in Italy. Destinazione America* è stata una mostra che racconta altre mostre, secondo una prospettiva affascinante ma anche estremamente impegnativa. Questa scelta ha dato avvio a una riflessione approfondita su come rappresentare eventi del passato che, nel tempo e nello spazio, si sono trasformati e che oggi risultano difficilmente ricostruibili nella loro interezza.

Molto spesso si tende a concentrarsi unicamente su *Italy at Work*, che è stata senza dubbio l'iniziativa centrale e più nota, ma il nostro lavoro ha cercato di documentare una rete più ampia di esposizioni itineranti, ciascuna con caratteristiche proprie, che si modificavano da una sede all'altra e che non sempre sono state completamente mappate. Per questo motivo, il nostro è stato un lavoro di ricostruzione, rintracciando, nei diversi contesti, materiali originali o, laddove non fosse possibile, oggetti analoghi o capaci di evocare quelle rassegne.

Uno degli ostacoli principali è stato proprio l'accesso agli oggetti originali, molti dei quali oggi si trovano in collezioni americane. La Fondazione Ragghianti ha sostenuto un investimento economico significativo, ma l'attuale situazione della produzione di mostre rende spesso i prestiti internazionali proibitivi. Questo ci ha spinto a selezionare oggetti che avessero una coerenza storica, stilistica e culturale con quelli esposti all'epoca, quando i materiali originali risultavano inaccessibili.

Fondamentale, in questo processo, è stato anche il lavoro sugli allestimenti, realizzato in stretta collaborazione con Oliva Velo, progettista della mostra. In un contesto in cui, spesso, curatori e allestitori lavorano separatamente, a volte persino in conflitto, la nostra è stata invece una sinergia piena, che ha permesso di ricreare, almeno in parte, l'atmosfera e le logiche espositive delle mostre storiche, grazie anche alle testimonianze iconografiche disponibili.

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Paola Cordera:

Per evitare un approccio autocelebrativo al Made in Italy, abbiamo anche voluto che il comitato scientifico fosse internazionale, in modo da garantire uno sguardo critico e plurale. In questo senso, si è rivelato particolarmente fruttuoso il dialogo con istituzioni come il Brooklyn Museum, che non solo ci ha fornito alcuni materiali, ma, stimolato dal nostro lavoro, ha anche avviato nuove ricerche sui propri fondi. Sono emersi documenti e oggetti di cui si era persa la memoria, un risultato che ha arricchito la mostra ben oltre le nostre aspettative.

Questo dialogo ha avuto un ulteriore valore: ci ha confermato la pertinenza delle nostre scelte, perché alcuni oggetti selezionati da noi risultavano essere presenti anche nelle loro collezioni, offrendo così un riscontro concreto e condiviso. In un certo senso, questa collaborazione ha rafforzato le ipotesi di partenza e ha consentito di consolidare una narrazione transnazionale, fondata sul confronto tra fonti italiane e americane.

Riguardo alla ricezione da parte del pubblico statunitense dell'epoca, il problema principale è che la documentazione disponibile è perlopiù rappresentata da pubblicazioni celebrative, come articoli di giornale o riviste, che tendevano a enfatizzare alcuni oggetti, restituendo dunque una visione parziale. Per questo motivo, abbiamo ritenuto fondamentale affiancare a queste fonti le testimonianze italiane, spesso trascurate o poco conosciute. Questa doppia lettura, parallela e comparata, ha permesso di introdurre nuove prospettive e di ampliare la narrazione rispetto a quella più tradizionalmente diffusa.

È proprio in questa prospettiva che si coglie uno degli aspetti più significativi della mostra: aver offerto una lettura critica e più articolata del processo con cui l'immagine dell'Italia veniva costruita, esportata e recepita negli Stati Uniti attraverso le mostre itineranti del dopoguerra. Un'immagine che non era monolitica, ma mobile, negoziata, composita, e che abbiamo cercato di restituire nella sua complessità.

La mostra è divisa in quattro sezioni: *La casa dell'artigianato italiano*. *Da Firenze a New York*, *Viaggio in Italia*, *Vivere all'italiana* e *Nuove forme e nuove rotte*. Quali sono le strategie di *storytelling* adottate per articolare la relazione tra materiali d'archivio, oggetti di design e apparato documentale delle diverse sezioni? E in che modo il *display* contribuisce a modellare l'esperienza dei visitatori?

Paola Cordera:

L'eterogeneità dei materiali si è rivelata da subito una risorsa preziosa ma anche una sfida, soprattutto in fase di selezione. A 75 anni dalle mostre itineranti oggetto dell'esposizione, alcuni esemplari risultavano degradati o in cattivo stato di conservazione. L'esigenza di presentare al pubblico pezzi di grande qualità, ben conservati e di forte impatto visivo ha inciso, da un lato sulle nostre scelte curatoriali, dall'altro sulla volontà di non inscrivere la mostra in una rappresentazione esclusivamente tradizionale della produzione italiana. L'intento è stato invece quello di mostrare come

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innovazione – o comunque i nuovi sviluppi – della produzione italiana si affermassero parallelamente al racconto tradizionale e olografico del Made in Italy.

Abbiamo deciso di costruire il percorso a partire da un racconto che mettesse in evidenza il ruolo centrale delle istituzioni pubbliche nel finanziamento delle mostre italiane, con il Piano Marshall che fa da sfondo all'intera vicenda. Abbiamo voluto mettere in luce come fossero realmente il frutto della produzione nazionale, e non semplici operazioni di rappresentanza. Esistevano infatti istituzioni e laboratori attivi sul territorio che sostenevano le nuove generazioni di artisti, veri e propri centri di innovazione con cui gli interlocutori americani si trovavano a dialogare.

Dall'altra parte, abbiamo cercato di restituire alcune delle suggestioni che il pubblico americano avrebbe potuto percepire, utilizzando fonti documentarie e materiali d'archivio per selezionare, per esempio, la palette cromatica dell'allestimento: il blu del mare, l'azzurro del cielo, il giallo del sole, il color ruggine delle vele dell'Adriatico. Questi colori sono indicati da Walter Dorwin Teague (1883-1960), uno dei designer, architetti e "curatori" della mostra *Italy at work*, che aveva proprio l'intenzione di evocare, più che ricostruire. Non si proponeva quindi di una *period room*, ma un allestimento più vicino all'*atmophere room*, teso alla rievocazione del senso di un mondo che il pubblico americano non avrebbe potuto esperire direttamente, ma forse poteva in par-

Fig. 02: Veduta dell'allestimento della mostra *Made in Italy. Destinazione America 1945-1954*, Lucca, Fondazione Ragghianti, 2025. Foto Alcide.

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te ricordare, visto che molte mostre si tenevano in città con una forte presenza italo-americana.

Questo supportava lo sviluppo narrativo della nostra mostra, arrivando fino all'ultima sezione, *Nuove forme, nuove rotte*, pensata per mostrare come alcuni oggetti o elementi emersi dalle esposizioni avessero diffusione anche in altri contesti e a livelli diversi. Pensiamo ai transatlantici o ai grandi magazzini negli Stati Uniti, ma anche in Italia, come la Rinascente che fu anche tra i principali sostenitori del premio Compasso d'Oro, istituito nel 1954 per valorizzare l'eccellenza del design industriale italiano. L'obiettivo era offrire una visione dell'Italia che non fosse solo tradizionale o folkloristica, ma che tenesse conto di questi diversi aspetti contestuali, avvenuti negli stessi anni, e che per motivi diplomatici, economici e politici venivano enfatizzati negli Stati Uniti, pur avendo esiti importanti anche altrove.

Questi diversi mondi e allestimenti sono stati rievocati dal *display* attraverso soluzioni museografiche, come, ad esempio, alcune gigantografie che riproducono scorci delle mostre americane. In queste immagini si possono riconoscere alcuni degli oggetti presenti anche nella mostra di Lucca, stabilendo così un legame diretto tra passato e presente. Stampate su veli di stoffa, sono state progettate dall'architetto Oliva Velo – responsabile dell'allestimento – anche per richiamare la presenza di materiali tessili che caratterizzavano molti di quegli eventi espositivi, ma che abbiamo potuto evocare solo parzialmente per via delle condizioni conservative che ne hanno limitato l'impiego.

Davide Turrini:

Un aspetto che ritengo particolarmente significativo, e che rappresenta una scelta anche in parte provocatoria, è il carattere interamente analogico della mostra.

In fase progettuale abbiamo inizialmente preso in considerazione l'ipotesi di introdurre ricostruzioni d'ambiente, poiché ci trovavamo nella condizione di presentare gli allestimenti originali. Abbiamo quindi valutato l'impiego di strumenti digitali, da soluzioni più semplici, come supporti audiovisivi, fino a esperienze immersive più complesse. Tuttavia, la scelta finale è stata quella di rinunciare completamente a tali tecnologie e di realizzare una mostra interamente basata su dispositivi analogici. Si tratta, anche in questo senso, di un'impostazione inusuale nel panorama espositivo contemporaneo.

Il tema del *setting* è comunque rimasto centrale: abbiamo rievocato alcuni allestimenti delle mostre itineranti, pur in forma estremamente sintetica, attraverso soluzioni progettuali improntate a un principio di essenzialità. Credo che termini come "asciuttezza allestitiva" e "stilizzazione" restituiscano efficacemente il linguaggio espositivo adottato.

In stretta sinergia con la progettista della mostra, abbiamo definito accostamenti tra oggetti che percorrono tutte le sezioni espositive. Un'attenzione particolare è stata riservata alla componente cromatica, come già accennato da Paola Cordera: la scelta dei colori mirava a evocare non solo l'atmosfera degli allestimenti originali, ma anche l'immaginario visivo associato all'Italia dell'epoca. Si partiva, ad

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esempio, dal blu del mare italiano, dal ceruleo del cielo, fino al giallo del sole e al ruggine, una tonalità in particolare, che riprendeva quella introdotta nelle mostre americane ispirandosi alle vele dei pescherecci tradizionali dell'Adriatico, in luoghi come Chioggia, Cesenatico o Cervia.

Tale cifra cromatica è stata tradotta in elementi concreti: podi, pannelli, basamenti, ma anche fondali fotografici stampati su tessuti spessi, sempre in coerenza con la gamma visiva della sezione di riferimento. Questi dispositivi, sebbene fortemente stilizzati, contribuivano a costruire una dimensione scenografica misurata ma intenzionale, capace di articolare simmetrie, dissonanze, accostamenti evocativi. La mostra, in tal senso, ha recuperato alcuni statuti propri dell'allestimento come linguaggio critico, operando una riflessione sul *display* che credo meriti attenzione.

Infine, vorrei tornare su un punto già emerso, ma che può essere ulteriormente approfondito: l'organizzazione delle quattro sezioni. Queste, infatti, non seguivano una scansione eminentemente cronologica: sebbene la mostra comprendesse un prologo riferito agli anni del Piano Marshall e una sezione conclusiva dedicata al periodo immediatamente successivo alla chiusura di *Italy at Work*, tra il 1953 e il 1954, la cronologia complessiva risultava molto compatta. Non si trattava di una narrazione scandita per decenni, ma di un'indagine circoscritta a un arco temporale limitato di circa dieci anni. Di conseguenza, le sezioni si sono configurate come moduli tematici, più che come articolazioni cronologiche.

La prima sezione della mostra era dedicata allo scenario italiano, e in particolare alle condizioni che reindirizzavano verso gli Stati Uniti la produzione artistica e manifatturiera del dopoguerra, con una forte attenzione al ruolo delle scuole d'arte. Paola ha citato Faenza, ma ci tengo

Fig. 03: Veduta dell'allestimento della mostra *Made in Italy. Destinazione America 1945-1954*, Sezione *La Casa dell'artigianato italiano. Da Firenze a New York*, Lucca, Fondazione Ragghianti, 2025. Foto Alcide.

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04

a sottolineare anche l'importanza dell'Istituto d'Arte di Porta Romana, a Firenze, che fu un vero e proprio centro nevralgico: da un lato creativo e produttivo, dall'altro anche gestionale, in relazione ai flussi economici che provenivano dagli Stati Uniti e ai campioni di produzione che venivano inviati in America.

Un altro nodo fondamentale, affrontato nella seconda sezione, era il tour italiano della commissione americana incaricata della selezione per *Italy at Work*: una sezione molto ampia per il numero di manifatture, autori e tipologie merceologiche. Il comitato di selezione, composto da esperti statunitensi, viaggiò in Italia per individuare gli oggetti da esporre, e in mostra abbiamo ricostruito quel momento, ponendo l'attenzione su come venne costruita, curata e definita l'immagine dell'Italia attraverso le scelte effettuate.

La terza sezione era dedicata agli allestimenti di *Italy at Work*, in particolare a quegli ambienti che potremmo definire "scenografici": la sala da pranzo, il teatrino delle marionette, la cappella per la preghiera, e altre ambientazioni che rappresentavano momenti della quotidianità italiana. Anche in questo caso, abbiamo lavorato per accostamento, presentando pezzi che non erano mai stati esposti prima, o comunque raramente visti in precedenza: questo ha rappresentato un ulteriore elemento distintivo del progetto.

Infine, l'ultima sezione, intitolata *Nuove forme, nuove rotte*, pur riferendosi a un periodo cronologicamente vicino, non seguiva una logica temporale, ma piuttosto critica

Figg. 04-05: Veduta dell'allestimento della mostra *Made in Italy. Destinazione America 1945-1954*, Lucca, Fondazione Ragghianti, 2025. Foto Alcide.

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e tematica. Il suo obiettivo era evidenziare come quell'Italia ancora legata, in parte, per l'America, a un immaginario vernacolare si stesse rapidamente trasformando in un Paese proiettato verso la modernità.

In questo senso, il Compasso d'Oro ha rappresentato un episodio significativo sia per il contesto in cui si inseriva, ossia quello dei grandi magazzini, come La Rinascente, sia per l'emergere di una nuova generazione di designer. Le collaborazioni con aziende statunitensi come Singer & Sons o Altamira, documentate nei loro cataloghi e in alcuni pezzi, mostrano come l'Italia, nel giro di pochi anni, abbia saputo proporre una nuova estetica, indirizzata specificamente al mercato americano. Accanto a produzioni ancora tradizionali, troviamo una serie di mobili radicalmente innovativi, pensati da progettisti italiani per il pubblico statunitense.

Paola Cordera:

Un ulteriore aspetto che mi sembra significativo evidenziare, nel racconto diacronico che abbiamo costruito, riguarda gli accostamenti tematici e materici all'interno della mostra. Si pensi, ad esempio, allo scooter Lambretta o ai prodotti Olivetti, collocati nella stessa sala accanto alle bambole con abiti tradizionali regionali, in un confronto diretto. Oppure al caso di Ferragamo – simbolo di lusso e alta moda – accostato a tessuti considerati "minori", diversi per qualità e destinazione d'uso, a suggerire la pluralità dei materiali presentati e la varietà di livelli produttivi messi in dialogo.

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Davide Turrini:

Abbiamo sempre cercato di tenere insieme, in modo consapevole, elementi "alti" e "bassi", l'innovativo e il tradizionale: questa era infatti la cifra distintiva delle grandi mostre americane dell'epoca. L'industria italiana, ancora esigua ma estremamente vitale, era rappresentata da esempi di grande modernità, come la Lambretta o le macchine per scrivere Olivetti o ancora le macchine per il caffè Robbiati – piccole eccellenze tecnologiche che suscitavano enorme interesse negli Stati Uniti. Questi oggetti convivevano, nei *display* originali, con elementi folklorici o vernacolari, come il carretto siciliano o le bambole vestite con costumi tradizionali delle regioni d'Italia, disposte su una grande carta geografica floreale. Questi accostamenti rimandavano a un'immagine dell'Italia molto cara all'immaginario americano: il Paese del sole e del mare.

Anche noi abbiamo cercato di restituire, seppur in forma stilizzata e asciutta, queste ambivalenze presenti nelle rassegne americane. Così, la Lambretta era posta accanto a un grande albero che ospitava le bambole regionali, mentre le quattro scarpe di Ferragamo in merletto ad ago di Tavarnelle – pezzi preziosi e raffinati – venivano esposte accanto a tessuti destinati alla vita quotidiana. È interessante notare come queste scarpe non fossero create appositamente per la mostra: tranne un sandalo da sera risalente agli anni '30, gli altri tre modelli erano stati prodotti durante la guerra da una piccola manifattura locale vicino a Firenze, dove, nonostante il conflitto, le donne avevano continuato a lavorare il merletto ad ago. Erano proprio questi i pezzi che Ferragamo aveva pronti e che furono selezionati per le iniziative americane. Anche questo dettaglio, in apparenza minore, racconta molto dello spirito del tempo e delle condizioni materiali e culturali in cui queste esposizioni prendevano forma.

Quali dispositivi di mediazione avete implementato durante la mostra per facilitare l'interazione con i pubblici? A mostra conclusa, quali riflessioni emergono riguardo alla risposta del pubblico?

Paola Cordera:

Un aspetto che abbiamo considerato attentamente in fase di progettazione è stato il problema della mediazione visiva in presenza di oggetti che, per ragioni conservative, dovevano necessariamente essere esposti in vetrina, come nel caso delle ceramiche. Per evitare un effetto di ripetitività nella presentazione dei pezzi in una logica quasi tassonomica, abbiamo lavorato su uno sviluppo sia in altezza che in orizzontale, alternando ripiani e piccoli supporti all'interno delle vetrine, per movimentare la composizione e suggerire una lettura articolata, che rompesse la rigidità della classificazione tradizionale. L'utilizzo mirato dell'illuminazione ha contribuito ulteriormente a valorizzare la varietà formale e materica degli oggetti. Alcuni pezzi, meno fragili, sono invece stati collocati su piccoli podi, accessibili ma comunque evidenziati come elementi musealizzati.

A posteriori, possiamo osservare come questi dispositivi si siano rivelati efficaci in termini di fruizione visiva, anche se in alcuni casi sareb-

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Fig. 06: Veduta dell'allestimento della mostra *Made in Italy. Destinazione America 1945-1954*, Lucca, Fondazione Ragghianti, 2025. Foto Alcide.

be stato opportuno ampliare le distanze di sicurezza: l'entusiasmo del pubblico ha talvolta generato un'eccessiva prossimità fisica agli oggetti, rendendo necessario introdurre segnalazioni più esplicite, come nel caso di alcune sedie in legno e paglia realizzate a Chiavari accanto a cui è stato posizionato un cartello con l'indicazione: "non toccare, non sedersi". La familiarità e l'immedesimazione dei visitatori con alcuni oggetti, riconosciuti come simili a quelli presenti nelle proprie case, ha contribuito a una percezione di accessibilità che andava mediata con maggiore chiarezza.

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Davide Turrini:

In effetti, questa relazione diretta e quasi affettiva con gli oggetti è stata centrale nell'esperienza del pubblico. Alcuni materiali, pur nel rispetto dei vincoli conservativi, sono stati volutamente mantenuti "a portata di mano" e di sguardo. Non tutte le ceramiche, ad esempio, erano chiuse in vetrina: la *Dattilografa* di Leoncillo era collocata a una certa distanza, ma senza barriere fisiche. In generale, l'allestimento ha cercato di privilegiare una prossimità visiva, valorizzando i dettagli attraverso l'uso di vetrine alte e trasparenti, in cui gli oggetti ceramici o vitrei si stratificavano in altezza, favorendo una lettura ravvicinata delle superfici e delle lavorazioni. Questo approccio ha incoraggiato un'interazione percettiva intensa, seppur sempre mediata da accorgimenti museografici calibrati.

Nel valutare la risposta del pubblico, è necessario innanzitutto contestualizzare il tipo di istituzione che ha ospitato la mostra. La Fondazione Ragghianti è uno spazio espositivo caratterizzato da ampie sale e da una programmazione fortemente orientata alla ricerca. Non si tratta, per vocazione e numeri, di un luogo frequentato da decine di migliaia di visitatori, ma piuttosto da un pubblico motivato, competente e attento. La mostra si è conclusa da poco più di una settimana e, pur non disponendo ancora di dati definitivi, possiamo affermare che, in relazione agli standard della Fondazione, si è trattato di un grande successo in termini di affluenza e partecipazione.

Due aspetti meritano un'ultima riflessione rispetto alla mediazione. In primo luogo, si è rivelata fondamentale l'attivazione di visite guidate regolari, condotte da personale appositamente formato. Questa scelta, che rientra nella consuetudine operativa della Fondazione, ha trovato particolare efficacia in una mostra di natura complessa e altamente documentata come questa. Le visite si svolgevano due volte a settimana e hanno registrato sistematicamente il tutto esaurito. Ciò conferma come, soprattutto per le mostre di ricerca, la mediazione umana e dialogica rappresenti uno strumento imprescindibile per attivare processi di comprensione e approfondimento da parte dei visitatori. Un secondo elemento riguarda la pubblicazione del volume bilingue (italiano/inglese) che ha accompagnato la mostra.[2] Il libro, infatti, ha riscosso un notevole successo di pubblico – anche grazie alla qualità editoriale, alla ricchezza iconografica e all'accurata lavorazione delle immagini – e si pone certamente come una forma ulteriore di mediazione culturale, capace di prolungare e amplificare l'esperienza vissuta dal visitare durante la mostra.

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Endnotes:

1 Tra il 1950 e il 1953 la mostra itinerante *Italy at Work: Her Renaissance in Design Today* fece tappa nei musei di dodici città americane e rappresentò un episodio emblematico per la promozione del Made in Italy negli Stati Uniti. Per un quadro complessivo dell'iniziativa e per la bibliografia di riferimento, si vedano i contributi raccolti in Cordera, Faggella 2023.

2 Cordera, Turrini 2025. Il volume si apre con una serie di saggi critici firmati da Paolo Bolpagni, Paola Cordera, Sandra Costa, Davide Turrini e Alessandra Vaccari, che analizzano le modalità con cui, nel secondo dopoguerra, l'Italia promosse all'estero una nuova immagine di sé attraverso il design, l'artigianato e la cultura visiva. La seconda parte è dedicata a una ricca sezione iconografica, accompagnata da testi di approfondimento di Antonio Aiello, Manuel Barrese, Sandra Coppola, Ali Filippini, Lisa Hockemeyer, Lucia Mannini, Simone Rossi, Oliva Rucellai, Mauro Stocco ed Elisabetta Trincherini, che ampliano e diversificano le prospettive sul tema.

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Gustavo Pulitzer Finali: The evolution of Interiors from Victoria I to Victoria II. Towards a Historical and Virtual Reconstruction using 3D Digital Models as a Reconstructive Tool Integrating Archival Sources

Marco Medici, Elisabetta Trincherini

Keywords:
Gustavo Pulitzer Finali; Ocean liner; Victoria; 3D Digital Reconstruction; Cultural Heritage

ABSTRACT:

This article explores the interior design of the ocean liners Victoria (1931 and 1951) by Gustavo Pulitzer Finali, tracing a transition from Art Déco luxury to postwar modernism. Based on unpublished archival materials from CSAC Parma, the study combines historical research with digital reconstruction, emphasizing the integration of design, materials, and artworks aboard ships as a reflection of contemporary aesthetic and functional values. Through the use of advanced 3D modeling techniques applied to original drawings, photographs, and material samples, the research reconstructs the interiors of Victoria II, providing new insights into the spatial organization, material culture, and artistic collaborations that characterized Pulitzer Finali's design practice. The article highlights how 3D models can serve as both heuristic and epistemological tools, enabling the critical visualization of lost heritage and contributing to its preservation and dissemination in alignment with current European cultural heritage policies.

Questo articolo analizza il design degli interni dei transatlantici Victoria (1931 e 1951) progettati da Gustavo Pulitzer Finali, tracciando una transizione dal lusso Art Déco al modernismo del dopoguerra. Basato su materiali d'archivio inediti conservati presso il CSAC di Parma, lo studio combina ricerca storica e ricostruzione digitale, mettendo in evidenza l'integrazione tra progetto, materiali e opere d'arte a bordo come riflesso dei valori estetici e funzionali del tempo. Attraverso tecniche avanzate di modellazione 3D applicate a disegni originali, fotografie e campioni materici, la ricerca ricostruisce gli interni della Victoria II, offrendo nuove chiavi di lettura sull'organizzazione spaziale, la cultura materiale e le collaborazioni artistiche che caratterizzarono l'opera di Pulitzer Finali. L'articolo evidenzia come i modelli 3D possano fungere da strumenti sia euristici che epistemologici, permettendo la visualizzazione critica di un patrimonio non più esistente e contribuendo alla sua conservazione e diffusione in linea con le attuali politiche europee per la valorizzazione del patrimonio culturale.

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Opening Picture:

Photograph of the Salone delle Feste – Gustavo Pulitzer Finali Archive, CSAC – University of Parma.

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Introduction by Irene Di Pietro (Digital section)

In the essay, the authors retrace the milestones of the research that led to the reconstruction *The Interiors of Gustavo Pulitzer Finali. From the Product Archive to Virtual and Synesthetic Reconstruction,*[1] a research initiative combining substantial archival investigation with a methodology that led to the digitization of the primary sources and the 3D reconstruction of interiors and objects. The main sources, largely unpublished, come from the archive deposited in 1988 at the CSAC (Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione of the University of Parma) and comprise over 16.000 design materials, ranging from drawings of various types (sketches, working drawings, presentation boards, etc.) to material samples (fabric color swatches, etc.) and photographs of models and completed projects[2] (Fig. 1).

1. Historical and Design Context

Gustavo Pulitzer-Finali (1887–1967) was a prominent Italian architect and designer, renowned as a leading figure in early 20th-century naval interior design. Based in Trieste, he championed a modern, functional approach to ship interiors that contrasted with the more traditional, opulent British-influenced styles favored by designers from Genoa.

In 1925, Pulitzer received his first commissions from the Triestine ship-owning Cosulich family, who entrusted him with the design of some interiors aboard the ships *Saturnia* and *Vulcania*. A few years later, in 1930, he was commissioned to design the entire interior of the motor ship *Victoria*, considered the first modern vessel in the Italian civil fleet. This project inaugurated a new generation of ocean liners, such as the *Conte di Savoia*, *Neptunia*, and *Oceania*, built throughout the 1930s and distinguished by radically different structural and furnishing solutions compared to the ships of the early twentieth century.

Conceived as a luxurious high-speed steamer for routes in the eastern Mediterranean, the *Victoria* stood out for its streamlined and aerodynamic silhouette. Unlike earlier vessels, where light-colored superstructures contrasted with dark hulls, here the entire ship was painted white, conveying a sense of lightness and of an elegance that had become “modern”.

Before Gustavo Pulitzer introduced this modern sensibility, concerning both functionality and aesthetics, the prevailing design approach aimed to reproduce the experience of a luxurious palace transposed to the sea, the so-called “floating baroque”. One need only think of the first-class ballroom created by Adolfo Coppedè aboard the *Conte Biancamano* (1925), or recall Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s 1928 account of a journey aboard the *Giulio Cesare*, which featured interiors furnished, among others, by Ducrot of Palermo, “[…] mi sforzo di ricordarmi che navigo nel salone da pranzo a due piani e cupola, guardando fuggire laggiù, dietro la vetrata, un piccolo mare civilizzato, estraneo, sconfitto, inutile come il fondale sopprimibile di un palcoscenico […]”[3]

The interiors of the *Victoria*, for which Gustavo Pulitzer won a design competition (the ship was rapidly built and launched in 1931), al-

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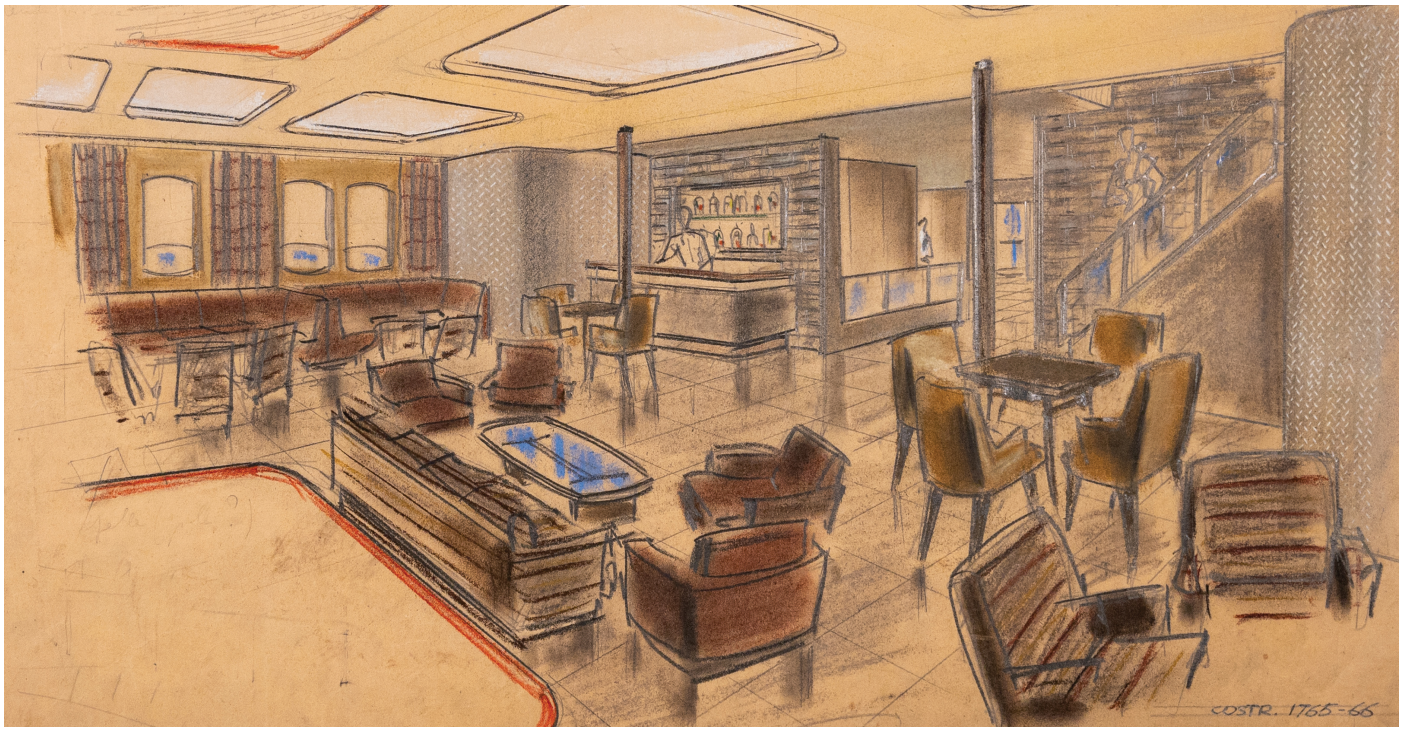

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Fig. 01: Original drawing of Sala Soggiorno - Gustavo Pulitzer Finali Archive, CSAC – University of Parma.

though incorporating some refined and luxurious materials, are characterized by a fundamental sense of sober functionality. Decorative elements such as boiseries, faux beams, and coffered ceilings were eliminated and replaced with solutions that responded more coherently to the internal volumes of the ship, giving rise to a novel interior language defined by coplanar surfaces and diffuse lighting.

Although the project can be situated within an aesthetic influenced by the Art Déco style of the time – as evidenced by the use of exotic woods such as Macassar ebony, brass, leather, parchment, and claddings in onyx and travertine, along with refined details in copper and chromed metal – it maintained a restrained functionalism, with structures often exposed in their essential forms. Materials were carefully selected for their performance and durability in marine environments, such as linoleum flooring. Systems were integrated into the wall coverings, and for the first time, the air conditioning function was incorporated into the overall design.

On the eve of the ship's maiden voyage, on June 25, 1931, Pulitzer himself declared in an interview with the Trieste-based newspaper "*Il Piccolo*":

> *"Non architetture che si sovrappongono a quelle della nave, non finti palazzi, non strutture posticce. L'architettura deve cercare la sua armonia nella genialità del rivestimento, senza alterare gli spazi che gli sono offerti dalle strutture della nave stessa"*[4]

In selecting artworks, Pulitzer once again demonstrated his instinct for harmonizing individual contributions within the overall vision of the project. His role was that of a director capable of orchestrating dialogue among artists, decorators, and designers, each with their own specificity. Even the tableware, highly

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refined and designed by Gio Ponti, was conceived as part of a unified aesthetic sensibility.

According to archival documents preserved at CSAC Archive, the artists involved in the 1931 *Victoria* were: Libero Andreotti, Marcello Mascherini, Maryla Lendnicka, Augusto Cernigoj, Elena Fronda, Gio Ponti, and Pietro Chiesa.

One of the interiors in which this sense of collaboration was most elegantly realized is the dining room, also known as the "Sala delle Sirene" ("Room of the Sirens"). The name of this bright space derives from a pair of sculptures by Libero Andreotti, featuring elongated bodies in a Liberty-inspired stylization. The sirens hold a vase aloft with their left arms, decorated with intertwined dolphins, a distinctly decorative motif.[5]

The walls of the room are adorned with black and gold ceramic decorations on a yellow background. Friezes designed by Gio Ponti, inspired by scenes from ancient Egypt, harmoniously interact with the bas-reliefs by Augusto Cernigoj and the stained-glass panels by Pietro Chiesa. The refined dinner and tea sets, marked with the red emblem of the shipping company and crafted from white and ivory porcelain with fine gold edging, were designed by Gio Ponti for the Richard Ginori manufactory.[6]

The elegant passenger motor ship *Victoria* had a brief lifespan and was tragically sunk in 1942 after being struck by British aircraft during the Second World War. The ship's celebrated elegance and innovation, along with its tragic fate, contributed to the decision to commission a new ship exactly twenty years later, in 1951. This new vessel, also named *Victoria*, was once again designed by Gustavo Pulitzer and conceived as a tribute in both name and spirit.

For the 1951 *Victoria*, Pulitzer chose to embrace an aesthetic more strongly influenced by the modernist and functionalist trends of the time, characterized by a formal clarity and the use of more restrained materials. The interiors of the new *Victoria* did not directly reprise the characteristics of Art Déco. Instead, they adopted a more measured and rational language, typical of postwar sensibilities: clean lines, uniform surfaces, and the use of materials such as wood, matte-finished metals, and natural fabrics in muted and neutral tones, far from the vivid colors and strong contrasts that had defined the Art Déco style.

The sculptures by Libero Andreotti, reproduced (likely through new castings),[7] created a symbolic and artistic bridge between the two ships; in this instance, one of the works was placed in the ship's writing room.

Both ships represented the finest achievements of Italian design. The first *Victoria* reflected the Art Déco style and the aesthetics of the 1930s, while the second embodied the modern, minimalist elegance of the postwar period, though still preserving a certain classical touch in its decorative details.

The decision to revive the name and some elements of the original ship was not purely commemorative; it also aimed to reinforce the Italian fleet's tradition of excellence and luxury by evoking the legacy of the 1931 *Victoria* and adapting it to the tastes and technological advancements of the early 1950s.

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Among the artists involved in the second *Victoria* were Tranquillo Marangoni and Enrico Ciuti, who was responsible for the decoration of the first-class ballroom bar, while in the same space Dino Predonzani created a curious arctic landscape that spanned the entire wall. Many of the furnishings, as extensively documented in the CSAC Archive, were designed by Pulitzer himself. Among them are, for example, the *Londra*, *Vittoria*, *Ceylon*, and *Hollywood* armchairs.

2. Contextualization of 3D Reconstruction in Heritage Research

The practice of three-dimensional (3D) reconstruction has progressively evolved into a robust scientific methodology[8] widely recognized in cultural heritage research.[9] While early uses of digital modeling largely focused on visual documentation of existing structures, contemporary applications of 3D modeling have expanded significantly[10], now incorporating detailed historical research, technical analyses, and advanced interpretative frameworks[11]. As a consequence, digital reconstruction is no longer considered merely illustrative but serves as a powerful investigative tool capable of formulating, testing, and refining hypotheses concerning heritage sites and artifacts.[12] This transformation is underscored by international standards such as the London Charter (2009),[13] which emphasizes methodological rigor, transparency of interpretation, and documentation of uncertainty in heritage visualization projects. Further advancing this trend, recent initiatives such as the EU-funded 4CH project[14] (Competence Centre for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage) and its continuation 3D-4CH project[15] (Online Competence Centre in 3D for Cultural Heritage) are introducing specific guidelines promoting standardized methodologies, interoperability of data, and comprehensive documentation practices.[16] At the policy-making level, the European Commission has explicitly recognized the crucial role of digitization and 3D modeling in heritage preservation and dissemination. In November 2021, the Commission issued a formal recommendation establishing a Common European Data Space for Cultural Heritage, urging all Member States to accelerate the digitization of cultural heritage sites, monuments, objects, and collections. This policy explicitly aims to safeguard heritage at risk from deterioration, disasters, or loss, and to actively foster reuse in diverse sectors including education, sustainable tourism, and cultural and creative industries.[17] In line with this strategic vision, integrated digital models combining archival, historical, material, and spatial data enable researchers to explore lost or altered configurations, enrich historical narratives, and enhance public engagement with cultural heritage through interactive and immersive experiences. Within this broader scholarly and policy framework, the present research employs integrated 3D modeling as a methodologically rigorous means to reconstruct and critically analyze the interiors designed by Gustavo Pulitzer Finali for the lost motorship *Victoria II*, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse on digital heritage preservation and interpretation.

In the following sections, we pres-

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ent a scholarly reconstruction of the *Victoria II* interiors from archival sources, focusing on the methodological framework and epistemological outcomes. We concentrate on how the integrated 3D model – built from original drawings, photographs, and material samples in the Gustavo Pulitzer-Finali archival collection – serves as a means to deepen historical understanding of the ship's design, facilitate spatial analyses that were not previously possible, and vastly improve accessibility of this cultural heritage to both researchers and the general public. The approach follows best practices for digital heritage visualization as outlined in recent European guidelines, ensuring scholarly rigor and interpretative transparency. By "giving form" to archival data in a digital model, we create an interactive knowledge repository that allows the *Victoria II* interior – an important yet little-known chapter of Italian design history – to be studied and experienced in unprecedented ways.

3. Methodology of Digital Reconstruction from Archival Sources

The overall reconstructive workflow was iterative and interdisciplinary, combining architectural research methods with digital modeling techniques. (Table 1) summarizes the main phases of the process and the tools employed in each phased methodology ensured a structured approach, from data gathering to hypothesis-testing and finally to communication of results. In practice, the phases were not strictly linear; there was considerable feedback between them. For instance, initial 3D modeling (Phase 3) often revealed discrepancies that prompted a return to the archival sources (Phase 1–2) to seek clarification or to adjust hypotheses.

2.1 Archival Materials and Digitization

The reconstruction project began with an in-depth study of primary sources from the Gustavo Pulitzer-Finali Archive held at the Centro Studi e Archivio della Comunicazione (CSAC) in Parma. This archive preserves a wealth of documentation related to Pulitzer-Finali's work on ship interiors, including original architectural drawings (plans, sections, elevations), perspective renderings and sketches, black-and-white photographs of completed rooms, correspondence and specifications, as well as material samples (such as textile swatches, wood veneers, and color palettes) from the *Victoria II* project. An initial curatorial selection identified the most significant and informative materials pertaining to the *Victoria II*'s interior outfitting. Priority was given to complete sets of drawings for key public spaces (e.g. the first-class social hall *Salone delle Feste*, the *Sala Soggiorno* lounge, dining room, and cabins), technical drawings of custom furniture pieces, and any photographs showing those spaces after completion.

All selected archival sources were then digitized at high resolution to facilitate detailed analysis and integration into the modeling process. Large-format drawings and blueprints were scanned or photographed with professional equipment to capture fine line-work, dimensions, and annotations. Fragile sketches and renderings were

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handled carefully and digitized via high-resolution photography. Material samples (e.g. a piece of patterned carpet or a veneer sample) were likewise scanned or photographed with calibrated color reference, so that their textures and colors could later be applied to the 3D models. This digitization step resulted in a corpus of digital assets: raster images of drawings and photos, each catalogued with metadata about their archival origin and content (Fig. 2 and 3).

2.2 Reconstructive Modeling Process

In Phase 2, reorganizing the sources was crucial for building a correct mental picture of the interiors. The team cross-referenced perspective drawings and period photographs with the technical deck plans and elevations. By aligning these documents, we reconstructed the spatial layout and identified any inconsistencies. One example was discovering slight mismatches between a perspective sketch of the *Sala Soggiorno* lounge and the measured plan: the artist's rendering had subtly stretched certain dimensions for visual effect, which became evident when compared to the scale plan. Such findings underscore the importance of the 3D model as a means to reconcile "idealized" representations with physical reality. In several cases, we noted gaps or ambiguities in the documentation – for instance, missing details for ceiling treatments or lighting fixtures in a room. These were flagged, and hypotheses were formulated drawing on analogous elements from the same ship or period (e.g. inferring a ceiling design by studying a similar lounge on a sister ship, or referencing descriptions in period literature). All assumptions were

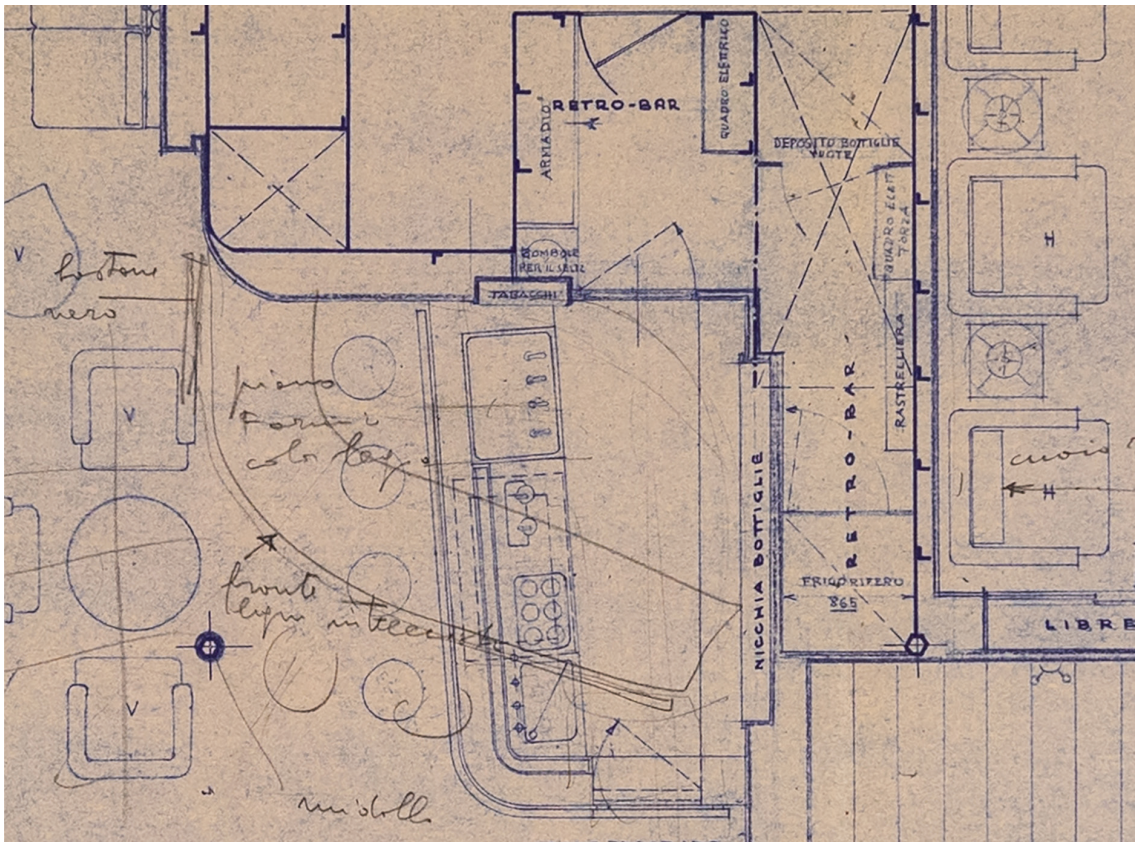

Fig. 02: Detail of original drawing of the bar in the Sala Soggiorno – Gustavo Pulitzer Finali Archive, CSAC – University of Parma.

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documented so that they remain transparent in the final reconstruction, recording the conjectural aspects of any virtual reconstruction (Fig. 4).

Phase 3: 3D modeling began with importing the 2D CAD plans as a base in the modeling software. The spaces were constructed in three dimensions by extruding decks, bulkheads, and columns according to the measurements given in the plans (converted to the modeling unit scale). Because the original drawings were highly detailed, we could model architectural elements with a high degree of accuracy. For example, the exact radius of a coved ceiling corner or the profile of an art-deco decorative molding could be gleaned from sectional drawings. For fixed furnishings (like bar counters, stage platforms, or built-in seating), we followed the designers' drawings to recreate their shapes. A noteworthy aspect of the reconstruction was the furniture modeling. The archive included orthogonal projection drawings of furniture designs, such as lounge armchairs

Fig. 03: Photograph of the Salone delle Feste – Gustavo Pulitzer Finali Archive, CSAC – University of Parma.

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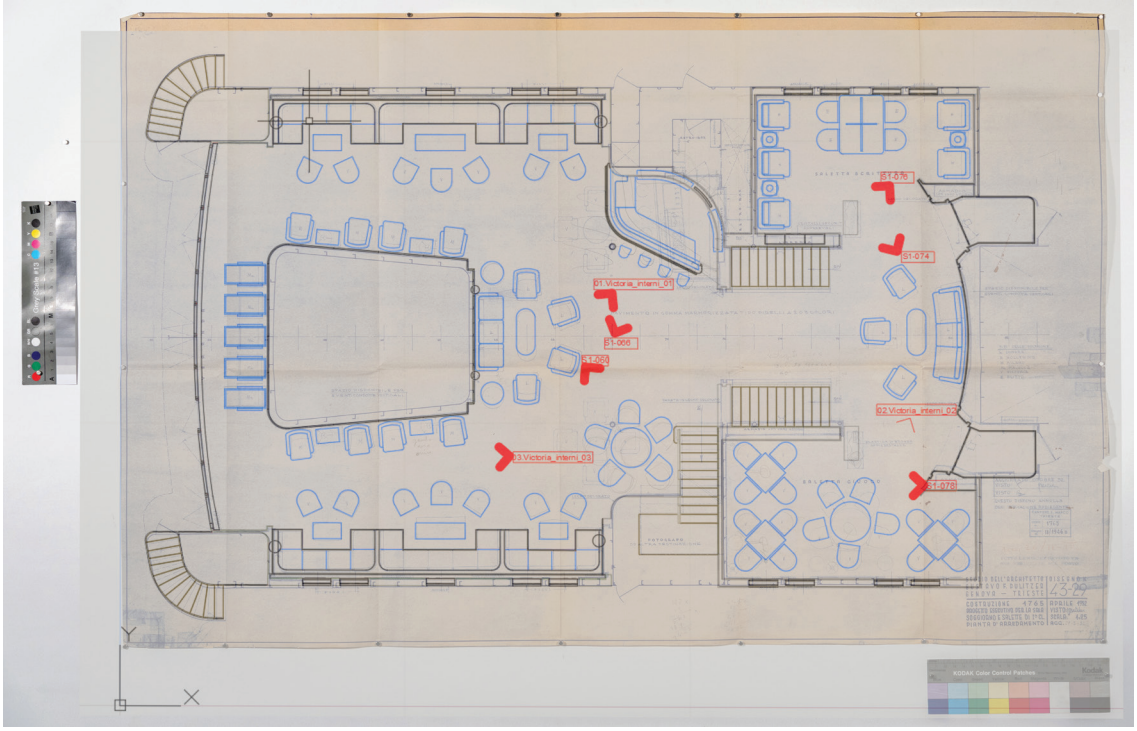

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and dining chairs that Pulitzer-Finali developed for *Victoria II*. By using these *quoted* (dimensioned) projections, we could model the furniture pieces to the precise proportions intended by the designer, ensuring dimensional accuracy in the 3D scene. For instance, the *Poltroncina tipo Victoria*armchair and the *Nilo 53* chair (names given to specific models of seating) were reconstructed in detail from their blueprints, down to the angle of their backs and the curvature of armrests (Fig. 6). This granular level of modeling enriches the overall authenticity of the reconstructed interiors – the virtual rooms are populated not with generic furniture but with the actual pieces that were designed and used, recreated at true scale (Fig. 5).

During modeling, continuous verification against the archival images was performed. We imported period photographs (e.g. a 1950s image of the first-class dining saloon) into the 3D scene as background plates or as image planes. By adjusting the virtual camera to match the photograph's perspective, we checked if our model aligned with the real scene. This technique helped validate dimensions and the placement of elements. In cases where the model did not align perfectly with a photo, it indicated either a potential error in modeling or a previously unknown alteration in the real space. For example, a photograph of the *Salone delle Feste* showed a different chandelier design than the one in the original rendering, suggesting a last-minute design change. We decided to model both versions (the rendered design and the one visible in the photo) as alternate configurations, noting it as a design variant.

Fig. 04: Original drawing of the Sala Soggiorno (Gustavo Pulitzer Finali Archive, CSAC – University of Parma) with CAD overlay and identification of photographic vantage points.

2.3 Accessing and visualizing the 3D model and its data

Phase 4: integration of data added a further layer of richness to the model. Using the digitized material samples (Fig. 7), we created realistic

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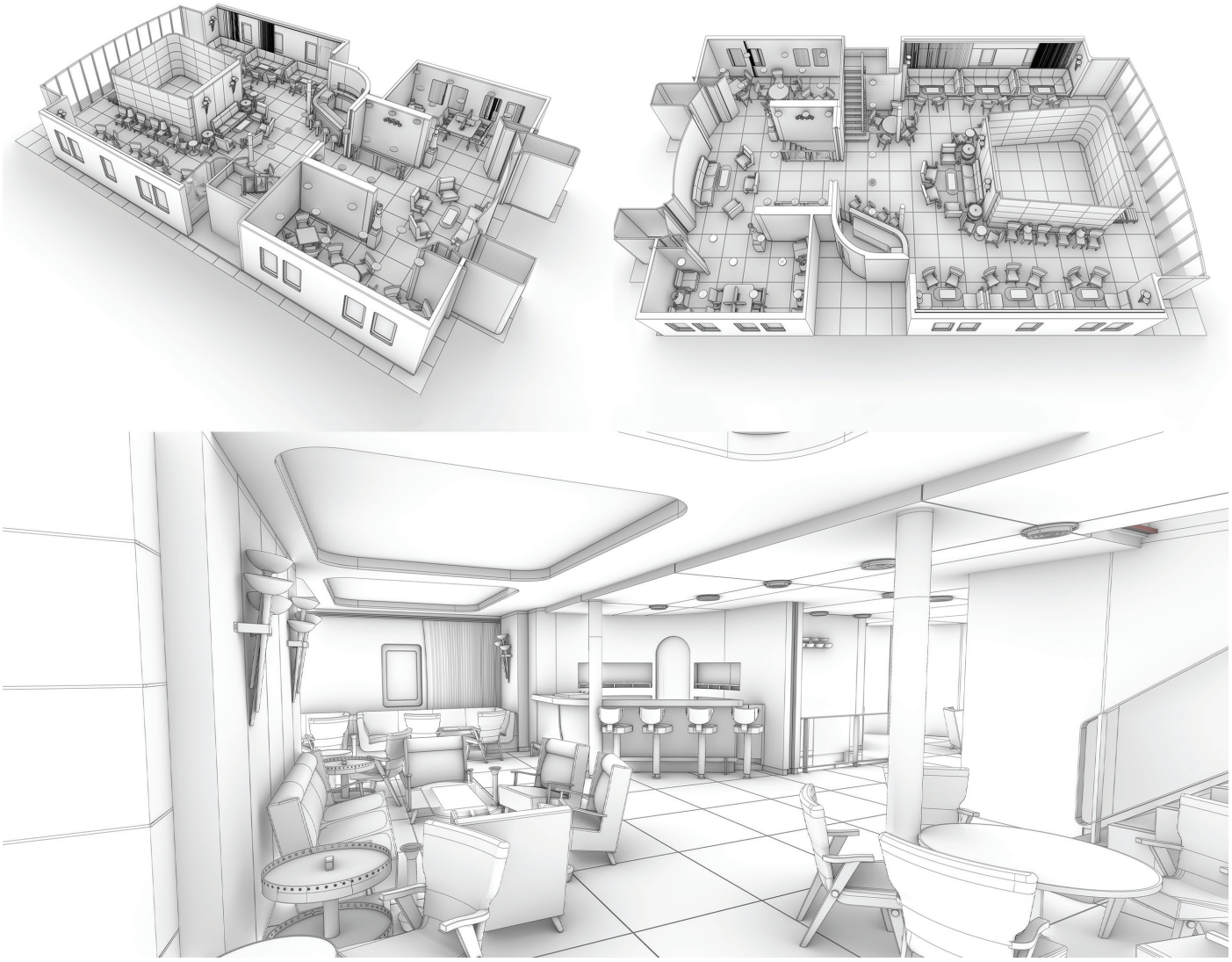

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materials and textures in the 3D environment. The honey-colored teak or mahogany wall paneling that was noted in the archives, for example, was simulated by scanning a sample or analogous veneer and applying it as a texture map with appropriate reflectivity. Likewise, fabric patterns for upholstery (if documented) were recreated from archive scans – such as a geometric motif used in carpet runners. The result was a set of materials faithful in color and pattern to the originals, enhancing the visual credibility of the reconstruction. Additionally, we annotated the model extensively: every significant object or architectural feature in the model is linked to its source references. Selecting a virtual object (say, a decorative glass panel or a chair) in the model allows one to retrieve the original drawing or photo of that element, as well as metadata like its designer, materials, and any uncertainties in the reconstruction. This effectively turns the 3D model into an integrated information system – not just a visual replica, but a container for archival knowledge.[18] It realizes the concept of an "integrated 3D model" where diverse archival resources coalesce in a single digital space. The team followed principles from the *4CH project* guidelines and the

Fig. 05:
3D reconstruction of the Sala Soggiorno – Exploded perspective views (top left and top right) and interior perspective rendering (bottom).

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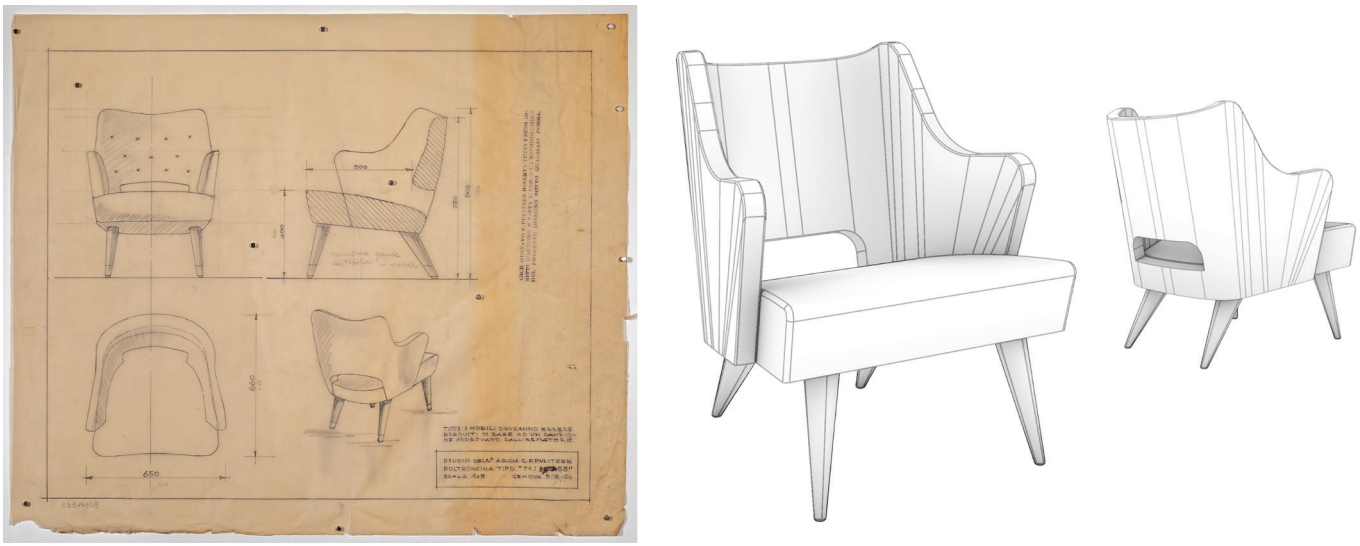

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Fig. 06: 3D reconstruction (center and right) of the "Nilo 53" armchair based on the original technical drawing (left - Gustavo Pulitzer Finali Archive, CSAC – University of Parma).

Fig. 07: Material samples – Gustavo Pulitzer Finali Archive, CSAC – University of Parma.

use of the INCEPTION web platform in this integration (Fig. 8), ensuring that all data is documented and that the model can be updated with new information in the future. Indeed, the model is conceived as a dynamic "digital organism" that can grow as more sources or insights become available.[19]

Finally, Phase 5: immersive visualization prepared the completed model for experiential use. We exported the model into a real-time rendering engine to allow interactive navigation. Care was taken to optimize geometry and textures for smooth performance without sacrificing detail. In the Unreal engine (Fig. 9), we set up lighting scenarios corresponding to the ship's original lighting (mixing warm incandescent interior lights with ambient daylight through portholes or windows). The advanced rendering capabilities permitted simulation of reflective materials like polished wood, brass, and glass, creating an ambiance close to how the spaces might have originally felt. The culmination of this phase was the deployment of the model to both VR (virtual reality) and standard desktop platforms. Users with VR headsets can now virtually step into the *Victoria II* interiors at real scale – walking

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through the grand staircase, standing beneath the domed ceiling of the dining room, or sitting (virtually) in a first-class lounge chair. For broader accessibility, we also prepared a non-VR interactive application and a web-based 3D viewer, so that the general public can explore the reconstructed spaces on standard computers or mobile devices. This aligns with the project's goal of making the reconstruction *accessible to all* via an easy-to-use platform, where one can navigate the model, toggle layers of information, and query metadata for educational purposes. Throughout all phases, an emphasis was placed on scholarly rigor and transparency. Every decision in the reconstruction process – whether based directly on evidence or inferred – was recorded. The final model distinguishes between elements reconstructed with high cer-

Fig. 08: INCEPTION web platform used for the semantic aggregation of source documents within the 3D model with a specific example of one armchair.

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tainty (supported by direct archival documentation) and those that are hypothetical (labelled as such, with notes on the rationale). By adhering to the best practices (e.g. documentation, transparency, authenticity), the project ensures that the 3D reconstruction serves not as a fanciful digital replica but as a true research tool, one that other scholars can interrogate and even contest. This methodological care underpins the epistemological value of the model, as discussed next.

4. Results of the Reconstruction and Spatial Analysis

The 3D reconstruction of the *Victoria II* interiors resulted in a detailed virtual environment representing the ship's design as it stood in the mid-1950s. Key public spaces – including the *Sala delle Feste* (first-class ballroom/social hall), the *Sala Soggiorno* (lounge), the first-class dining room, the smoking lounge, and typical first-class and second-class cabins – were modeled with full architectural detail and furnishings. The fidelity of the reconstruction enables a range of spatial analyses and observations that were previously impossible using only the 2D archival documents. One immediate outcome was the ability to visualize the intended spatial experience of these interiors. Standing a virtual camera inside the model, we can for the first time since the ship's demise observe the rooms from any viewpoint – including those not captured in historical photos. For example, the *Salone delle Feste* can be viewed from the stage looking outward, or from the upper balcony level downwards, providing perspectives that yield insight into sightlines and the room's volume. This helps confirm historical accounts of the space's design effect. Contemporary descriptions praised the lounge's open-plan design and harmonious proportions;

Fig. 9: Rendered 3D reconstruction of the Sala Soggiorno – View of the bar area.

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our model validates these descriptions by showing how the spacing of columns and the coffered ceiling geometry create an impression of spaciousness relative to the ship's beam. Precise digital measurements in the model reveal, for instance, that the ceiling height in the ballroom was about 4.2 meters – exceptionally tall for a ship of this size – which explains the grandeur noted in passenger memoirs. Such quantitative spatial data could not be easily obtained from fragmented drawings alone, but the model integrates the pieces into a measurable whole.

The reconstruction also enabled a comparative analysis between the original drawings and the realized spatial configurations. In particular, the case of the Sala Soggiorno offered an instructive example of how visual conventions in archival materials may affect interpretation (Fig. 10). The original perspective drawing depicts the lounge with what appear to be floor-to-ceiling fading panels on the central structure. However, this choice was not a literal design proposal; rather, it served as a representational strategy to enhance spatial legibility by visually opening the interior toward the viewer. Archival plans and photographs confirm that the executed design in fact featured wood paneling with integrated shelving in that location. To explore this interpretative ambiguity, we reconstructed two configurations in the 3D model: one with the rendered transparent panels, and one reflecting the actual wooden partition. This allowed us to assess how such visualization choices affect spatial perception and the understanding of interior articulation. While the transparent wall offered a more expansive and luminous view comparable with the original perspective view by Pulitzer Finali, the authentic wood-paneled version conveyed a more intimate, enclosed ambiance. This exercise highlights how 3D modeling can clarify the intent behind visual representations and provide a critical platform to distinguish between descriptive clarity and design reality. It reinforces the role of reconstruction as a methodological lens for interpreting archival drawings, especially when they employ graphic conventions for narrative or compositional purposes rather than literal documentation. During the modeling, the team uncovered a number of incongruities and corrections. For example, one photograph of the first-class smoking room showed a decorative scheme (furniture placement, light fixtures) that did not perfectly match the available drawings. By interrogating the model and sources further, we discovered that the smoking room had undergone a minor refit during the ship's service (perhaps during a mid-1960s renovation when the ship changed owners). We documented both configurations in the model on separate layers. This finding underscores an epistemological point: the act of modeling can identify inconsistencies that prompt deeper archival digs, potentially correcting or enriching the historical record.[20] Here, a 3D approach led us to discover evidence of an undocumented alteration. It also speaks to the accuracy of the model – to reconcile the model with the photo, we had to adjust object placements, thereby refining the model to reflect the most likely actual arrangement at a given date. Each such refinement increased the model's validity as a representation

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Fig. 10: Comparative visualization of the Sala Soggiorno. From top to bottom: original perspective drawing for spatial clarity (Gustavo Pulitzer Finali Archive, CSAC – University of Parma); 3D reconstruction with glass panels reflecting the drawing's visual convention; 3D reconstruction with wood paneling as built, based on technical drawings and photographic documentation.

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of reality.

Another result of the reconstruction is a comprehensive catalog of furnishings and decor elements, extracted and modeled from the archives. Many of these items (lighting fixtures, chairs, tables, artworks) can now be studied in detail as 3D objects. Scholars of design can examine, for instance, the form of a Pulitzer-Finali armchair in three dimensions and understand its ergonomics or stylistic details better than from a flat drawing. The model effectively creates a digital inventory of design artifacts, some of which no longer exist physically. This digital preservation of individual objects contributes to the broader preservation of design heritage. It also enabled collaborations – for instance, a textile expert was consulted when applying fabric textures, and their analysis of the pattern informed a better understanding of 1950s Italian maritime textiles. Thus, the reconstruction has interdisciplinary reach, linking architecture, interior design, material culture, and even conservation science (through questions of material simulation).

Crucially, the reconstructed model has proven to be a powerful educational tool for spatial analysis. Architecture students and researchers can step inside the virtual *Victoria II* and perform analyses akin to those they would in a real building: studying circulation routes, sight lines, lighting distribution, and human scale. For example, we evaluated the visibility of a mural placed in the *Salone delle Feste* from various parts of the room – confirming that its position was optimally chosen to be visible from both ground floor and balcony. We also analyzed the layout for its adherence to safety norms of the time (exits, distances, etc.), finding that the design cleverly balanced elegance with regulatory requirements (e.g. the distance between fire bulkheads). These kinds of analyses demonstrate that a historical space, once virtually reconstructed, can be systematically evaluated using contemporary spatial analysis techniques, opening new research questions about the design's functionality and performance. In summary, the results of the *Victoria II* interior reconstruction are twofold: a rich virtual environment that faithfully represents a lost masterpiece of Italian ship design, and a set of new insights gained from using that environment as a research tool. The 3D model confirms much of what was intuitively known from archives – for instance, that Pulitzer-Finali's design was remarkably consistent with his modernist ethos and was executed with a high level of craftsmanship – but it also uncovers new details, variations, and questions that advance our understanding of mid-century maritime design. It stands as a digitally resurrected fragment of history that one can inspect and explore in depth. The next section discusses the broader implications of this work, particularly how such integrated 3D models enhance historical knowledge and public engagement with cultural heritage.

5. Discussion: Epistemological Value and Public Accessibility

The reconstruction of the *Victoria II* interiors from archival sources illustrates the significant methodological and epistemological value that

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3D digital models bring to cultural heritage research. At a fundamental level, the 3D model served as a synthesis of knowledge – it integrated disparate archival documents into one coherent representation[21]. In doing so, it transformed two-dimensional, often fragmented historical data into a holistic three-dimensional understanding of the ship's interior environment. This transformation is epistemologically powerful: it is a process of *in-formatio* in the original Latin sense of "giving form" to information. By literally giving form (in digital space) to the Victoria II's design, the project generated new information that was not explicit in the archives alone – spatial information, experiential information, and integrative interpretations.

One key epistemological benefit is the model's ability to facilitate visual and spatial reasoning. Historians and designers examining archival plans can now step into an immersive visualization of those plans. The human ability to understand space is greatly enhanced by 3D experience; thus, scholars can notice aspects that might evade detection in 2D drawings[22]. In this project, the 3D model allowed researchers to perceive subtle design features – for example, how a sequence of spaces aligned along the ship's axis creates a dramatic enfilade vista when viewed in perspective, or how ceiling heights varied by area to denote hierarchy of rooms. These observations deepen the historical understanding of Pulitzer-Finali's design strategies. They also allow us to pose new questions: for instance, did the layout of *Victoria II* influence later cruise ship interior designs in terms of flow and sightlines? With the virtual model, such questions can be explored more readily by comparing it with models of other ships or buildings.

Another value lies in how the model enables the verification and testing of historical hypotheses. The 3D reconstruction process is inherently an act of interpretation – requiring the researcher to make choices on how to fill gaps, which must be justified with evidence or logical inference. As such, it externalizes the researcher's hypotheses in a tangible form that can be examined and critiqued by others[23]. In our case, when we hypothesized a certain configuration for an unseen detail (like the pattern of a ceiling or the design of a curtain), we implemented it in the model, effectively creating a visual hypothesis. This could then be evaluated for plausibility: does it fit physically? Is it stylistically consistent? If new evidence emerges (say, a newly found photograph), the hypothesis can be adjusted or rejected. The model thus acts as a platform for iterative knowledge building, where hypotheses are not just abstract but visible and testable in a simulated environment. This echoes principles from the London Charter that encourage using visualization as a means of research inquiry, not just presentation. Our project demonstrated that making a 3D model is not a mere end product; it is part of the research thinking process, often revealing things in "the making" that one would miss otherwise. For instance, only by modeling a particular chair did we realize its proportions were unusually large – which led to an archival inquiry confirming that chairs were intentionally oversized to anchor them against ship movement. Such

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interconnected insights are a direct result of the reconstruction methodology.

The integrated 3D model also greatly contributes to enriching and valorizing existing documentation with new interpretative perspectives. It brings together historical, technical, and material data into a single analytical framework. In practice, this meant that historians, architects, and even lay observers could derive more meaning from the archives when seen through the lens of the model. For example, a plain technical blueprint gains new life and context when the viewer can see the 3D space it describes, overlaid with the original drawn lines. The project effectively augments the archival record: the digital model is a new form of documentation that complements, and indeed enhances, the traditional records. It does so by adding dimensionality and interactivity – two qualities that paper documents lack. From an epistemological standpoint, this augmentation allows for multi-sensory engagement[24]. While still visual at core, the immersive model can simulate acoustic properties or even tactile suggestions (via haptic interfaces) of the space, enabling researchers to ask how the spaces might have sounded or felt, not just looked. Such questions move us closer to comprehending the lived experience of historical spaces, bridging the gap between objective documentation and subjective human experience.

Beyond the scholarly domain, the 3D reconstructed model has enormous value for public accessibility and education in cultural heritage[25]. The interior of Victo*ria II* no longer exists in physical form, which ordinarily would confine public understanding to a few old photographs and descriptions. Now, with the virtual model, a broad audience can be invited to *explore* this lost environment in an intuitive way. Virtual reality showcases, interactive museum kiosks, or web-based 3D tours can present the *Victoria II* interiors to people who may never read an academic paper or visit an archive. This democratization of access aligns with the project's goal of an accessible platform for all. It transforms archival research into an experiential narrative – for instance, a museum exhibit could allow visitors to "time-travel" onto the mid-century ocean liner, walking through its salons as they learn about 1950s design and travel culture. The emotional impact of such an experience can be profound (hence the notion of "emotional graphics" mentioned in the research): seeing history reconstructed around you can create a personal connection to heritage that reading a document cannot match. This emotional engagement can foster greater public interest in preservation and understanding of design history. Furthermore, the model's accessibility features, such as layer filtering and metadata interrogation, mean that it can serve users of varying interests and expertise. A casual user might simply enjoy the visual spectacle, whereas a student might toggle on an annotation layer to see informative notes about each room, and a researcher might dive into the metadata to find archival references for a specific feature. The ability to *filter by layers and query metadata*[26] in a user-friendly way exemplifies how an integrated model can act as an interactive *catalogue raisonné* of a

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complex work. In a single platform, one can both experience and study, play and learn, thereby blurring the line between education and entertainment (but always rooted in factual research, avoiding the trap of mere "edutainment").

It is worth noting that while the 3D model provides clear benefits, it does not replace original archives or traditional scholarship – rather, it supplements them. The process has reinforced the importance of rigorous archival research; the model is only as good as the sources and interpretations behind it. However, once created, the digital reconstruction becom*es a sustainable form of heritage preservation i*n its own right. It can be stored, copied, and migrated to new formats over time, ensuring that the essence of the *Victoria II* interiors remains available to future generations even if physical artifacts continue to dwindle. In the context of risk management for cultural heritage, digital models offer a backup of knowledge – should physical archives be damaged or lost, the digital amalgamation retains much of their informational value (with proper documentation).

In conclusion, the *Victoria II* interior reconstruction demonstrates that an integrated 3D digital model is a powerful epistemic tool: it deepens historical insight, provides a testbed for hypotheses, and makes heritage accessible in engaging ways. The project also models a workflow that can be applied to other lost interiors or sites – particularly those where rich archival data exists but the subject is inaccessible or destroyed. In an era where digital technology is increasingly entwined with heritage work, this case stands as evidence that careful, research-driven 3D visualization can lead to *"new interpretative perspectives"* and significantly *"enhance the understanding of cultural heritage"*. The integrated approach of combining archival rigor with digital reconstruction paves the way for more such endeavors, suggesting that the future of heritage studies will be as much about building knowledge in virtual space as it is about excavating it from the archives.

6. Conclusion

The interdisciplinary reconstruction of Gustavo Pulitzer-Finali's *Victoria II* ship interiors underscores the methodological and epistemological strengths of 3D digital modeling for cultural heritage. By meticulously converting archival drawings, photographs, and material samples into an immersive, navigable virtual environment, the project not only resurrected a lost mid-century design icon but also unlocked new avenues of inquiry and public engagement. The scholarly structure of the endeavor – guided by charters and best practices in digital heritage – ensured that the 3D model functions as a reliable repository of knowledge, where every virtual element is traceable to historical evidence or clearly identified conjecture. The process of "giving form" to archival data proved to be an act of research discovery in itself, revealing design variants, inconsistencies, and spatial qualities that deepened understanding of Pulitzer-Finali's work and the context of 1950s Italian liner design. From an epistemological standpoint, the case study demonstrates that a digital reconstruction can be

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far more than a visual replica – it becomes a dynamic tool for thinking, akin to a laboratory where historians and designers simulate the past to test hypotheses and gain insights. The *Victoria II* model showed how integrating diverse sources into one 3D space can produce a sum greater than its parts: the combination of technical plans with visual and material data yielded a comprehensive picture that neither alone could provide. This integrative model, continually augmentable with new data, aligns with the concept of a growing "digital organism" of knowledge and serves as a blueprint for future projects. Equally important are the implications for heritage communication. The ability to step aboard a virtual *Victoria II* closes the distance between contemporary audiences and historical environments. It transforms scholarly outputs into experiences – inviting global audiences to learn about Italian modernist design by strolling through its digital facsimile. This experiential access is invaluable for education, outreach, and even tourism (imagine a virtual museum of Italian ocean liners where *Victoria II* is one of the exhibits). The reconstruction thus contributes to both the preservation and the dissemination of cultural heritage. It resonates strongly with international calls to digitize and share heritage content widely.

In summary, the project affirms that 3D digital reconstruction, when executed with academic rigor, has dual benefits: it advances scholarship by providing a new modality of analysis, and it enhances public understanding by providing an engaging window into history. Gustavo Pulitzer-Finali's *Victoria II*, once a fading memory preserved in archives, is now accessible as a rich, interactive digital artifact – a testament to how modern technology can illuminate and propagate the legacy of design masters and their creations. As we submit this work to the broader museum and heritage discourse, we envision that it will spur further discussions on standards, methods, and creative possibilities of virtual reconstructions. The lessons learned here reinforce that the melding of archival science, design history, and digital modeling can yield outputs that are academically robust and widely inspirational, ensuring that "important pages" of our cultural heritage, like the story of *Victoria II* and Italian ship design, continue to be known and appreciated in the digital age.

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Endnotes:

1 Scientific coordinator: Davide Turrini. Research team: Loreno Arboritanza, Matteo Bevilacqua, Marco Mancini, Marco Medici, Eleonora Trivellin, Elisabetta Trincherini. The project is part of the 2023 FIRD Project (Dipartimental Research Integration Fund) at the University of Ferrara, Department of Architecture.

2 The archival units, catalogued and inventoried, are dated between 1939 and 1967.

3 Marinetti 1928, p. 77; cited in Fochessati 2004, p. 230.

4 Pulitzer 1931, cited in Riccesi 1985, p. 72.

5 For these works, the artist created various studies, as evidenced by the plaster casts preserved in Pescia at the Libero Andreotti Gipsoteca, where the artist's imagination gave shape to mythological marine figures in different iconographic interpretations of sirens or women born of the sea. For the complete list of works in the Andreotti Gipsoteca, see Casazza, 1992.

6 For these topics, see Frulio et al. 2016.

7 The original sirens from the 1931 Victoria ended up, after being salvaged, at Allerton Garden in Hawaii, while the fate of those from the 1951 ship remains uncertain.

8 Guidi, Russo 2011.

9 Friedrichs 2018.

10 Gherardini, Sirocchi 2022.

11 Croce, Caroti et al 2020.

12 Quattrini, Pierdicca et al. 2017.

13 London Charter, https://londoncharter.org/

14 The 4CH project - Competence Centre for the Conservation of Cultural Heritage. https://www.4ch-project.eu/

15 The 3D-4CH project - Online Competence Centre in 3D for Cultural Heritage. https://www.3d4ch-competencecentre.eu/

16 Medici, Fernie 2022.

17 European Commission 2021.

18 Maietti, Di Giulio et al. 2018.

19 Iadanza, Maietti et al. 2019.

20 Münster, Apollonio et al. 2018.

21 Medici, Maietti 2023.

22 Paes, Arantes, Irizarry 2017.

23 Adamopoulos, Rinaudo 2019.

24 Spadoni, Carulli et al. 2023.

25 Cecere, Colace et al., 2024.

26 Bonsma, Bonsma, et al 2018.

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A Designed Life

1951-1954

Contemporary American Textiles

Contemporary American Wallpapers

Containers & Packaging

Travelling exhibitions between past and present: Dialogue with the curator of *A Designed Life*

Margaret Re, Federico Maria Giorgi

Keywords:
U.S. Traveling Exhibition Service; American Product Design; Exhibition Displays

ABSTRACT:

From the point of view of curators, architects, and designers, the challenges presented by travelling exhibitions are as unique as they are complex. As such, Peggy Re gives voice to her insights in this interview, gained from curating the exhibition *A Designed Life: Contemporary American Textiles, Wallpapers and Containers & Packaging, 1951-1954*, a historical retrospective of three exhibitions organized by the U.S. Traveling Exhibition Service between 1951 and 1954. We will explore how, throughout its historical evolution, the design of traveling exhibitions has consistently intersected with issues related to identity, soft power, technology, manufacturing, and the public.

Dal punto di vista dei curatori, degli architetti e dei designer, le sfide poste dalle mostre itineranti sono tanto uniche quanto complesse. In questa prospettiva, l'intervista a Peggy Re vuole dare voce alle sue intuizioni, acquisite durante la sua esperienza curatoriale con la mostra *A Designed Life: Contemporary American Textiles, Wallpapers and Containers & Packaging, 1951-1954*, non solo in relazione alla storia di tre mostre organizzate dall'U.S. Traveling Exhibition Service tra il 1951 e il 1954, ma anche rispetto ad una pratica di progettazione espositiva contemporanea. Verrà approfondito come, nel corso della sua evoluzione storica, la progettazione espositiva di mostre itineranti si sia sempre incrociata con tematiche legate all'identità, al soft-power, alle tecnologie e al rapporto con il pubblico.

Opening Picture:

Poster of the exposition *A Designed Life* at the Center for Art, Design & Visual Culture, UMBC.

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Margaret Re

Margaret Re is a professor of Graphic Design at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). She is also a practicing designer, researcher and consultant to academic, cultural, and non-profit institutions. Her work has been recognized by the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), the American Association of Museums (AAM), and The Type Director's Club (TDC). Her research interests include typography, design history, and women and design.

For this fourth issue of MMD- Museum, Materials and Discussions, whose dossier is dedicated to topic of travelling exhibitions, we decided, for the section devoted to architecture and display, to give voice to the curatorial experience of the exhibition "A Designed Life: Contemporary American Textiles, Wallpapers, and Containers & Packaging, 1951-54". Through the lens of this contemporary travelling exhibition, which retraces and recontextualizes the history of three travelling exhibitions from the 1950s, we aimed not only to highlight and compare the evolution of the opportunities and the challenges present in these showcase experiences, but also to underscore the possible synergies between design practice and historical archival research. As such we aim at showing how the threshold between museology and museography is a fertile ground for the development of experiences that highlight both the products and the processes of architecture, history and design.

Federico Maria Giorgi: During this project, you analysed the three exhibitions commissioned by the U.S. Traveling Exhibition Service and shown in Germany between 1951 and 1954: *Contemporary American Textiles,* designed by Florence Knoll; *Contemporary American Wallpapers,* designed by Tom Lee; and *Containers and Packaging,* designed by Will Burtin. Compared to regular exhibits, travelling exhibitions like these offer multiple specific challenges. They often need to find a balance between strict time constraints, tight economic budgets, object conservation, and curatorial objectives and the necessity of developing flexible displays. How did the curatorship experience of *A Designed Life*[1] help you look back at the history of the challenges faced by these three post-WWII travelling exhibitions?

Peggy Re: Like Knoll, Burtin, and Lee, I was challenged to identify and collect the materials to be presented. As a curator, I was fortunate to locate each exhibit's original catalog, which included product checklists and designer and manufacturer. I reviewed these lists, researched the manufacturers and designers, and considered each object's function, intended audience and price point, tasks that Knoll, Lee, and Burtin had to complete. To understand the intent — why an object was selected by the original curators — what made it "Contemporary" and "American" — I also examined each object and researched the background of each designer and manufacturer. I considered the product form language and the origin of that language.

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From a commercial perspective, I also had to consider what might be unique about each product or its designer or manufacturer so that I could interpret it for an audience. Knoll, Burtin, and Lee were charged with selling an idea of America as "Contemporary" or modern, so they, too, had to think about form language as the made their selections. They also had to consider innovative manufacturing techniques, many resulting from systems developed to support the war effort and ways to show the resulting products. The experience of curating and designing ADL made me understand the conceptual challenges Knoll, Burtin, and Lee faced in creating exhibits that would circulate through and be presented in unknown spaces. ADL would require as much adaptability as it could offer to accommodate a multiple of spaces while respecting the intent of the original designers.

Florence Knoll responded to this challenge of adaptability by exploring the idea of "small architecture" and designing a pavilion. "Contemporary American Textiles" was organized as a self-contained architectural space meant to be viewed and experienced as a whole: a twenty-four-by-sixteen-by-eight-foot self-lit aluminum-framed pavilion from which panels composed of individual textiles arranged and sewn into geometric shapes were hung by straps and braced by crosswire supports.[2] Fourteen tapestries were used in creating double-sided wall panels assembled from patterned and woven textiles stitched together into geometric compositions. Rather than a line of objects viewed at eye level, textiles floating within a grid were deployed as scrims to make a room within a room. Sight lines formed by shape and pattern afforded a continuously changing viewpoint that encouraged individuals to move through the exhibit. The lighting system mounted to the interior ceiling cast shadows of visitors that could be seen in and outside of the space, creating intrigue. This pavilion is important as a design artifact because, in addition to textile use, color, and texture, it documents Knoll exploring an open plan layout and circulation — how people interact and move through space. This awareness caused me to think about color and lighting and evaluate how people could be invited into and move through ADL. Because Knoll's pavilion was self-contained, it also made me aware that I could think about creating zones or areas for each part of the story I wanted to tell.

Will Burtin responded to the challenge of creating an exhibit that had to react to unknown spaces by designing three sets of shelves that he called "crate units."[3] Each crate unit, which was divided into 18 compartments on each side, was braced on its outside edges by opposing isosceles triangles. They could be arrayed from a center point, aligned head-to-toe, or set side-by-side. Burtin presented over 100 products, applicable at all stages of life, in the home and across industries, packaged using English in a limited, flexible space, evoking the idea of store and shadow box. To me, this raised a consideration of audience interpretation beyond language. While product names can be translated via labels, did Burtin select packages and containers based on their visual and emotional appeal as much as their innovative structure or content? Burtin made me aware that

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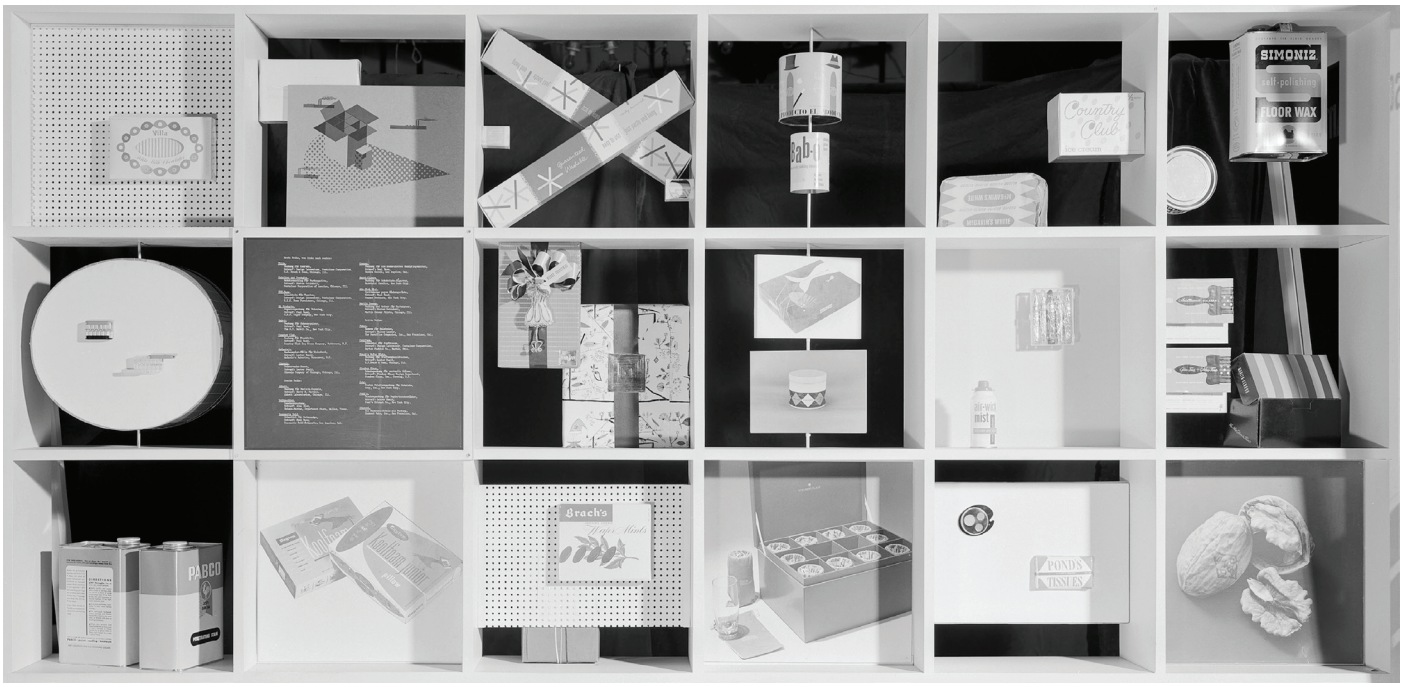

01

these exhibits were meant to connect with real consumers and their emotions as it invited them to consider their wants and desires.

Lee created a flexible exhibit consisting of sixty framed and papered panels mounted to wooden supports that could be arranged in various ways: rectangles, hexagons, or any shape needed to suit the available space. The panels could also be separate from their supports and wall mounted. The State Department in Germany extensively reworked Lee's exhibit, making me aware of the importance of editing. Lee, an interior and exhibit designer, who had extensive experience with designing theatre set and costumes and packaging and trade displays for the beauty other industries created what he called "spectaculars." I wanted "spectacular."

This experience gave me a deeper understanding of logistics. The three designers had to design exhibits that could travel, i.e., be shipped efficiently — by boat, train, and car. The exhibits had to be lightweight and easy for a small, unskilled workforce to understand and install. The United States Department of State presented these exhibits via the Amerika Haus program, a US government-funded system of information centers tasked with acting as agents and interpreters of American culture through the facilitation of free discussion and the presentation of public programming intended to increase cultural and political prestige on the part of the United States. The Amerika Haus libraries, which were cultural centers *and* libraries, were typically housed in prominent spaces often associated with the previous government. The US State Department also planned to present the exhibits in German museums and to the German public through other events like fairs and trade shows. While Knoll, Burtin, and Lee understood this, they did not know where the State Department would actually present their work and how these environments were organized and experienced by the people who used them.

Fig. 01:
Front of the panel of *Purchase Appeal & Grabbing Attention*.

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02

UMBC's Center for Art, Design, and Visual Culture[4] planned to travel ADL to university and college museums and galleries so the logistics of packing, shipping containers, weight and travel costs were logistics to be considered. I didn't know what universities and colleges ADL might travel to and what these gallery spaces might offer when I was designing ADL. I was very much aware that university and college museums and galleries are teaching labs where exhibits are often prepared and installed by students under the guidance of a more experienced preparator or curator. We also planned to travel ADL to free-access venues, like the Center for Architecture in Sarasota, Florida, and the Chicago Design Museum, which values design as a tool to create and connect communities. So, like Knoll, Burtin, and Lee, I was aware that a light weight and simple installation was essential. Could the installation be done in under a week in very different spaces by a crew of interns and students learning their craft under the direction of a more experienced preparator? What happened if ADL's presentation needed to be split between two spaces? This happened at the Chicago Museum with Burtin's exhibit presented in a secondary space across the street from the main gallery.

This experience also made me aware of the "behind the scenes" complexities involved in curating an exhibition, such as securing permissions and insurance, licensing and copyright law and fair use, and an appreciation of open-access materials. While Knoll, Burtin, and Lee weren't challenged with these responsibilities — most if not all the products they displayed were donated commercial products created as multiples — the charge to create these three exhibits was born from the aftermath of the State Department's experience with the 1946 "Advancing American Art" exhibition that featured works created by a culturally diverse group of emerging American artists. The State Department developed "Advancing American Art" to present the con-

Fig. 02:
Back of the panel of *Mass Production & Design Issues*.

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cepts of freedom of expression and individualism as fundamental democratic values enjoyed by American artists and therefore all Americans. To do this, the State Department, which was tired of the challenges created by borrowing artwork from museums, galleries, and other cultural institutions, which imposed permission requirements, fees, time limits, and insurance requirements on the State Department, purchased seventy-nine oil paintings and seventy-three watercolors. I have a deep appreciation for the complexities of this work.

Federico Maria Giorgi: The way in which these displays tried to overcome and anticipate the unforeseeable logistical challenges of travelling exhibitions, is certainly one of the most interesting aspects of their designs. However detailed pieces of information about temporary exhibitions of all kinds, even today in our digital age, are easily lost to time and are often difficult to reconstruct. The Birth of *A Designed Life* is directly linked with the analysis and exploration of different historical records. The exposition itself could be interpreted as a tool capable of adding new materials and providing new meanings to forgotten archives: a way of extending their life. How did the relationship with different archives and the use of various types of sources (written documents, photographs, journal articles, technical drawings) influence the exhibition's creation and its life cycle?

Peggy Re: Your statement about reconstruction is so true. I continually found myself considering the purpose of the archive and the appraisal process conducted within it—who decides what gets collected and preserved, why, and who is this content for?

The different archives of the Smithsonian Institution, the Library of Congress, and other parts of the federal government were willing to connect with each other in support of this project. Much of the history behind A Designed Life is their history. The various archivists and librarians were interested in learning about their predecessors and the decisions they made. On several occasions, archivists knew of materials that had not been cataloged, or used in some time and were willing to retrieve materials such as Amerik Haus posters stored in the Library of Congress. The archivist in charge of these posters generously allowed them to be photographed and reproduced in ADL and its accompanying catalog. I am thrilled that they are now cataloged on the Library of Congress website so that others can use them. I was also privileged to travel to Germany to use the Bauhaus library. While I didn't uncover direct reference to these three exhibits, I found information about Knoll and design professionals featured in the textile, packaging, and wallpaper exhibits. A visit to a library in Dessau connected me to an archive in Cologne containing useful information related to the Amerika Haus program and Felix Muller and Karl Oskar Blasé, two German designers who supported this program.

The various types of sources forced me to consider how I could take these findings and make a cohesive

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03

Fig. 03:
Display of *Contemporary American Textiles* during the exposition *A Designed Life: Contemporary American Textiles, Wallpapers and Containers & Packaging, 1951-54*, as presented at UMBC's CADVC.

whole. While I located the catalogs for each exhibit, each exhibit was documented differently. Knoll's exhibit was documented through drawings, plans, textual descriptions, and minimal photography. Burtin's exhibit was extensively documented by American architectural photographer Ezra Stoller, with whom Burtin worked throughout his career. Stoller's photographs were of such high quality that they were scanned and enlarged to create a full-size digital trompe l'oeil recreation of Burtin's original design, which was important as there was no way I could have located all the products listed in the catalog. Select examples of the wallpapers presented in Lee's exhibition were printed and displayed through the generosity of Cooper Hewitt, in part because outside of the catalog, I could only find textual descriptions. While I wanted to find drawings, plans, or photographs, I was okay with this because Lee's exhibition was extensively reworked once it arrived in Germany. It was the most flexible of the three exhibits. Newspaper articles revealed that the wallpaper panels could be hung on the wall, displayed freestanding, or joined to create groupings. Lee's exhibit was also the only exhibit opening that was documented via a newspaper article sharing remarks made by the State Department officer opening the exhibit.

I became very interested in the process behind making and presenting each exhibit as separate activities. Plumbing the materials in the various archives revealed the differing agendas of the people involved in creating, traveling, and displaying these exhibits. These agendas ranged from overtly propagandistic ones, prioritizing nationalism over all else (both American and German), to personal agendas that were willing to set aside the TES project

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charge in favor of creating an abstract artistic experience (Knoll), to agendas that were as much as about the promotion of individual design firms as anything else (Knoll and Burtin). Exploring the archives also provided me with insight into how the exhibitions were received by the various audiences that saw them. Evidence suggests the reception differed significantly from the intention.

I also became very interested in the correspondence (memos) related to the exhibits. Through them, I began understanding different people's roles and their importance or relevance to the individual exhibits and the exhibit program. I also got a sense of individual personalities and learned about their life stories and what these individuals valued. TES Director Pope compared the Cranbrook-educated Knoll's exhibition to a Mondrian painting. Her American-born, Princeton-educated State Department counterpart Richard Brecker, a WWII veteran, dismissed Pope's concern with aesthetics. He wanted to stay on message. Brecker found Knoll's exhibit ridiculously inflexible, requiring a presentation space at least five wider on all sides. Memos between the TES and State Department officers in Germany document a story of want and need related to Burtin's exhibit. Packages were continually stolen for their contents. The State Department replaced the stolen packages with empty packages which were also stolen. Herwin Schaeffer, a State Department official and German émigré who returned to Germany after WWII to find his American-born mother, felt the need to interpret Lee's wallpaper exhibit because some of the presented papers were so abstract and, like the Knoll textile exhibit, were displayed abstractly without context. German audiences are on record as finding the American color palette, as expressed through the wallpaper selections, unappealing.

Stories like these made me want to add an audio component to ADL so that people could get a sense of these individuals and their conversations with each other. I was very fortunate that a colleague, an experienced voice actor, was willing to lend her expertise in helping create scripts based on these memos and the audio files themselves. Other colleagues were willing to "audition" and serve as character actors. A colleague who recorded these audio stories selected and dubbed in background music to set the tone and further an emotional connection. I also felt it was important to bring in the biographies of select designers whose work was featured in these exhibitions and who I also researched while studying Knoll, Burtin, and Lee's work. Many of these individuals had fascinating personal and professional histories. They were European émigrés themselves or had studied art and design with European émigrés. Three 32 x 24" monitors showcased a rotating display of panels containing didactic text supported by images.

The didactic panel accompanying Contemporary American Textiles presented textile designer and colorist Eszter Haratszky, who worked for Knoll. Haratszky, who, after she left Knoll, focused on "needle painting," her own expressive style of detailed embroidery rooted in the handicrafts that she learned as a child in Hungary, advised her fellow

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artists and designers in one of her two books on embroidering flower design that "… you don't necessarily have to do exactly what I say, or do as I do but do. It is the only way that you will learn how good you are." Meanwhile, the Contemporary American Wallpapers didactic panel gave the life and work history of industrial designer Ray Komai, one of two design professionals of Asian descent associated with these three exhibits. Komai, who in 1942 was incarcerated at Manzanar, an internment camp for Japanese and Japanese Americans, designed figurative and abstract wallpaper and textiles for Laverne International that show the influence of abstract and Cubist artists. Komai worked with the United States Information Agency from 1963 to 1976, designing exhibitions and publications for U.S. expositions sent overseas to promote American values and democracy during the Cold War. Komai's colleague and friend Alan Carter shared a memory in Komai's USIA obituary about interviewing Komai. When Carter asked Komai about his early WWII years, Komai's paraphrased response was, "Well, I was raised to believe I was American. I played baseball, I did well in school, and I did all those things typical American kids did. Then, one day, in my later teens, I was told in effect that I was not American— that I was to be sent to a relocation camp along with my family and other Japanese Americans." When Carter asked Komai why he would want to join the very government that treated him so horribly, Komai softly replied, "Because no one could ever again doubt that I am American." Finally, the Containers & Packaging didactic panel showcased Morton and Millie Goldsholl. The Goldsholls explored commercial design to create playful and modern product packages, corporate identities, and animations. Morton designed packaging for the Container Corporation of America, where he met Millie, an accountant and aspiring artist. Morton took evening classes at the Institute of Design under Moholy-Nagy and Gyorgy Kepes. He suggested to Millie that she enroll in this new school. The couple established Goldsholl Design & Film Associates in 1955 while raising a family — making them even cooler than the Eames, in my opinion.

Curating and designing ADL using what initially felt like incomplete sources, opened me up to thinking about other ways to tell its story and give context. For example, I was able to incorporate the European Recovery Plan (ERP) posters from the Virginia Military Institute that I originally consulted to learn about form language. How could I introduce an audience to this language? Show the posters! And, when I couldn't find the textiles originally used in Knoll's exhibit, I decided to use projections of select textiles and re-editioned textiles available today.

Interpretative devices enhancing the viewer experience were also crucial to the ADL life cycle as where outreach events. They helped other venues and audiences find value. It was essential to find ways for audience participants to connect with the individual displays and ADL. For Knoll's exhibit, audience members were invited to touch and closely examine samples of each displayed textile. Booklets containing panel diagrams were also available for audience members to

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consult as they walked through and around the exhibit. A worksheet mimicking a shopping list invited individuals to consider what was needed then and now to live comfortably was available to viewers as they explored Burtin's exhibit. Lee's wallpaper exhibit was supported by coloring pages showing a variety of modern interior spaces. Individuals were invited to design and color these pages based on what they found appealing in ADL. The Architecture Center at Sarasota hosted a speakers' series that attracted community members to ADL. The Chicago Design Museum (CDM) and I worked on programming and creating a Facebook/Instagram campaign featuring objects and designers who contributed to Knoll, Lee, and Burtin's exhibits or a related reading or question to consider. The campaign took place weekly between May and mid-September of 2021. CDM also did an excellent job organizing and hosting outreach events supporting ADL.

Federico Maria Giorgi: Realising an exhibition is often a precious occasion to collaborate with a wide variety of professionals from different scientific fields and career paths. In this case, looking back at the complex behind scene of these exhibition, is also an opportunity to reflect on their multidisciplinary nature and their ability to overlap aesthetics and languages between decorative art, design, and art and architecture. What possibilities did this multidisciplinary approach offer to developing travelling exhibitions in the 1950s and today?

Peggy Re: ADL was a very complex, collaborative, and multi-disciplinary experience that relied on the expertise generously offered by many different individuals, resulting in the audience being able to better explore complex themes and opposing viewpoints. Recreating these three exhibitions and considering how to give a sense of context and unity within a tight budget and small team, which, in addition to CADVC colleagues, included UMBC graphic design, theatre, and history students, Morgan State University architecture students, and Johns Hopkins University museum studies students, encourage us to think about how a richer and more engaging narrative could be presented that encouraged curiosity and exploration. It required the project's core team to forge professional relationships within and outside of UMBC some of which are discussed below.

As part of the Knoll recreation, and as discussed earlier, we used "descendant fabrics or re-editions" inspired by earlier textiles, rotating projections of historical textiles onto select panels in Knoll's pavilion. We also worked with UMBC's costume shop, which is housed in the theatre department, to sew the panels used for Knoll's exhibit using textiles donated by Knoll Textiles and other manufacturers after consulting with their in-house design teams. The Microfabrication, Machining, and Electronics team housed within UMBC's College of Engineering and Information Technology helped fabricate the aluminum structure from which the panels were hung. A Smithsonian Institution lighting designer freely consulted on the type of light bulb and wattage Knoll

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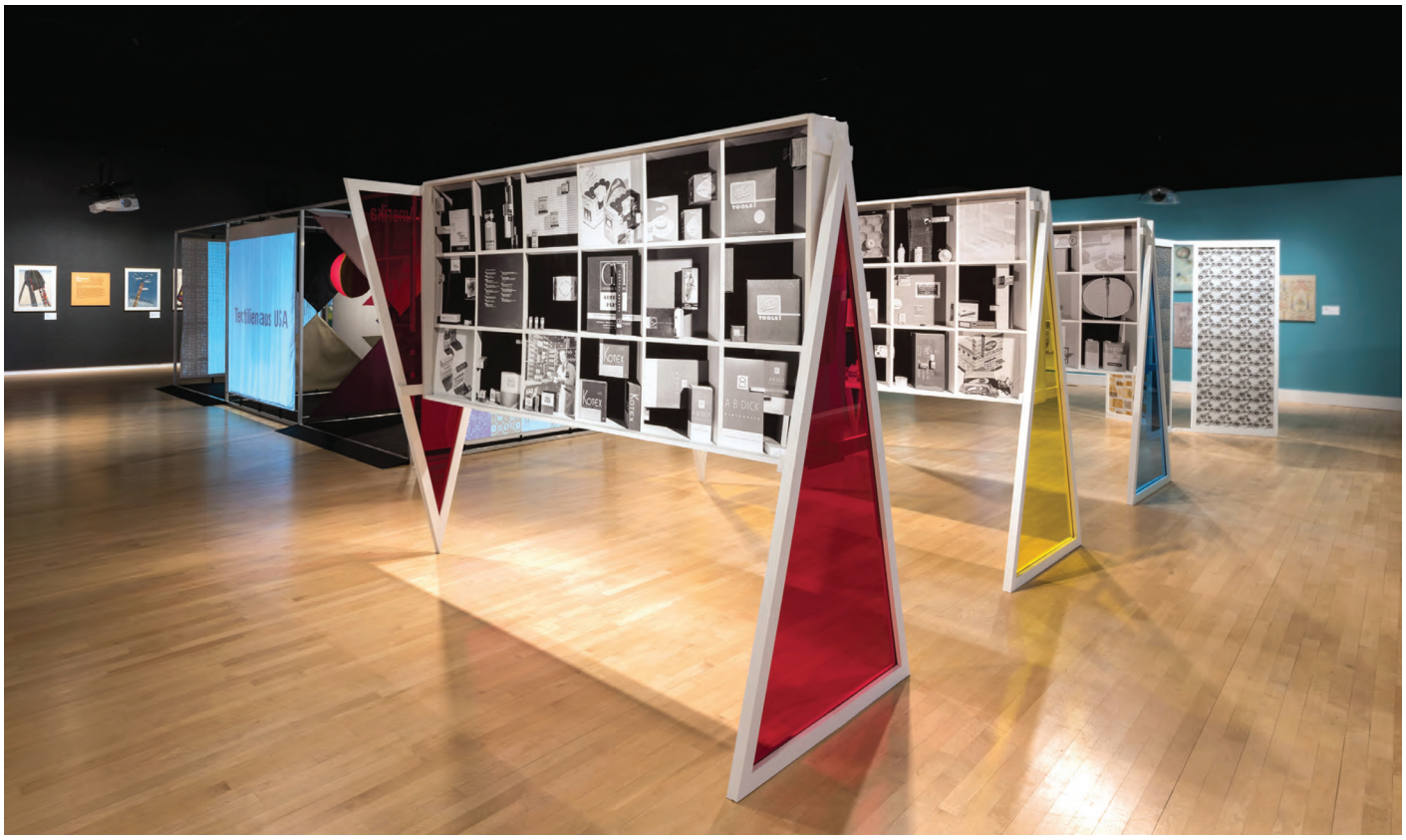

04

Fig. 04:
Display of *Containers and Packaging* during the exposition *A Designed Life: Contemporary American Textiles, Wallpapers and Containers & Packaging, 1951-54*, as presented at UMBC's CADVC.

might have used and helped find a lighting system. Digital printing done in-house was important to ADL because it allowed for cost-efficient reproductions. Esto, which houses architectural photographer Ezra Stoller's archives, reduced fees, provided high-quality scans and gave permission to reproduce Stoller's photographs of Burtin's exhibit. Equally valuable, Cooper Hewitt generously provided scans of the presented wallpapers and permission to print them.

A façade of an Amerika Haus found at the National Archives and Records Administration was printed digitally at scale to help create a sense of place and time. To further understand the geographic location, historical context, and cultural factors, we presented select European Recover Posters (ERP) borrowed from the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) at UMBC. We created a slide presentation using these ERP posters to support ADL as it traveled. Two Marshall Plan/ECA films, including one film that focused on a young German man who volunteered to work the Ruhr-Rhineland coal mines, also borrowed from VMI, were presented that were valuable in understanding how the U.S. government sold the ERP.

Today, we have the option of promoting exhibitions and presenting them digitally. Covid meant A Designed Life could not travel as extensively as planned. However, ADL was presented online as a virtual immersive experience using Matterport.[5] The Matterport exhibit, which shot in Chicago, meant that visitors could walk through the space, observe objects from different angles and distances, and interact with them as if they were physically present.

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Federico Maria Giorgi: These exhibitions where a great experimentation ground for trying different approaches toward audience engagement. A such these displays were used as influence tools capable of growing a country's soft power through cultural events. They presented a curated portrait of the American people with the objective of creating an aesthetic identity that could influence the emotions, desires and expectations of foreign countries. Do you think the role of travelling exhibitions has changed since then? What challenges and possibilities do they still offer regarding the topic of identities today?

Peggy Re: I want to answer no and yes.

I live on the outskirts of Washington, D.C., which recently celebrated Embassy D.C. The various embassies and cultural attaches open their doors and introduce themselves to the city via open houses, street festivals, and exhibits — all forms of cultural diplomacy or soft power as defined by Joseph Nye. Besides being a way to learn about other countries, these activities invite participants to consider and explore multiple facets of their identity and that of others, using a lens that can be focused on various facets of affiliation: gender, place, nationality/ethnicity, social status, traditions, governmental systems, personal interests, and more. Events like these can increase empathy and cross-cultural communication. These embassies use engagement methods like those that the US Department of State explored in 1950s Germany as they circulated Knoll, Burtin, and Lee's exhibits through the Amerika Haus program. The US Department of State was trying to find ways to introduce audiences within Germany and Europe to the United States of America and its system of government.

The role of traveling exhibitions has changed since the 1950s. They've become more immersive. There's a strong interest in showing an object and finding ways to solicit input as exhibits are planned and invite diverse audiences into the exhibition space so that all communities feel welcomed to interact with the museum and its contents. There's also a concern with visitor accessibility and reaching visitors through engagement activities that address the variety of ways in which people learn, process, and retain information. This concern with accessibility includes creating interpretive panels that use concise everyday language and often incorporate an interactive element. Traveling exhibitions allow cultural organizations like museums to reach audiences they might otherwise not reach. They also enable museums and galleries to contain costs and diversify their offerings by bringing in materials that audiences may not be able to travel to see.

Federico Maria Giorgi: Reflecting on the different perspectives possible toward an exhibition and its various stakeholders is critical when discussing cultural events strongly linked with forms of soft power. Studying exhibitions from the past allows us to ponder their reception and critically examine whether or not both the space and the public accepted this temporary event. How was the recep-

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tion of these three exhibitions at the time? And how was the reception of the recreated display today?

Peggy Re: Most of my research was conducted within the United States, and I was unable to find extensive records documenting the reception of these exhibits in Germany. What I did find showed that German audiences were curious about these exhibits; however, their reception was uneven and often tinged with gentle humor. The Department of State's goal was to persuade Germans and other Europeans that the United States offered more attractive and better lifestyle options than the Soviet Union. To achieve this, the Department of State planned to utilize the visual language of what would become known as modernism to align consumer choice with political choice. While modernism was emerging in the United States, it benefitted from the contributions of immigrants, including those who had studied at the Bauhaus. American-made goods that might have been received within the United States as novel and exciting might not have been seen as novel or exciting when returned to Germany. The German reception was also impacted by the tension and conflict that existed between the TES and the Department of State regarding the exhibits' purpose and intended audience. The exhibits had multiple subsets of audiences. The first audience was TES Director Pope, a German émigré, who contracted Knoll, Burtin, and Lee at the advice of MoMA's Edgar Lee Kaufmann, director of MoMA's Department of Industrial Design and the "Good Design" exhibition program, to curate and design their respective exhibitions as well as create a catalog. Pope, an art historian who completed a PhD in German Baroque sculpture and studied with Paul Sachs as a postgraduate student, served as Assistant Director in charge of exhibitions at the American Federation of Arts before establishing the TES. She appreciated and would make a life for herself, organizing huge traveling exhibitions involving significant artworks. She was enthusiastic about each exhibit as she supervised their development.

Pope's Yale-educated State Department counterpart, Richard Brecker, represented another type of audience — that of the United States government. A former Marine, he was not interested in connoisseurship. Brecker, as chief of the State Department's exhibitions branch and who, based on State Department correspondence, operated primarily within the United States, viewed these exhibitions as opportunities to counter Soviet influence, foster a sense of mutuality between the German and American people, and sell the idea of democracy by showing the goods made available through a democratic government.

Brecker's colleague, Herwin Schaefer, a German-born United States Department of State officer stationed within West Germany and charged with receiving and circulating these exhibitions, represented a third perspective that was perhaps most directly connected to that of German audiences. Schaefer, like Pope, was a German émigré who, after completing a PhD from Harvard with a dissertation on medieval architecture, joined the Rhode Island

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05

Fig. 05:
Projected textiles during the exposition *A Designed Life: Contemporary American Textiles, Wallpapers and Containers & Packaging, 1951-54*.

Serge Chermayeff, Navajo #1, 1952.

Alexander H. Girard, Small Squares, 1953.

Don Wight American, Garden of Glass, c. 1950.

Stig Lindberg Swedish, Apples, c. 1950.

Philip Johnson, Van Dyke Squares, c. 1953.

Eszter Haraszty, Tracy, 1952.

School of Design Museum in the Department of Decorative Arts before accepting a position as an assistant curator in the Department of Architecture and Design. He left MoMA when he was appointed assistant director of design at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. Schaefer, who joined the State Department in an attempt to return to Germany, was directly concerned with how these three exhibits would be received and understood. He edited and made opening remarks to provide context for Lee's exhibition. He was also responsible for the exhibit catalogs that Knoll, Lee, and Burtin produced as part of their contracts. While the catalogs were planned to follow the MoMA's Good Design format, which credited the designer and manufacturer and provided the item's cost, Schaefer made the decision to remove the cost information deeming it irrelevant. The objects weren't obtainable, and most expenditures made in Germany were for basic living needs.

Pope compared Knoll's "Contemporary American Textiles" to "a painting by Mondrian." She considered Contemporary American Wallpapers to be appropriately flexible, asserting it was "one of the best installations I have ever seen, especially for traveling purposes." Brecker,

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06

Fig. 06:
Projected textiles during the exposition *A Designed Life: Contemporary American Textiles, Wallpapers and Containers & Packaging, 1951-54*.

D.D. & Leslie Tillett, Walnuts, c. 1950.

Marianne Strengell, Textile, c. 1950.

Angelo Testa, Campagna, c. 1951.

Bernard Rudofsky, Fractions, c. 1949.

Noémi Raymond American, Chinese Coin, 1948.

Ross Littell, Border Riff #3, c. 1948.

who was interested in reaching the masses — regular folks — judged Knoll's exhibition as impractical. He felt that Contemporary American Textile's inflexible box-like structure limited its adaptability, making it unlikely that it could be presented at an America House, which was typically placed in existing structures used by or associated with the former government. The pavilion was too big.

Pope was aware of Brecker's judgment, which didn't bother her at all. She felt that the America Houses were the least important of the Department of State-specified venues. Pope was interested in high culture. To her, the venues with the highest value and utmost importance were the museums and fairs — big fairs with unlimited space and a large number of visitors, such as the Berlin Trade Fair, the Berlin Cultural Fair, and Constructa. Pope valued an aesthetic experience intended for an affluent, cultured, and educated audience that would offset the conception of the United States as "lady wrestlers, bloody strikes, and boogie-woogie fiends." Pope may have gotten her way. She wrote that Brecker requested "Contemporary American Textiles" to be featured in 1953 at the Munich Amerika Haus, in Essen, and for the Berlin Festi-

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val, despite its late arrival. Based on the date of Pope's memo, it can be inferred that the Berlin Festival referenced by Pope was the 1952 Berlin Cultural Festival, a program that was part of an American foreign policy initiative aimed at countering the European perception that America was an aesthetic desert.

The documentation found related to Contemporary American Textiles revealed that German audiences were not that impressed with it. A trade publication reviewed the exhibit when it opened at the Amerika-Haus Essen, asking, "So what?" The reviewer found that the forms presented in the various patterned textiles selected by Knoll were not unique. The reviewer, who identified the American palette as garish, found the exhibit too abstract, observing that it could have benefited from larger textile samples so that the audience could understand how these fabrics could be used in architectural spaces and on three-dimensional forms — an insight with which I agree.

How a fabric drapes is important to its use and final appearance. Knoll's presentation also meant that the audience couldn't rub the fabric against itself to determine its durability, which could influence use. As an example, Knoll included Don Wight's cotton print, "A Garden of Glass," in her exhibit. Wight created a simple half-drop repeat pattern using isometric line drawings of glassware: wine glasses, bottles, carafes, and more. Wight's textile looks remarkably different when presented flat as part of a grid, which is how Knoll presented it, than when used as a curtain and draped or hung from a rod. The resulting folds shatter the glass, creating an abstract pattern.

Pope considered Contemporary American Wallpapers to be appropriately flexible, with the TES director asserting it was "one of the best installations I have ever seen, especially for traveling purposes." Brecker, in a 1952 New York Times article, stated that the "exhibit was intended to show residents of foreign countries characteristics of the" typical American home. It would also show that Americans are not concerned solely with the machine and what it can produce but with aesthetics as well. However, that didn't mean the State Department deemed Lee's exhibition suitable for German audiences. Once the exhibit arrived in Germany, Schaefer edited Lee's selections, reducing the number of papers from sixty to forty because, in his judgment, many of the designs were not acceptable for German consumption. Schaefer's appraisal was supported by a West German press that humorously and benevolently complimented the American wallpaper industry on its courage.

A local newspaper reviewed Lee's exhibit when it opened at Kassel's Museum of Natural Wonders, with Schaefer providing opening remarks. According to the article, the exhibit opened with a wallpaper composed of realistic pocket watches presented alongside early colored German wallpapers and four large pictures of nineteenth-century American life. Several nails placed next to the opening paper, on which visitors were invited to hang their own watches, reflected what was perceived as the exhibition's avant-garde nature. The displayed

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papers, intended for residential and commercial use, included motifs inspired by chicken wire (Ilonka Karasz), marbled paper (Erwine and Estelle Laverne), foliage (Ben Rose), and empty frames. The reviewer suggested that the exhibition was not received as the Department of State had planned. Schaefer had to introduce the audience to the idea of a significantly larger country with a less homogeneous and more mobile population where homes were not created for generations of living. According to the reporter, Schaefer's words elicited "a more unprejudiced" response from this audience. The review concluded that the Schaefer-supplied context opened the audience up to a lively discussion about the use of patterns.

State Department records document that Contemporary American Wallpapers were exhibited in American Houses in Munich, Berlin, Mannheim, Essen, at the Wallpaper Fair in Darmstadt, in the Ulm town hall, in Hagen, and at a large wallpaper store in Düsseldorf, which appears to have been the most successful. The store owner estimated an unbelievable 525,000 visitors saw the exhibition. These records also indicate that the exhibition was shown at America House Hof and at the "For Every Woman" Fair, sponsored by the America House Hannover, where it raised a controversial discussion. The America House Hannover reported that visitors didn't like the exhibit. America House Hof played it safe — they noted that the exhibition was excellent but too advanced for the taste of most visitors. The State Department planned to offer the exhibit to museums interested in modern design, supporting Pope's belief that museums and fairs were the venues with the highest value and importance.

Pope wrote to Burtin that Contemporary American Containers and Packaging was a wonderful and creative project that she was proud to present abroad. I didn't find direct documentation of the German reception to Burtin's Container and Packaging exhibit other than the repeated theft of packages containing products that could be eaten or used. State Department officials stationed in Germany requested replacement packages, writing that the exhibit was successful and tempting. So, it can be somewhat cynically inferred that in this time of need, there was an enthusiastic reception of some sort.

However, correspondence exchanged between Brecker, Schaefer, and other State Department officers revealed that the State Department felt that Burtin's exhibition, like Lee's wallpaper exhibit, could be of real use to German museums interested in American design and manufacturing. The State Department may have hoped that Containers and Packaging, while smaller in scale, would be received with enthusiasm like that enjoyed by MoMA's "Design for Use, USA," the Kaufmann-curated 1951 exhibition of American household goods presented at Stuttgart's Landesgewerbemuseum, which attracted sixty thousand visitors over five weeks.

So, what happened to these exhibits? I believe the State Department abandoned these three exhibits of mass-produced goods or donated them to earn good will. In all likelihood, traveling via boat, truck, and train and being presented at venues of differing sizes, where they were

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viewed by untold numbers of people, took a toll on them — because of its size, the textile pavilion was limited to venues where crowds of visitors could walk through it. I found no record of handling or shipping instructions or of specialized packaging planned to protect the exhibitions. There is also no record of exhibit conservation or repair, except for the State Department's request for replacement packages for Burtin's exhibit. The Department of State planned to offer the wallpaper exhibit to art schools and museums interested in modern design.

The exhibits may have also been abandoned as the Department of State reduced its association with the TES due to coordination and communication issues. One officer wrote regarding Knoll's exhibit: "… almost as much time and work was expected of us as … if we contracted directly with the designers." The Department of State may have also decided to limit its relationship with the TES as it guided the1953 Eisenhower-established United States Information Agency in developing larger international expositions that presented American designed and made products in environments that showcased American lifestyles. These larger exhibits included the 1959 American Exhibition in Moscow, which featured an apartment complete with modern furnishings.

However, there's a third reason why the Department of State may have abandoned or donated these exhibits in Europe — which leads to the question of how today's audiences received A Design Life. The Department of State may have felt it couldn't return them to the United States because of the 1948 Smith-Mundt Act, the first significant U.S. legislation on international information activities officially authorizing American government public diplomacy efforts abroad. Smith-Mundt permitted the "preparation, and dissemination abroad, of information about the United States, its people, and policies" through various media, including press, publications, radio, motion pictures, and information centers. It also contained a de facto provision restricting materials prepared for presentation overseas from being presented within the United States, out of fear that this could allow the American government to propagandize its people. Smith-Mundt, which allowed the Department of State to contract with individuals or organizations deemed important in combating communism, allowed the Department of State to fund these exhibits through the TES. However, the Department of State may have also concluded that this restriction prevented the return of these exhibits and thus these exhibits were never seen in the United States. The audiences that viewed A Designed Life were intrigued by this law and its implications. Many audience members were equally interested in learning about Smith-Mundt and to be invited to reflect on the ideas of personal identity, choice, propaganda and soft power as related to design. They were surprised to learn that design can consciously/unconsciously influence/shape social systems. As an educator it helped me point out to students that as designers, they have a responsibility to understand what the messages they create. It also helped convey to audiences that we are all consumers

On the surface level, audiences

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were very receptive to A Designed Life because of the popularism of modernism and the names associated with it. Knoll and Burtin are well known American design professionals.[6] The exhibits that they and Lee curated also contained work created by other well-known modernists including Evelyn Anselevicius, Eszter Haraszty, Marianne Strengell, Angelo Testa (Contemporary American Textiles); Marion Dorn, Illonka Karasz, Ray Komai, Alexander Calder (Contemporary American Wallpapers), and Saul Bass, Lester Beall, Morton Goldsholl, and Paul Rand (Containers and Packaging).

As they visit A Design Life, audience members were equally interested in reflecting on the ideas of personal identity, choice, propaganda, and soft power as they relate to design and its influence. They were surprised to learn that design can consciously or unconsciously influence and shape social systems and to consider how what we choose reveals about us. Audience members who toured A Designed Life were intrigued to consider how the people who viewed the original exhibits might have valued and used the display products. The accompanying educational programming created a well-received "shopping experience" that invited individuals to consider the display items and select those that were relevant to their lives today.

Federico Maria Giorgi: The context in which an exhibition is built is always an essential factor in its development. From this point of view, travelling exhibitions have the rare opportunity to continue to learn and evolve after their completion by picking up new pieces of information along their journey. The pandemic didn't allow *A Designed Life* to complete its journey fully; can you tell us more about its travels? What were the different venues initially programmed for the exhibit, and what were (if they were pre-programmed) the design changes made to the exhibition for each location?

Peggy Re: A Designed Life opened at UMBC's Center for Art, Design, and Visual Culture and then traveled to the Center for Architecture Sarasota before the pandemic impacted its existing travel schedule. At this time, UMBC's Center for Art, Design, and Visual Culture (CADVC) was also planning to propose this exhibit to other educational institutions. The CADVC was in discussion with Drake University for fall 2020 when the majority of American universities and colleges decided to close for that semester. The Chicago Design Museum presented "A Design Life" in the spring of 2021 when many parts of the United States were still closed due to the pandemic[7].

Like the three original exhibitions, the three reconstructed exhibitions faced challenges — and some of these challenges mirrored those faced by the original exhibitions. For example, reconstructing Knoll's Contemporary American Textiles exhibit at the original scale meant that it required a space that allowed audience participants to move through and around the textile exhibit — an additional five feet was needed on each side, as detailed in Brecker's State Department correspondence. Size was an issue when

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07

the Center for Architecture Sarasota presented A Designed Life. The space was tight. There wasn't room for visitors to walk comfortably around the outside. However, the Center for Architecture Sarasota, which is bounded on two sides by curtain walls, recognized this and positioned the Knoll and Burtin exhibits close to these windows, creating a strong visual impact from the street. Discussions with Drake University revealed that Knoll's exhibit would have required them to show A Design Life in two locations. Due to the space needed by Knoll's pavilion, the Chicago Design Museum presented Burtin's Containers and Packaging exhibit in a space directly across the street from it.

Burtin's Containers and Packaging exhibit was flexible but heavy. It was easy to install, and all three 'crate-units,' as Burtin called these structures, could be displayed radially or linearly. The option also existed to present one or two crate units instead of three. Balancing the crate units was a challenge. Burtin used opposing triangles to support the crate units, with one side of each crate unit resting on a vertex. As Burtin's exhibit traveled, this point required reinforcement with a small but wider triangle — a very inelegant solution. I hadn't considered what the constant pressure on this point would do to it. Burtin must have reinforced the vertex by drilling a threaded metal pin into the wood to which he discretely screwed a flat plate. In addition to preventing the wood from splintering and spreading weight, this screw would have allowed a crate unit to be adjusted so that it sat more stably on an uneven floor. The Center for Architecture Sarasota presented Containers and Packaging linearly. The Chicago Design Museum presented it in three staggered rows. Lee's Wallpaper exhibit employed

Fig. 07:
Display Elements of *A Designed Life: Contemporary American Textiles, Wallpapers and Containers & Packaging, 1951-54*, as presented at UMBC's CADVC.

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traditional presentation methods, with the majority of the wallpapers displayed on the wall. A 'kiosk' composed of three vertical panels radiating out from a center point referenced the structures on which Lee hung the original wallpapers. The ERP posters belonged to the Virginia Military Institute's Marshall Museum and, therefore, couldn't travel. Instead, we were able to present these posters in a digital format.

By exploring the behind-the-scenes challenges faced during the project "A Designed Life" we can focus our attention toward some critical aspects linked with exhibition design. First and foremost, ADL highlighted the logistical challenges of the design practice, both from the point of view of display hardware and curatorial management. However, it also showed how making these difficulties visible was a great way to resonate with public and help them understand the processes and the historical objectives of the U.S. Traveling Exhibition Service. Furthermore, this curatorial experience underscored the importance of creating a vast and multidisciplinary network of professionals both before, during and after the exhibition life-cyle. These types of projects initially draw on a wide variety of materials and information, belonging to different bodies and agencies, and characterized by very different supports. This variety of sources also translates into a range of new materials produced, which often seek to exploit a broad spectrum of communication methods mixing both physical, digital and mixed medias. These exhibitions thus become an opportunity to create large "resonance chambers", as described by museum theorist Stephen Greenblatt, that can bring together and confront the views, interests, and specialist knowledge of a wide variety of actors around a single theme. A final aspect that seems very interesting about "A Designed Life" is how the practical act of designing it was able to shed light into the history of three American Traveling Exhibition and shape the way we understand them. From this perspective, historical research and the concrete presentation of this research blur the boundaries between museography and museology, underscoring the necessity for collaboration among the designer, architect, and historian, as multiple and very layered stories are told within one construct.

This dialogue was organized in between February and June 2025 by Federico Maria Giorgi, Editor of the Section Architecture and Displays of this review. Many thanks to Professor Peggy Re for her time, her energy and her generosity in sharing with us the curatorial experience of the exposition "A designed Life"

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Endnotes:

1 See the catalogue of the exhibition: Gute, Re 2020. From this point onwards, the exhibition will often be referred to by the abbreviation ADL.

2 See: https://theconversation.com/florence-knoll-bassetts-mid-century-design-diplomacy-110878

3 See: https://www.transatlanticperspectives.org/entries/will-burtin/

4 See: https://cadvc.umbc.edu/

5 See: https://cadvc.umbc.edu/a-designed-life/

6 See: https://www.printmag.com/daily-heller/modernism-rediscovered/

7 See: https://www.designchicago.org/a-designed-life

References:

Gute, Re 2020: Gute C., Re M. (eds.), *A Designed Life: Contemporary American Textiles, Wallpapers and Containers & Packaging, 1951–54,* Center for Art, Design and Visual Culture, UMBC, 2020.

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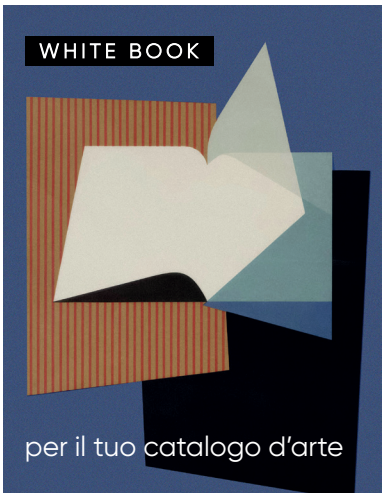
EXHIBITION

Uno sguardo disincantato sulla realtà



CATALOGO MOSTRE

ARTE

de bello

16 APRILE 2025
12 OTTOBRE 2025

GRES ART 671
BERGAMO

Inserisci una mostra

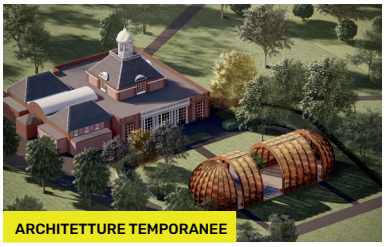
COMPILA LA SCHEDA
E MANDALA ALLA REDAZIONE

FOTOGRAFIA

Razza Umana

17 APRILE 2025
27 LUGLIO 2025

PALAZZO BLU
PISA



ARCHITETTURE TEMPORANEE

"A Capsule in Time", il Serpentine Pavilion 2025 disegnato da Marina

Per festeggiare i 25 anni del progetto è stata chiamata dalle Serpentine Galleries di Londra l'architetto bengalese impegnata con il suo studio a rispettare sostenibilità, contesto culturale e storico e attenta al sociale e ai cambiamenti climatici. Contemporaneità e tradizione dialogano all'interno di uno spazio flessibile. ▶

LUOGHI

La luce protagonista del nuovo allestimento della Galleria dei Re all'Egizio di Torino

Le celebrazioni del bicentenario del Museo iniziano con la riapertura al pubblico della Galleria dei Re e del Tempio di Ellesiya, rinnovati nell'allestimento grazie alla collaborazione tra egittologi e studio OMA di Rotterdam che cura la trasformazione architettonica del palazzo seicentesco. ▶

MY EXHIBITION TV

Un'app intelligente per cambiare il paradigma di visita della Biennale di Architettura 2025

CATALOGO PROFESSIONISTI

ARCHITETTO

Pieluigi Molteni

BOLOGNA

Operi nel settore espositivo?

COMPILA LA SCHEDA
E MANDALA ALLA REDAZIONE

pc-|◄
paolo
cesaretti
Arch-

ARCHITETTO

Paolo Cesaretti

FIRENZE

My Exhibition: una piattaforma per fare la storia delle mostre

Alessandro Lolli

Keywords:
Exhibitions; Exhibition design; Museums; Cultural heritage; Database

ABSTRACT:

For this issue of *MMD*, the editorial committee has decided to give a voice to those who provide institutional recognition to essential yet often overlooked figures in the cultural and museum landscape. In this perspective, *My Exhibition* plays a central role: the platform collects and organizes data, practices, and key actors of exhibition design in Italy. It documents the staging of exhibition spaces and temporary architectures, offering a multidisciplinary outlook that encompasses installations, scenography, materials, educational tools, technological devices, and multimedia applications. Through this work of documentation, *My Exhibition* contributes to building a shared memory of exhibition practices and to acknowledging the professionals who, working behind the scenes, play a decisive role in shaping contemporary museum practices.

Per questo numero di *MMD*, il comitato editoriale ha deciso di dare voce a chi offre riconoscibilità istituzionale a figure essenziali ma spesso poco visibili nel panorama culturale e museale. In tale prospettiva si colloca *My Exhibition*, piattaforma che raccoglie e organizza dati, pratiche e protagonisti dell'exhibition design in Italia. Il progetto documenta la "messa in scena" di spazi espositivi e architetture temporanee, offrendo uno sguardo multidisciplinare che comprende allestimenti, scenografie, materiali, strumenti didattici, dispositivi tecnologici e installazioni. Attraverso questa ricognizione, *My Exhibition* contribuisce a costruire una memoria condivisa delle pratiche espositive e a valorizzare i professionisti che, operando dietro le quinte, svolgono un ruolo determinante nella definizione delle pratiche museali contemporanee.

Opening Picture:

Homepage della piattaforma My Exhibition.

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Alessandro Lolli

Alessandro Lolli, formatosi in ambito tecnico, dopo la laurea in scienze geologiche (1983), ha ricoperto ruoli manageriali nei settori della formazione, della comunicazione, del marketing e dell'editoria e si è occupato di progettazione nei settori dell'arte, dell'architettura e del design. Nel 2012 ha fondato con altri partner l'agenzia di comunicazione integrata, Design People. La società rappresenta il motore di un gruppo di marchi che ha nel settore Cultura il mercato di riferimento e nel quale investe per offrire servizi e prodotti innovativi: nel 2024 è stata implementata la piattaforma web *My Exhibition*, strumento di informazione e approfondimento professionale sulle mostre; nello stesso anno viene costituita White Book, casa editrice aperta e indipendente, nata per dare voce e spazio ai temi dell'età contemporanea.

Premessa

Il settore delle mostre e quello museale, dopo l'evento pandemico che ha interessato tutto il mondo, sono in continua e costante crescita, come dimostrano i dati del Ministero della Cultura italiano riferiti ai musei e alle aree archeologiche. I dati sono pubblicati sul sito del MiC[1] con tavole ufficiali relative agli ingressi nei musei e parchi archeologici italiani dal 1996 al 2024.

Il numero assoluto di visitatori raggiunto nel 2024 è di 60.850.091 e il confronto con il 2023 indica un aumento di circa 3 milioni di visitatori. Se si rapportano i dati all'anno 2018, che rappresenta, con 55,3 milioni di visitatori, il picco nell'epoca prepandemica, si legge una variazione positiva di circa 5 milioni di presenze, pari a un incremento di oltre il 9%.

Non ci sono invece inchieste mirate o disponibili al pubblico che analizzino il settore mostre. Una ricerca interessante, unica nel suo genere, fu promossa da Fondazione Venezia negli anni 2009 e 2012 nell'ambito dello sviluppo del progetto *M9*. L'indagine, presentata a "Florens 2012 – Biennale Internazionale dei Beni Culturali e Ambientali" nel novembre 2012 a Firenze, fotografa per la prima volta i contorni del variegato settore delle mostre fornendo dei numeri difficili da recuperare sia in forma singola che aggregata. La ricerca prese come fonte i calendari dedicati alle mostre di alcuni periodici di riferimento ("Il Giornale dell'Arte" ed "Exibart") e una piattaforma che raccoglieva comunicati stampa: la raccolta dati svolta stimava che in Italia venivano inaugurate circa 11.000 mostre all'anno, distribuite più o meno sull'intero territorio nazionale.

Oggi gli strumenti di documentazione e aggiornamento sono rappresentati da diversi periodici di settore generalmente consultabili in rete; però si tratta quasi esclusivamente di pubblicazioni indirizzate ai consumatori di mostre e/o agli studiosi d'arte, e sono principalmente riservate a contenuti storico-artistici.

Da qui la necessità e l'interesse di avere a disposizione un nuovo strumento di indirizzo per il settore mostre che si basi su una sistematica raccolta dati, con il fine di agevolare la loro consultazione e la rielaborazione mirata rispetto a specifiche ricerche.

Introduzione

La piattaforma *My Exhibition*[2] è nata, per esempio, con l'obiettivo di diventare un punto di riferimento permanente per gli operatori del settore mostre, sia in ambito museale che all'interno di spazi dedicati. Il mercato *B2B* oggi non offre un riferimento, uno strumento, dove approfondire esperienze e trovare informazioni e dati sui temi della messa in scena e della divulgazione per il settore mostre e musei.

In questo contesto, *My Exhibition* diventa un luogo dove l'arte del mettere in mostra viene affrontata anche da un punto di vista concreto, fattuale. Uno spazio specializzato che pone come assunto la collezione e come tema di progetto il percorso multidisciplinare che porta a creare il dialogo con il pubblico prima, durante e dopo la visita.

La base progettuale dell'*exhibition design* contemporaneo è rappresentata dall'integrazione tra scenografie, allestimenti, materiali, strumenti didattici, apparati tecnologici

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e multimediali, percorsi e segnaletica, programmi promozionali e social media marketing.

Per offrire una positiva soluzione a queste esigenze, i professionisti cui ne è affidata l'interpretazione devono offrire un ampio spettro di competenze specialistiche, in grado di valorizzare i contenuti di un'esposizione attraverso un dialogo concettuale e fisico che coinvolge luoghi, spazi, architetture e apparati nell'ambito della cultura, del marketing e della comunicazione. *My Exhibition* si pone come obiettivo di rappresentare la sintesi di tutto questo organizzato in banche dati consultabili e progettate per produrre ricerca.

La piattaforma

My Exhibition si configura come una piattaforma dedicata alle mostre e agli allestimenti museali già realizzati, in corso o in programma nel panorama italiano. Uno spazio digitale capace di ospitare un archivio trasversale, per offrire un supporto utile ed efficace a chi intende progettare una nuova mostra o approfondire la sua conoscenza in merito. Un luogo, quindi, per sua stessa natura multiforme e aperto, dove i dati possano trasformarsi in idee e le singole esperienze più innovative e meritevoli possano diventare punto di partenza di *best practices*. Un confronto che intende offrire nuove opportunità di valorizzazione per i professionisti del settore e allo stesso tempo è in grado di generare nuovo interesse per chi vuole affacciarsi a questa realtà.

Il sito dopo un primo avvio sperimentale è alla sua seconda release e da inizio luglio 2025 sono state aggiornate le modalità di raccolta e archiviazione dei dati.

La piattaforma è suddivisa in una sezione giornalistica che propone approfondimenti su progetti e protagonisti e un'ampia sezione riservata alle banche dati.

All'interno di questa parte, in costante evoluzione, gli argomenti non hanno vincoli di recensione e tendono a monitorare progetti e servizi innovativi sempre connessi al concetto di *messa in scena*. Sono inoltre previste rubriche affidate a esperti del settore che potranno gestire lo spazio giornalistico a loro dedicato in una logica di blog, con un'attività diretta oppure ospitando esperti da loro selezionati. Questo spazio ha l'obiettivo di avviare e coltivare relazioni con le principali istituzioni museali e con esperti che a vario titolo si occupano di mostre ed esposizioni.

La seconda parte della piattaforma è dedicata alla banca dati e, in particolare, a tre tipologie di catalogazione: mostre, professionisti e spazi. L'obiettivo è quello di rendere possibile la storicizzazione dei contenuti al fine di consentire agli utenti la possibilità di consultare i dati all'interno dello stesso anno oppure commissionare ricerche più articolate che necessitano di incrociare dati riferiti a diversi anni di indagine.

La banca dati

Alla base del progetto ci sono, quindi, tre data base interconnessi e dedicati a tre diversi gruppi di informazioni: *Catalogo Mostre*; *Catalogo Professionisti*; *Catalogo Spazi*.

La definizione dei campi delle sin-

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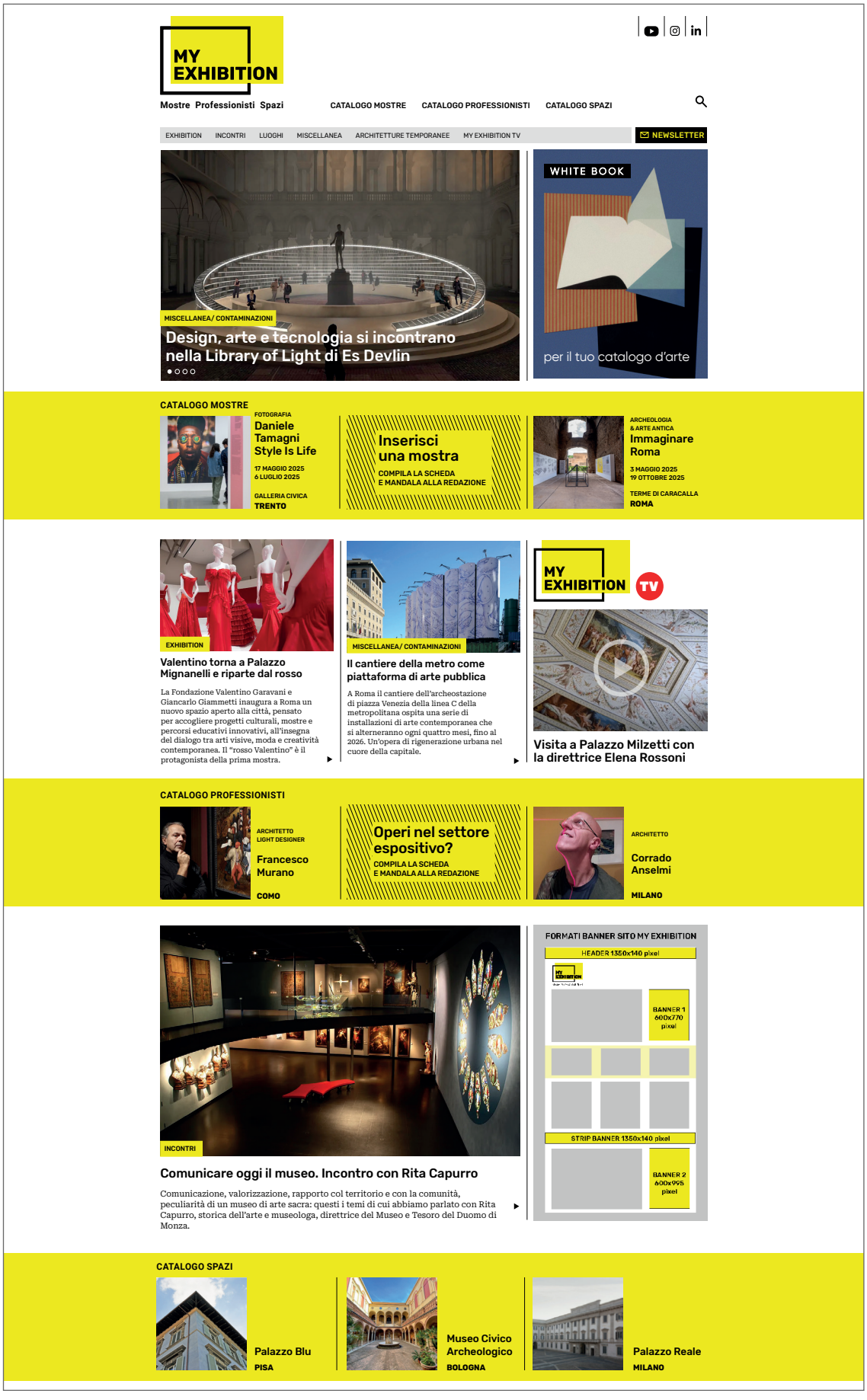

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gole schede di rilevamento ha rappresentato uno dei passaggi più importanti dal punto di vista metodologico; per tale ragione la loro elencazione è sinteticamente riportata di seguito.

Il *Catalogo Mostre* ogni anno censisce le mostre a pagamento, ovvero tutte quelle mostre che prevedono un biglietto di ingresso diretto o aggregato al biglietto di ingresso al museo. La stima annua per questo data base è di circa 1.800 – 2.000 nuove mostre all'anno distribuite su tutto il territorio nazionale. La pubblicazione sulla piattaforma è gratuita come la consultazione delle informazioni di base.

La scheda di raccolta dati, scaricabile anche dalla home page della piattaforma per la compilazione, è suddivisa in tre parti: la prima pubblicata e consultabile raccoglie i dati anagrafici (titolo, sottotitolo, date e orari di apertura, luogo e indirizzo). Le mostre sono state classificate in funzione delle loro tematiche in undici categorie: Antropologia, Archeologia e Arte antica, Architettura, Arte, Arte contemporanea, Arti applicate, Design e Moda, Fotografia, Scienza e Tecnologia, Sport, Storia. Infine, un campo aperto dove inserire un'eventuale tipologia non compresa nei campi a risposta chiusa.

La seconda parte, anche questa a consultazione libera quando presente, raccoglie i dati di caratterizzazione professionale e opzionali: curatore, comitato scientifico, promotore, produzione, patrocini, sponsor, sponsor tecnico, progetto di allestimento, realizzazione dell'allestimento, progetto illuminotecnico, illuminotecnica, immagine coordinata, grafica della mostra, multimedialità, ufficio stampa, catalogo, pubblicazioni di riferimento, prezzo del biglietto (intero e ridotto), presenza della prenotazione online.

La terza parte, utilizzabile per la ricerca, raccoglie dati organizzati e analitici circa: i percorsi di visita all'interno della mostra, la tipologia delle opere, la loro provenienza, il numero e i vincoli allestitivi, il progetto allestitivo, la presenza di supporti digitali che accompagnano la mostra fisica, informazione sull'applicazione di Economia circolare, raccolta dati sulle caratteristiche di sicurezza previste nello spazio di visita. La scheda è completata dall'immagine guida della mostra, da alcune foto di dettaglio dell'allestimento (immagini adatte alla lettura dello spazio), dal comunicato stampa e infine dai riferimenti di compilazione e dai contatti per approfondimenti e specifiche.

Il metodo di lavoro e la raccolta dei dati prevede: il monitoraggio delle principali testate on-line di settore, dei periodici specializzati, e delle pagine cultura dei principali quotidiani nazionali; la presa di contatto con gli uffici stampa e le direzioni degli spazi espositivi per la raccolta delle cartelle stampa e dei colophon delle mostre, mirata all'apertura di un rapporto continuativo per riunire i dati delle eventuali mostre successive. Infine il contatto con il curatore della mostra e il progettista dello spazio espositivo per mettere insieme elementi di dettaglio sulla mostra.

Ad oggi, i dati da raccogliere per la definizione di una scheda mostra prevedono un lavoro su più fronti, in quanto non esiste una classifica-

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zione oggettiva riconosciuta.

Prendendo a esempio altri media come i film, occorre risalire al 1998, quando Zanichelli pubblicò la prima edizione del *Dizionario Morandini* che classificava e raccoglieva dati tecnici e di contenuto delle opere cinematografiche. Il loro vantaggio era che fin dagli albori del cinema esistevano i titoli di coda al termine dei film e chiunque poteva leggere ogni dettaglio riguardo ai professionisti che avevano realizzato l'opera.

Nel settore delle mostre non si è ancora diffuso questo tipo di riconoscimento culturale, ma un tentativo è certamente rappresentato dalla buona prassi di pubblicare nel catalogo ed esporre a inizio mostra il colophon con l'indicazione di "chi ha fatto cosa". È certamente particolare constatare che spesso il colophon, dagli addetti alla comunicazione, viene considerato uno strumento informativo riservato o non di rilievo.

È possibile scaricare la scheda in pdf compilabile[3] e nel caso che una mostra da recensire corrisponda alle richieste della piattaforma è possibile inviare la scheda alla redazione con la richiesta di pubblicazione.

Il *Catalogo Professionisti* ha l'obiettivo di raccogliere un'ampia selezione di figure professionali che operano nell'ambito dei beni culturali. In questo caso non ci sono riferimenti numerici e ci troviamo di fronte a un universo che negli anni sarà in continua espansione. La pubblicazione sulla piattaforma non prevede costi per il professionista che potrà compilare e caricare la propria scheda in autonomia o con il supporto della redazione; i dati raccolti attraverso la scheda di censimento professionisti saranno tutti a consultazione libera. Il professionista sarà inoltre linkato a tutte le mostre a cui ha collaborato presenti sulla piattaforma e l'aggiornamento avverrà automaticamente.

La scheda propone un'ampia tipologia di professioni a campo chiuso ed è comunque prevista la raccolta del dato anche con un campo aperto per "Forniture tecniche" e per professioni meno ricorrenti con un campo "Altro" e richiesta di specifica. Le specializzazioni principali sono: Architetto, Curatore, Light designer, Sound designer, Graphic designer, Interaction designer, Videomaker, Web designer, Social media manager, Performer, Allestitore, Editore, Ufficio stampa, Pubbliche relazioni, Didattica. Segue la raccolta dei dati anagrafici del professionista o dell'azienda con specifica dell'anno di costituzione e del numero di addetti. Una breve descrizione della attività svolta, l'indicazione dei contatti e un breve elenco degli ultimi progetti espositivi a cui ha collaborato completano la scheda.

La raccolta dati della scheda professionisti ha un percorso più lineare: in sostanza, il riferimento principale è la scheda mostra che fornisce una prima mappatura dei professionisti a cui sottoporre la presenza sulla piattaforma.

A questa metodologia si aggiunge anche il monitoraggio delle principali testate on-line di settore per individuare professionisti che abbiano collaborato a mostre che non prevedono un biglietto di ingresso, come ad esempio alcune fondazioni culturali con programmi espositivi consolidati, musei privati e gallerie

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MY EXHIBITION

Mostre Professionisti Spazi

CATALOGO MOSTRE CATALOGO PROFESSIONISTI CATALOGO SPAZI

EXHIBITION INCONTRI LUOGHI MISCELLANEA ARCHITETTURE TEMPORANEE MY EXHIBITION TV

NEWSLETTER

CATALOGO MOSTRE

Veduta della mostra. Archivio MUSE - Museo delle Scienze, fotografo Michele Purin

SCIENZA & TECNOLOGIA

Food Sound. Il suono nascosto del cibo

Quale è il ruolo dei suoni nella nostra relazione con il cibo? La mostra del MUSE di Trento "Food Sound. Il suono nascosto del cibo" si propone di rispondere a questa domanda con un innovativo approccio narrativo-scientifico e una modalità di fruizione guidata da suoni binaurali

Food Sound
22 febbraio 2025 - 11 gennaio 2026
MUSE - Museo delle Scienze
Corso del Lavoro e della Scienza, 3
Trento

A CURA DI:
Vincenzo Guarnieri con Chiara Quartero con la supervisione di Massimo Bernardi e Patrizia Famà - MUSE e Massimiliano Zampini - CIMeC Università degli Studi di Trento

PROMOSSA DA:
MUSE - Museo delle Scienze da un'idea di Vincenzo Guarnieri

PRODOTTA DA:
MUSE - Museo delle Scienze

PATROCINI:
Provincia Autonoma di Trento

SPONSOR:
Lavazza; COREPLA; ITAS Mutua

PROGETTO ALLESTIMENTO:

MY EXHIBITION

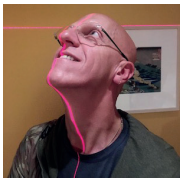
Mostre Professionisti Spazi

CATALOGO MOSTRE CATALOGO PROFESSIONISTI CATALOGO SPAZI

EXHIBITION INCONTRI LUOGHI MISCELLANEA ARCHITETTURE TEMPORANEE MY EXHIBITION TV

NEWSLETTER

CATALOGO PROFESSIONISTI



ARCHITETTO

Corrado Anselmi

Lo studio opera prevalentemente nell'ambito del recupero di contesti storici ed è specializzato nella progettazione di allestimenti museali stabili e temporanei. I progetti sono orientati alla risoluzione delle problematiche evidenziate dai luoghi o dal cliente, con l'ideazione di soluzioni specifiche che siano evocative e rispettose del contesto ambientale o storico di riferimento. Negli allestimenti museografici stabili e temporanei, i progetti sono impostati all'interpretazione delle opere da esporre in stretta relazione con i luoghi espositivi ma salvaguardando i criteri di conservazione e tutela. Molta importanza viene data allo studio della relazione percettiva fra il pubblico e le opere attraverso la progettazione specifica degli elementi per il loro supporto e protezione.

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MUSEO DI ROMA PALAZZO BRASCHI
ROMA

ARTE
De Nittis
24 FEBBRAIO 2024
30 GIUGNO 2024
PALAZZO REALE
MILANO

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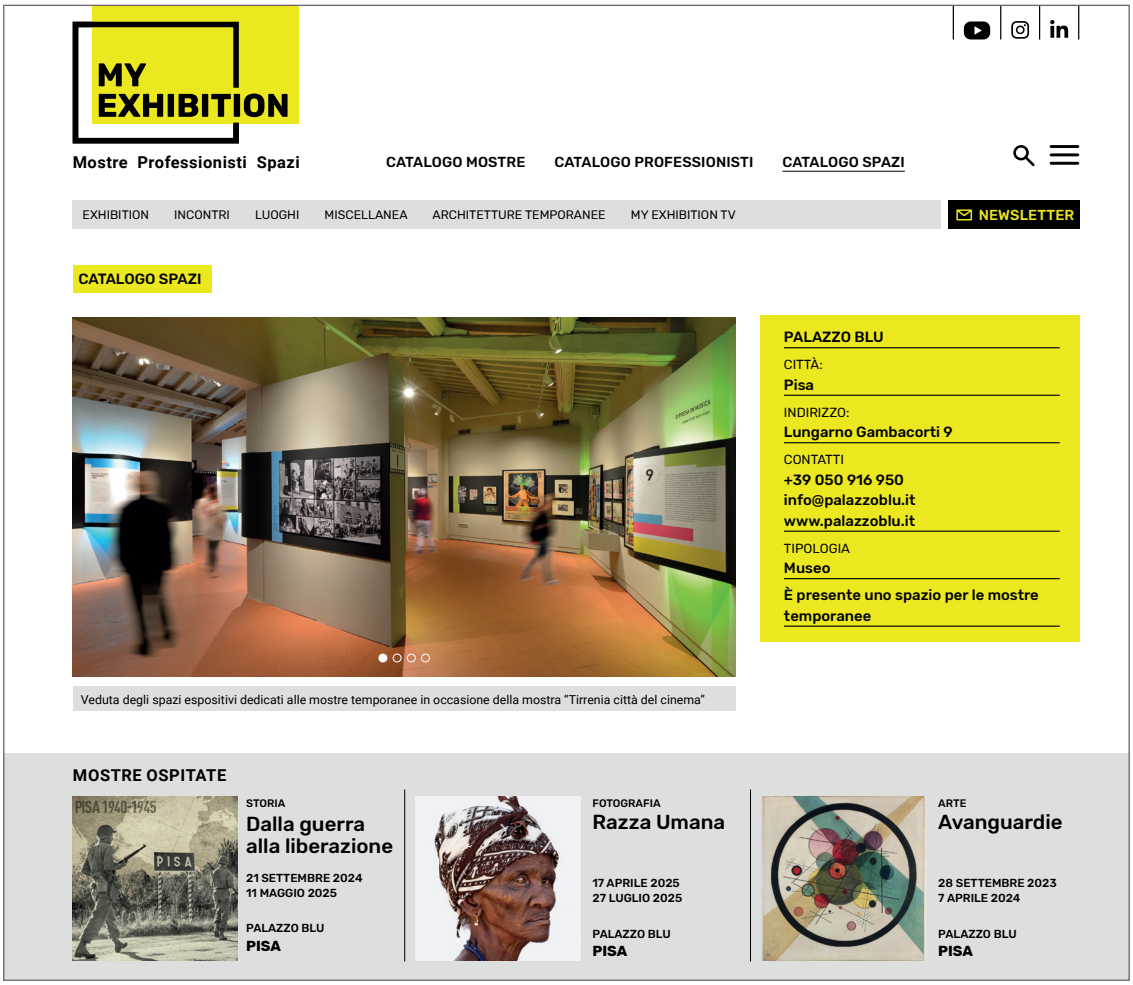

d'arte particolarmente attente al percorso espositivo e alla comunicazione della mostra.

Questa tipologia di scheda viene proposta al professionista accompagnata da una lettera che spiega l'utilizzo dei dati e il contenitore che li andrà a ospitare; nella seconda release della piattaforma è stato previsto che il professionista/azienda possa scaricare la scheda, compilarla in autonomia e spedirla alla redazione.[4]

Anche per il *Catalogo Spazi* l'indagine ha il vantaggio di costituire un insieme di istituzioni e strutture aperte e in funzione con una tendenza di incremento molto bassa.

La prima richiesta proposta dalla scheda è la classificazione e prevede la suddivisone in: Spazio pubblico, Galleria Civica, Spazio indipendente, Parchi e giardini, Museo, Museo nazionale, Galleria privata; anche in questo caso è presente una categoria "Altro" all'interno della quale è richiesto di specificare eventuali ulteriori tipologie di appartenenza.

La scheda è divisa in due parti sia per tipologia di informazioni che per modalità di fruizione. La prima parte è aperta in teoria a tutti gli spazi espositivi ed è in libera consultazione sulla piattaforma; la seconda parte, da compilare solo nel caso in cui il luogo contempli uno spazio dedicato alle mostre temporanee non è consultabile on-line, ma verrà utilizzato esclusivamente per la ricerca.

In particolare, la scheda si compone di una classificazione tipologica

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come specificato sopra, una raccolta dei dati di anagrafica, la seconda classificazione di edificio storico e l'indicazione di uno spazio mostre.

Le informazioni richieste nella sezione sulle caratteristiche dello spazio prevedono una raccolta dati specifica e, a solo titolo esemplificativo, si riportano alcune domande: numero di visitatori che lo spazio può accogliere contemporaneamente, la dimensione dello spazio in metri quadrati, lo sviluppo delle pareti in metri lineari, la tipologia di impianti presenti (sicurezza, climatizzazione,...), le modalità di accesso, i servizi accessori presenti. In sostanza tutte quelle informazioni necessarie per lo svolgimento di mostre con eventuali prestiti provenienti da altri musei nazionali o internazionali oppure ragguagli necessari alla progettazione preliminare di una mostra sia in termini di contenuto che di allestimento.

La tipologia dei dati presenti nella scheda richiede una compilazione, al di là della parte anagrafica, con un responsabile dello spazio che, oltre a fornire informazioni attendibili e veritiere, autorizzi alla diffusione di alcune informazioni anche se trattate in forma riservata.

Anche in questo caso gli spazi vengono censiti a prescindere della tipologia di mostre svolte all'interno (gratuite o a pagamento) e si stima che l'universo di indagine sia composto da circa 5.000 *record*.

Oggi resta difficile prevedere come potrà ampliarsi negli anni la piattaforma, ma le intenzioni dei progettisti sono quelle di fornire al mercato uno strumento di consultazione per il *B2B* utile ai professionisti, agli operatori del settore, agli amministratori pubblici e agli enti formativi.

L'analisi dei dati raccolti può portare ogni anno a fornire un utile strumento di lettura del mercato delle mostre sia a produrre ricerche mirate su specifici campi di indagine.

Dall'idea al progetto

Design People è un'agenzia di comunicazione integrata per il settore Cultura e intende essere un riferimento per offrire servizi e prodotti innovativi e accessibili.

Il team di professionisti di *Design People*, ha maturato esperienze dirette in ambito espositivo-museale ed editoriale. Una competenza che ha avuto origine alla fine degli anni Ottanta, con l'importazione in Italia del servizio di guide acustiche e l'avvio di collaborazioni con Palazzo Grassi, i Musei Civici di Roma e la Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna. Il passo successivo è stato l'organizzazione di mostre d'arte, attività inaugurata con "Cento icone russe in Vaticano". Il successo delle mostre "Splendori di Bisanzio", "Paul Gauguin e i pittori di Pont-Aven e Le Pouldu", "Modigliani, Soutine, Utrillo e i pittori di Zborowski" ha costituito il presupposto per la gestione pluriennale di spazi espositivi quali il Braccio di Carlo Magno in piazza San Pietro in Città del Vaticano e Palazzo Gabrielli-Mignanelli a Roma. In parallelo, è maturata un'importante esperienza anche nel settore editoriale. Durante l'attività espositiva si sono strette collaborazioni con le più importanti case editrici italiane – Bompiani, Marsilio, Skira, Electa – arrivando poi alla direzione di una casa editrice, Editrice Compositori, specializzata in arte, architet-

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tura e design che, oltre a pubblicare circa 70 novità editoriali all'anno, vantava un settore specializzato nei periodici illustrati: "Ottagono", mensile di design, "Rassegna", trimestrale di storia dell'architettura diretto da Vittorio Gregotti prima e da François Burkhardt dopo e "OP/ Opera Progetto", rivista semestrale dedicata all'architettura costruita e alla cultura del progetto, diretta da Gabriele Cappellato.

L'agenzia, costituita nel 2012, ha avviato l'attività affiancando aziende ed enti pubblici per sviluppare azioni e strumenti di comunicazione efficaci rispetto alle esigenze dei clienti o dei brand rappresentati. Nel 2024 è stata implementata la piattaforma web *My Exhibition* e nello stesso anno, con *White Book*, si è dato vita a una casa editrice aperta e indipendente, nata per dare voce e spazio ai temi dell'età contemporanea.

Energie e competenze sono rivolte ai settori della Cultura: dai musei alle università, dall'editoria agli enti di ricerca, dalla pubblica amministrazione alle aziende private. Questo peculiare percorso permette oggi di coniugare un'agenzia di comunicazione integrata (*Design People*), l'informazione d'approfondimento (*My Exhibition*) e l'editoria (*White Book*) in una proposta complementare di azioni e servizi nel campo dell'arte e, più in generale, delle scienze applicate che si ritiene possa sviluppare ricadute positive sia nell'ambito dell'economia della cultura che in quello della ricerca istituzionale.

Endnotes:

1 Cfr. Ufficio Statistica - Visitatori e introiti musei 2024. https://statistica.cultura.gov.it/?page_id=961.

2 www.myexhibiion.it

3 https://www.myexhibition.it/inserisci-una-mostra/.

4 https://www.myexhibition.it/inserisci-un-professionista/.

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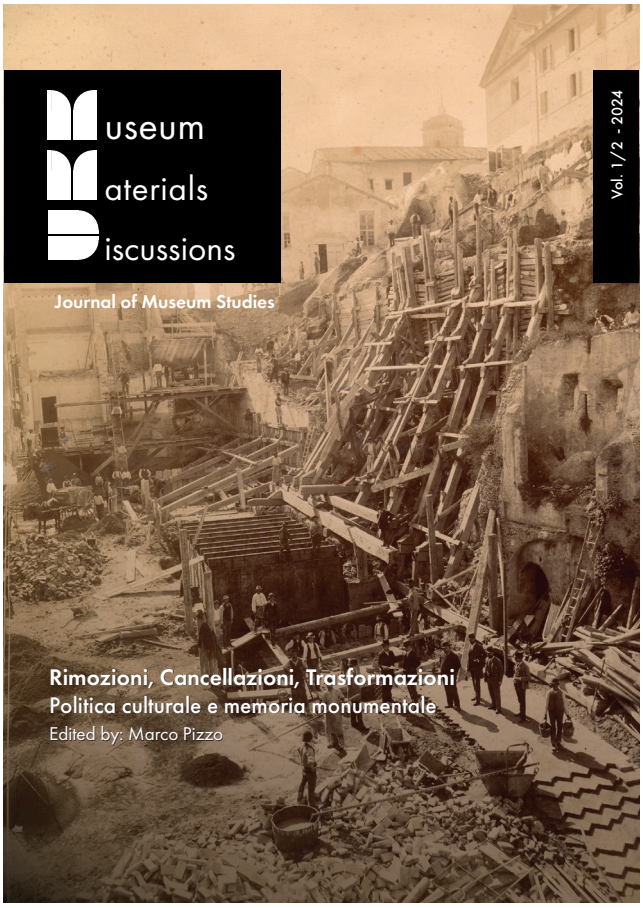
Previous volumes:

Vol. 2 No. 1 (2025)

The repairing museum

Edited by Dominique Poulot



Vol. 1 No. 2 (2024)

Rimozioni, Cancellazioni, Trasformazioni. Politica culturale e memoria monumentale

Edited by Marco Pizzo

MMD - Museum, Materials and Discussions. Journal of Museum Studies is an open-access academic journal in English, French, and Italian, devoted to museology, museography, Cultural Heritage as well as research on audiences and fruition with an international outlook, addressing both the life of museum institutions and collections, and the latest challenges they face in their broad cultural and social dimension.

MMD aims at promoting and enhancing the collaboration among researchers from the field of humanities, social sciences, architecture, and Digital Humanities through their complementary perspectives. It is addressed to scholars, students and professionals working in these specific disciplinary fields, but also readers interested in the current evolution of the debate on issues, methods and tools related to the material and immaterial aspects of museology in its relation to history and contemporaneity, and in connection with the progress of public welfare.