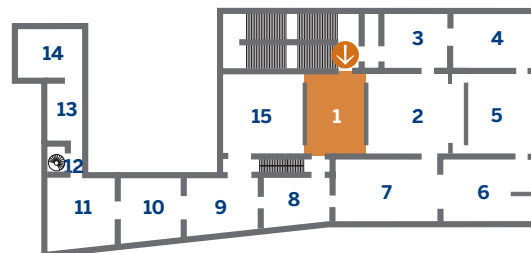


## 1. Dialogues.

### Rodin, Medardo, Wildt



Three fundamental exponents of not only the collection but also twentieth-century European sculpture, offer an impressive opening to the tour.

Auguste Rodin (Paris 1840 – Meudon 1917), the greatest French sculptor of his times, did not follow the traditional path of education. Fascinated by Michelangelo, he mediated the naturalism of forms, the memory of classicism, the harrowing dynamic nature of poses and the complexity of symbols, with sensational results.

Medardo Rosso (Turin 1858 – Milan 1928) is the greatest Italian sculptor of that period. A complex, rebellious figure, who was more famous in Paris where he lived for years than in his homeland, he experimented and anticipated new expressive languages. With visual perception and immediate psychology as his starting point, he seems to sculpture on the light and space itself, so that the material seems to dissolve and voids are eliminated.

Adolfo Wildt (Milan 1868 – 1931), a solitary “self-taught figure without rules”, but one with virtuoso technical skill, infinite patience, expertise, slowness and care. With very close ties to central Europe, his detailed, topical cultural references express both Expressionist and Symbolist elements, and similarities with the Secession and Art Nouveau.

The monument to the Burghers refers to an event in the fourteenth century when six inhabitants of a besieged Calais offered the enemy their lives to save the city. Commissioned by the city council, the work met with resounding success although Rodin’s wishes were not actually respected: he had wanted it to be placed on the town hall steps without a pedistal so it would have encouraged a sort of immediate dialogue between the ancient burgher heroes and the current world.

Medardo’s *The Concierge* and the *Child in the Soup Kitchen* (or at the kindergarden for a piece of bread) belong to what was still a profound realist phase, in which the interplay of light is given an emotive role, while the *Woman with a Veil* is the impression of an instant, a fleeting meeting on the street.

**1. Dialogues.**

Rodin, Medardo, Wildt

*Larass* is the model for the portrait of the architect who designed the gardens for Franz Rose's estate, Wildt's German patron.

The marble version was a mask dominating one of the paths in the park, with works of art scattered around, but destroyed by bombs during the Second World War.

The evocations that result from the combination of the sculptures in the room are around Rodin. According to reports, Rodin and Medardo both admired and respected one another and they even exchanged their works but this came to an abrupt end in 1898 when critics observed that Medardo might have influenced Rodin's innovative style in his monument to Balzac.

On the other hand, Wildt seems to have followed Rodin's lessons in his experimentation of the infinite expressive possibilities that every part of the human body offered.

Both Medardo and Wildt were involved by Margherita Sarfatti in the first exhibition of the Italian *Novecento* in 1926, and they differed considerably from one another, both at a human and artistic level. Medardo makes the object unravel in light to create a mass in the rapid and transitory dimension of a gesture on wax; Wildt, on the other hand, excavates and pierces, creating voids that become the expression of a volume while the marble yields to a finish that distorts its characteristics. What do such diverse choices have in common? The conscious aim, followed by both but each in their own way, to be able to cross the limits of sculpture.

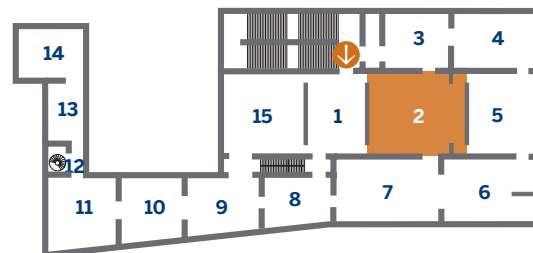
*Above the door:*

*Gerolamo Bruscaferro (1677-1745), Virtue and Constance, ca. 1702, fresco in stucco frame*

**The itinerary continues in room 2,  
to the left of the museum entrance**

**Please return this card**

## 2. From the Macchiaioli to scientific Luminism



The latest French trends, from anti-academic Realism to the more recent examples of landscape following the Barbizon school were presented in Paris in 1855 at the Universal Exhibition.

Various Italian artists visited it with great interest: in Italy art was experiencing the path of the “real” and the Academy was losing its role as guide; furthermore, painters of different origins were united in trying their hands at painting outdoors – elaborated by real facts and worked through in an innovative fashion – whilst also having an opportunity to meet on the battle fields of the Risorgimento, sharing the same patriotic ideals (and dying in great numbers).

It was in this context, between 1850 and 1860 that the *Macchiaioli* movement developed in Florence; its aim was to portray reality as seen by the human eye, in other words, through light and splashes of colour. This led to the study of new values in painting that were founded on the relationship between colours and volumes expressed in synthetic contrasts of light and shadow.

It was an innovative movement, and one that – owing to the clear differences in its studies, range and results - preceded but did not anticipate Impressionism (which was ‘officially’ founded in Paris in 1874).

The Tuscans Telemaco Signorini and Giovanni Fattori are outstanding exponents of the *Macchiaioli* movement, to which in many ways the Venetian Guglielmo Ciardi also belonged. Of Signorini’s two works on display here, the rigorous interior of the Florentine lunatic asylum surpasses the *Macchiaioli* instances, representing one of the greatest achievements of Italian painting of reality. Fattori’s canvas is almost like a snap shot of a military subject that has been treated with concise realism, without any rhetoric but with heartfelt participation.

This ‘scientific’ interest in the optical effects of colour combinations continues and intensifies also beyond the *Macchiaioli* movement; in Italy, on the other hand, having been unified in 1861, unsolved social issues gradually emerge and the centre of

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## **2. From the Macchiaioli to scientific Luminism**

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artistic research now coincides with the productive heart of the country, Milan.

Here, in 1891, at the first Triennale exhibition a group of paintings stands out with its pure colours that are “divided” into patches (hence the critical name “divisionism”). The underlying idea of divisionism is similar to that of the contemporary French *Pointillism*; however, on the one hand, in addition to an interest in the landscape (for example in the works on display here by Grubicy) the Italian works pay particular attention to social themes (for example in Morbelli’s intense Christmas); on the other, there is the expressed wish to resort to dreams (for example, Nomellini’s work here) or philosophical themes, paving the way for Symbolism.

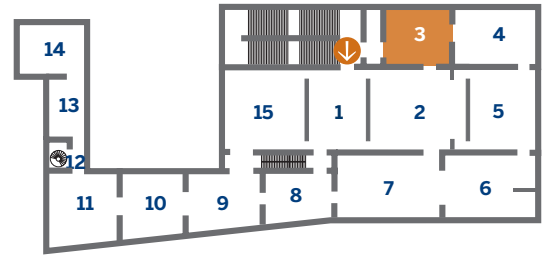
Medardo Rosso’s studies on the relationship between light, material and the surrounding space were just as rigorous and revolutionary, finding their highest expression in *Madame X*, a unique piece that the artist was extremely fond of and which he donated to the museum, together with other sculptures. The amazing, anticipating abstraction of this work became an unavoidable reference for countless artists after him.

*Above the door:*

*Gerolamo Bruscaferro (1677-1745), Glory and Eternity (west door); Divination and military Goodwill (east door), circa 1702, frescoes in stucco frame.*

**The itinerary continues in room 3:  
with your back to room 1, turn left**

### 3. From Realism to the Belle époque



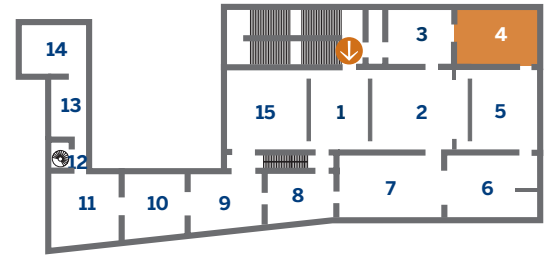
Between 19th and 20th centuries, the most important European countries and the United States witnessed what proved to be staggering industrial development, accompanied by continuous fundamental technological progress, urban revolutions and great expansionist and colonial designs.

Maker and protagonist of this new world, the bourgeoisie also expressed a demand for self-representation, thus encouraging the birth of new painting genres

Numerous universal exhibitions offered an opportunity for international exchange; in addition, it was in this context that art merchants began to play a new, decisive role - from Paul Durand Rouel to Goupil with his branches in many European capitals and in New York – in mediating and meeting their clients' tastes and determining and promoting the success of artists. Amongst these were the "Italians in Paris": Giuseppe di Nittis and Federico Zandomenighi - whose works on display here focus on female figures – interpreting the social circles with the greatest skill, and achieving both fame and success in the French capital. Noteworthy are also the painting by the Spaniard Zuolaga, purchased at the 1903 Biennale, with its great expressivity and elegance, and the family group that Giacomo Favretto painted when he was barely twenty-four years old, skilfully paying great attention to detail, interplay of light and eyes.

On the other hand, social themes were still receiving attention and being met with appreciation, with portrayals of scenes of a labourer's or farmer's life, filtered through the lesson of Impressionism but understood and reworked differently. For example, the light in the splendid canvas by the Spaniard Sorolla is completely Mediterranean; it was displayed at the 1905 Biennale where the city of Venice made a considerable investment to purchase it, together with the *Peasant Girl* by the Dutch artist Toorop. Another example is Liebermann's calm and delicate portrayal of the lacemakers.

## 4. Expressions of symbolism and secession



Positivist faith in industrial and technological progress was no absolute dogma. On the contrary, at the end of the nineteenth century in Europe intellectuals, artists and men of letters of different social standing all distanced themselves from these values; they were expressing the need to go 'beyond' the rational-scientific fact of visual perception and to pay more attention to spiritual contents, the world of ideas, the unfathomable nature of the abysses of the mind, the different possible network of sensations and their portrayal using evocation and symbolic synthesis.

The roots of this symbolist aesthetics lie in Baudelaire's poetry (his *Fleurs du Mal* published in 1857 was to be a source of inspiration for many painters in the following generation) whilst its theoretic support is to be found in the philosophy of Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche as well as scholars such as Mallarmé. It spread throughout Europe in greatly differing forms that all shared the refusal of themes linked to topicality – preferring references to poetry, mythology and psychological studies – and the tendency to favour a sort of integration between the arts, taking Wagner's *total work of art* [*Gesamtkunstwerk*] as an example.

It is precisely this idea of 'total work of art', in which elements of symbolism, painting, sculpture, architecture and decoration all come together, that was also the source of inspiration for artists in Central Europe who were fed up with academic authority and the official organisation of the art system and thus detached themselves during the 1890s, creating alternative movements, the so-called "secessions".

The first (1892), established in Munich by Franz von Stuck, was followed in 1897 by the most famous one in Vienna under Gustav Klimt; the following year saw Berlin as protagonist, including artists such as Max Klinger and Edvard Munch.

Important works by all these protagonists are on display here, many of which were purchased by the city of Venice at various editions of the Biennale from 1899 to 1912.

The at times impenetrable and enigmatic nature of the female figure, one of the

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## **4. Expressions of symbolism and secession**

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typical themes of symbolist poetry, is portrayed in two works by Fernand Khnopff, an eccentric figure in this artistic galaxy; he was Belgian as was George Minne, a major sculptural symbolist, on display here with one of his skinny, dramatic figures of adolescents.

Three Italian works are on display: in De Maria's the landscape is a metaphor for the artist's state of mind whilst in Tito and Previati's mythological images symbolist themes are combined with decorative design.

Von Stuck's *Medusa* is characterised by dark tones, and a dense and allusive atmosphere while the continuous and sinuous line of Klinger's *Bather* anticipates one of the dominant characteristics of Art Nouveau.

With its strong emphasis on colour, agonising tension of the hands and restless sensuality, Klimt's *Judith II* anticipates expressionist themes. The influence of Secessionism is also evident in Wildt's marble and gold group of sculptures.

Three of Munch's drawings are on display here (together with a soft varnish by the 'diabolic' Félicien Rops), revealing the characteristic traits of his dramatic, desperate and 'modern' awareness of the precariousness of the human condition.

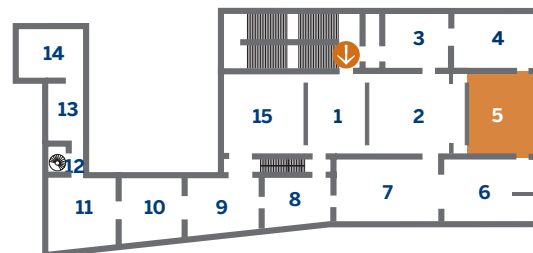
*On the ceiling:*

*Nicolò Bambini (1651-1739), The Glory of the Pesaro Family (in the middle); Prudence and Fortitude (at the sides, in the half ovals), 1682, oils on canvas in the wooden sculpture arrangement*



## 5. Man and his thoughts.

Auguste Rodin  
and Adolfo Wildt



Rodin's thinker/poet, Wildt's silent men or faceless speakers and the essential spirituality of Chagall's Rabbi: these are all artists' insights into the most profound identity of the human being, with his eternal questioning of material and spirit, life and death.

The most famous exhibit here is probably Rodin's in the plaster version that was presented at the 1907 Biennale. The initial idea of the *Thinker* goes back to 1880 when the artist was commissioned with a monumental gate for the Musée des Arts décoratifs (that was never completed). Inspired by the *Divine Comedy*, with no less than 186 different figures this *Gate of Hell* was meant to rise to the symbolic portrayal of human passion. Around 70 cm high, at the top the Thinker was Dante. Enlarged and exhibited as an individual sculpture in London and Paris in 1904, the work became a modern thinker, a naked man reflecting on his fate: it met with such success that the artist was asked to create a bronze version (now in the Paris Rodin Museum).

The works on display here by Adolfo Wildt include a selection from the important nucleus of 43 works that the Wildt-Scheiwiller heirs donated to the museum in 1990, and which reveal his unceasing formal studies and the dense web of different cultural references. In his abstract nude of *Silent Man* and the Phidian body resting on a Christian shield in *The Crusader*, the alliance between classicism and symbolism is extremely close whilst the work *The Speakers* is remarkable: originally the two figures had their backs to one another and were looking backwards while speaking, but were later modified by Wildt so that only one of the figures remained, removing its head, foot and arm, and thus emphasising the tension of the form.

The bronze version of the *Vir Temporis Acti*, the highly dramatic tormented figure of a soldier, is based on another large marble bust without arms, the legs cut off at the knee and a sword at his side.

Of great expressive intensity is the portrait of Franz Rose, the wealthy Prussian landowner who was a close friend and great patron of Wildt. Completed after his



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**5. Man and his thoughts.**Auguste Rodin and Adolfo Wildt

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death, on the back of the marble is the inscription "ubi es nescio sed sentio" (I don't know where you are but I can feel your presence, I'm thinking about you).

A mystical and visionary image lightened by the band it is resting on and from which two golden threads once hung like trickles of water, the other bronze *The Fathers' Soul*, differs in style. Finally, with its sense of death, perhaps inspired by Italy entering the war, in *Rosary* from 1915 one can perceive the influence of Klimt, Minne and Munch.

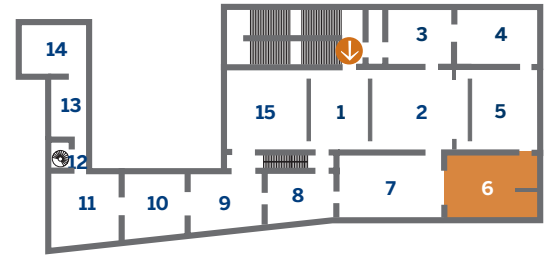
The only painting in the room is the famous *Rabbi* that Chagall painted when he was twenty-eight in 1914 when he returned to Russia after four prolific years in Paris: here the traditional portrait theme is combined with more modern, revolutionary solutions regarding the geometrical simplification of the lines, the emphasised and contrasting whites and blacks, in which different shades of light define the lean face of the man in prayer.

*Above the door:*

*Gerolamo Bruscaferro (1677-1745), Victory and Tragedy (west door);*

*Pieta and Temperance (east door), circa 1702 circa, frescoes in stucco cornices*

## 6. Venice: exponents of the Italian Secession



Following an initiative of the Venice City Council, the Biennale originated in 1895. Opened by the king, it was immediately met with resounding success and favoured celebrative names and confirmed trends when selecting the works to be exhibited.

Ca' Pesaro, on the other hand, was founded as space that was to be dedicated to young people "who were often forbidden from entering great exhibitions". It was with this aim in mind that Duchess Felicita Bevilacqua La Masa bequeathed the palazzo to the City in 1899. In 1902 it became the home for the new collection of contemporary art that the city was gradually purchasing, but it was not until 1907, when the twenty-three-year old Nino Barbantini became director, that Ca' Pesaro completely carried out the function of supporting young artists as envisaged by the donor.

The exhibitions "Bevilacqua La Masa a Ca' Pesaro" that, together with the Biennale were also supported by the City Council, were meant to be a sort of "field of young experimentation" as a collateral event to the main exhibition but they soon took on such strength and identity that they were soon playing an alternative, antagonistic role. From 1908 to 1914 they were an important reference point on the national art scene causing heated debates that were then quenched by the cannons of the First World War. The exhibitions recommenced in 1919 but in 1920 the group divided and exhibited outside the palazzo, thus putting an end to the most important phase of this experience.

The "Ca' Pesaro artists" – a significant selection of whom are on display here in this room - vary greatly from one another; what they have in common is their interest in experimentation and reflection on the latest studies on the international scene.

Umberto Boccioni is here because it was at Ca' Pesaro that he had his first solo exhibition in the summer of 1910 - immediately after futurist leaflets were dropped from the Clock Tower against "past-loving Venice", causing a sensation - with 42 of his works (including *Portrait of Sister Reading* on display in the room), documenting his studies of the previous five years, and in particular the divisionist lesson he learnt

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**6. Venice:** exponents of the Italian Secession

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in Rome from Giacomo Balla, of whom there is a portrait from 1901. Within a very brief period both were to be the protagonists of the pictorial concretisation of the futurist programme.

However, the driving forces in the Ca' Pesaro were Gino Rossi and Arturo Martini. Works on display here by the former, a restless, learned artist who learned much from Gauguin and Cézanne include a "Breton" portrait dated 1909 and an essential female figure painted shortly after; the latter, who worked together with Rossi in Paris (he exhibited at the 1912 *Salon d'Automne* together with Modigliani), was also open to the stimuli from the Viennese Secession, as can be seen by his extraordinary sculptures on display here, in which both expressionist and symbolist stylistic features are manifest.

Felice Casorati was an artist who exhibited at the Biennale when he was just twenty-four. He then became a member of the Ca' Pesaro group and was to be a key figure. In the famous painting on display here, purchased at the Biennale, are echoes of Secessionist and Central European evocations.

Intimate and reserved, Cadarin's nude is different; he began exhibiting at Ca' Pesaro when he was sixteen and maintained his original poetical style, detached from all the others.

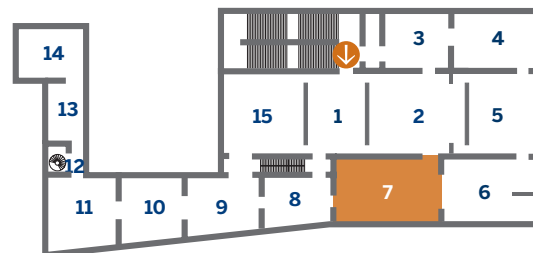
It was on the island of Burano that the young Ca' Pesaro rebels found their Pont-Aven, their refuge, cenacle and inspiration: on display here are two of the many works that found direct inspiration in the lagoon, one by Umberto Moggioni, expressing symbolist instances with distinct naturalism and one by Pio Semeghini, in which the ethereal surfaces of the enchanted houses evoke an almost metaphysical atmosphere.

*On the ceiling:*

*Giambattista Pittoni (1687 - 1767), Jupiter Protector of Justice, Peace and the Sciences, circa 1730, oil on canvas in the centre of complex decorations with carved wood.*

## 7. Archaistic expression.

### The 1920s and 1930s



During the early twentieth century diverse avant-garde artistic movements were founded and diffused, all united in the intransigence of their research and the primary importance of overcoming the norms that had guided artists' work for centuries.

Fauvists, Cubists, Futurists and Abstractionism – to name but a few in the artistic galaxies that were created and developed during this period – the first fifteen years of the century were characterised by an abundance of manifestos, declarations of intent, reviews, programmes of the total new foundation of art and effective, extraordinarily innovative results. However, it was inevitable that the tragedy of the First World War led to interruptions, conclusions, changes in direction and other actions and reactions.

This was why in Europe the twenties also witnessed the birth of groups and movements that were striving for a “return to order”, wanting to question the methods and results of the avant-garde, whilst also reviving a reinterpretation of the great figurative tradition of the past, with particular reference to before the Renaissance. For example, Picasso's position in all of this was emblematic: after a trip to Rome in 1917, in this period he produced not only Cubist works but also figurative compositions of sculptural and mock-classical bodies.

In Italy, under the Fascist rule that began in 1922 and lasted two decades, this trend found expression in *Novecento*, a movement founded by Margherita Sarfatti, a keen art critic who did her utmost to take advantage of her good relationship with Mussolini to launch an artistic project, the main objective of which was quality rather than ideology; the trend also found expression in several magazines, including *Valori Plastici*, which was published between 1918 and 1922, with articles by Carlo Carrà amongst others. A former leading exponent of Futurism, he distanced himself in 1915 and set to work on Giotto and Paolo Uccello's Primitivism before taking part in the most intense phase of metaphysical painting (after a fateful meeting with De Chirico in 1917 in a military hospital in Ferrara where both had been admitted).

The works on display here by Carrà are from the 1930s and synthesise the two

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**7. Archaistic expression.**The 1920s and 1930s

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fundamental moments of his research after 1915; there is also one of his works from the 1950s, placed alongside Sironi's *Figure with a Bowl* for comparison.

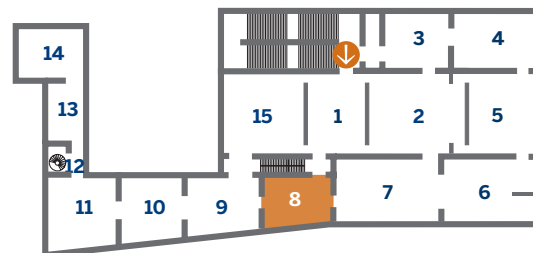
One of Sarfatti's favourites, the latter had also been a Futurist, before going on to express new visions that offered an original combination of the metaphysical, primitivism and a desolate vision of contemporary society.

However, the room also allows an immediate comparison of the "change in pace" of two outstanding artists on the Italian scene during that period: Arturo Martini and Felice Casorati, who were amongst the protagonists of the Ca' Pesaro movement. In Martini's works the expressionistic and almost grotesque intentions of his sculptures before the war make room for solemn meditation and solid, closed and essential forms. Casorati's girls, on the other hand, which are so different to the young ladies he painted fourteen years earlier, evoke a suspended dimension that is emphasised by pure forms, long shadows and apparent immobility.

Another exponent of the *Novecento* movement is Massimo Campigli for whom, after visiting the Villa Giulia Museum in Rome in 1928, the explicit evocation of Etruscan figures would always be his source of inspiration.

In a room full of Italian artists there is also a charcoal drawing, purchased at the 1924 Biennale, by the Belgian artist Constant Permeke; an original figure on the European scene between the two wars and indifferent to avant-garde experimentation, he found inspiration in the great Flemish masters, portraying the everyday life of fishermen and poor farmers with intense feeling.

## 8. Echoes of the metaphysical



Metaphysical painting expresses the subjectivity of vision, offering seemingly real facts to a variety of possible interpretations and perceptions: evoking the unconscious and dreams, it anticipates the surreal.

The history of metaphysical painting can be divided into two stages: the first was from 1911 to 1914 and was dominated by Giorgio de Chirico, while the second was from 1915 to 1920, and was marked by the meeting between De Chirico and his brother Andrea (Alberto Savinio) with Carlo Carrà, and later joined by Giorgio Morandi, Mario Sironi, and Filippo De Pisis. It was never a real movement as such but rather a sort of close but temporary collaboration during the unfolding of the artistic development of these different figures.

On display here are the different, unique results of their respective paths, with works after the years of their actual partnership in which “echoes of the metaphysical” are still loud and clear.

Two versions of Giorgio de Chirico's famous theme *Mysterious Baths* are on display here; it developed in the middle of the '30s and originated on the one hand in the memory of a beach he had gone to as a child in Volos in Greece, where he was born, and on the other, in an association of ideas between polished floors and water.

This was a return to the metaphysical, after the artist had devoted himself to other genres at the end of the twenties. On display here is also the beautiful portrait by De Chirico of Professor Lionello De Lisi (1885 – 1957), a great collector and famous neurologist who bequeathed an extensive collection to Ca' Pesaro, now on display in different sections of the museum.

In this room, the works from the De Lisi legacy include the *Urban Landscape* by Sironi from 1950, with clear metaphysical echoes in the cold, leaden colours chosen by the artist and a *Still Life* by Morandi from 1948.

Here, formal rigour and an atmosphere of silent contemplation imbue solemnity to

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**8. Echoes of the metaphysical**

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simple, discarded objects while the reworking of them in almost infinite variations, for example the nearby work from 1946 (a recent long-term deposit acquisition by the museum) endows Morandi's poetry with a sort of suspension of the dimension of time.

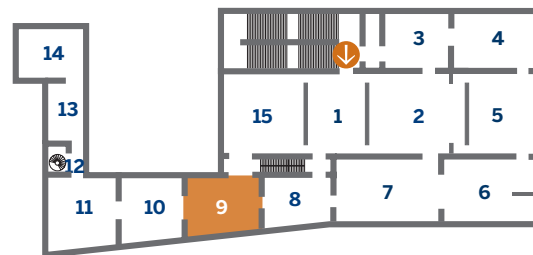
On display in one corner is a lithograph dating from the end of the nineteenth century by Odilon Redon, renowned as the father of the Symbolists but also a forerunner of some of the famous themes of the artists in this room, such as the interweaving of classical mythology and the contemporary, the portrayal of a reality that has been filtered through memory and imagination, and a predilection for dreams and fantasy.

*On the ceiling:*

*Gerolamo Bruscaferro (1677 - 1745), Jupiter and Juno, oil on canvas*



## 9. The infinite research of colour



All the works on display here are characterised by the fundamental, persistent role of an infinite, endless research on colour.

When he was still very young, Pierre Bonnard was a member of the *Nabis* group, which was active during the 1890s and aimed to overcome Impressionist naturalism and create a language that was based on colour and formal synthesis; at the beginning of the 1900s Emile Nolde was part of the movement *Die Brücke* (the Bridge) that not only fought for coordination amongst the avant-garde striving to renew art, but also dedicated the greatest attention in painting to the role of colour, with radical expressionist emphasis. This movement was founded in the same year (1905) as the group *Fauves* (wild beasts), led by Matisse and including Derain and then Dufy among its members. The name *Fauves* - coined by unkind critics during their first exhibition - comes from their use of bright, arbitrary colours in soft splashes to create smooth surfaces and achieve the total correspondence between emotive suggestion and expression in painting.

As was the case with many other avant-garde groups in that period, these movements - founded in the wake of Gaughin, Cézanne and Van Gogh - were more or less organised and they soon dispersed, with each artist going his own way and achieving his own specific results.

Emile Nolde's painting is the only one that goes back to when he was a member of the group mentioned above. Despite the layout that was still linked to Impressionism, here the emphasis, energy and "storm" of colours and the simplification of the forms all herald the Expressionist works this artist was to go on to produce.

Bonnard's nude, on the other hand, is dated 1931. Purchased at the 1934 Biennale, it goes back to one of the artist's favourite themes, offering a virtuoso portrayal of free light and colour that unfold in an interior on both the objects and a figure, altering radically the Impressionist lesson of an imaginary dimension.

Derain's canvas also goes back to the thirties and is devoted to a theme – landscape

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**9. The infinite research of colour**

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– that became one of his favourites after his travels to Italy in 1921, and experiencing different phases and at times contrasting sources of inspiration.

The period of the *Fauves* is now in the distant past although its memory can still be seen in the combination of cold and warm colours, large, soft and free brushstrokes. Having met the *Fauves* whilst also making other comparisons with the Expressionists of *Die Brücke* and the Cubists, from the 1920s onwards Dufy found his own original form of expression, still concentrating on the study of light, colour and his favourite subject matter - the atelier -, which he painted at times, as is the case here, without the artist from the 1930 onwards.

Works by the Italian painter and cultivated writer De Pisis are also on display here; after his metaphysical experience with De Chirico before the 1920s, he moved to Paris in 1925 where he remained for a good while, meeting the *Fauves* and studying the Impressionists; the influence of this experience is clear in the still life on display, while references to the 18th century strokes and colouring of painters such as Francesco Guardi can be seen in his large 1948 landscape.

Virgilio Guidi's studies also focussed on landscape, as we can see in this 1950 *Marina*, achieving spots of extreme rarefaction that become pure luminous space and colour.

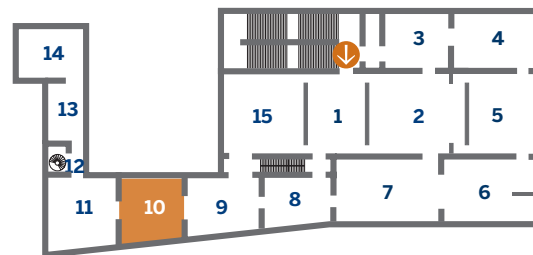
*On the ceiling:*

Antonio Buttafogo (before 1772 - 1817) attr., Triumph of Hercules, fresco.

**The itinerary continues in room 10,  
go straight along this wing of the palace.**

## 10. Incumbent ghosts of power.

The 1930s and 1940s



During this historically complex and dramatic period, totalitarian regimes established themselves throughout Europe.

Before leading up to the appalling catastrophe of the Second World War, the violence of dictatorships that is evoked in the name of the room also expressed itself in widespread ideological control from the thirties on in particular, affecting artistic expression as well.

While in Germany Hitler was having books and paintings burnt and banishing anything by the avant-garde as 'degenerated art', in the Soviet Union Stalin was persecuting many artists even though they had believed in and supported the Socialist revolution. For both, official art had to be rigorously realistic, celebratory and a form of propaganda. In Italy Mussolini founded Fascist academies, associations and trade-unions, conferring privileges and awards to only those artists who were aligned. And while Margherita Sarfatti tried to gain recognition for the official role of her movement *Novecento*, during the Thirties repressive methods and strict ideological observance and obscurantism prevailed in Italy as well.

The reaction to the avant-garde, some of the results of which we have seen in Room 7, and the need for a return to order did not completely correspond to dictatorial policies. The movement *New Objectivity* (*Neue Sachlichkeit*) for example, founded in Germany in 1925 with the aim of returning to figurative painting, included both instances of explicitly social criticism of some artists (that was to result in their being included in the "degenerates" in 1937), and the more 'Classicist' aspirations expressed by others. Influenced by metaphysical painting and associated with the magazine *Valori Plastici*, this "Classicist" current was also known as *Magic Realism*. Two of its main exponents in Italy were Antonio Donghi and Cagnaccio di San Pietro, and their works are on display here. Their immobile figures portrayed with such detailed realism and immersed in limpid light and restless, and pensive suspension really do create the effect of an ambiguous, alienating enchantment.

Several of the other works on display here deal with one of the regimes' favourite

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**10. Incumbent ghosts of power.**The 1930s and 1940s

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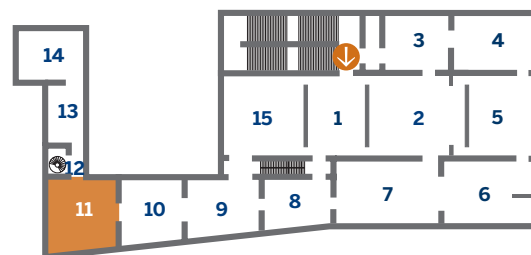
themes at that time, celebratory sports, but interpreted in a strange way: Martini's *The hundred-metre Sprinter*, portrayed whilst still immobile before the start is both anti-monumental and startling; Martinuzzi offers a classical portrayal of the boxer's muscles while he is realistically sitting on a stool in the ring whereas the black background and the lack of any details in *The Race* by the Russian painter Deineka are highly anti-realistic, drawing attention to the dynamism and tension of the pose.

The room houses two other works that are radically different. One is by Armando Pizzinato, a staunch adversary of the Fascist regime who did not paint from '43 to '45 but played an active part in the Partisan movement. On display here is a large canvas from '49 with a realism that is mindful of not only Futurist and Cubist influences but also of symbolic meanings, which was part of the heated debates of that period, amidst political commitment, renewed hope and the new nightmare of the Cold War. The same is evoked by Henri Moore's helmet, which is two interlocking pieces that have no meaning on their own. Here Cubism and Surrealism unite in the ambiguity of the portrayal of a figure that is no longer human.

*On the ceiling:*

Giambattista Crosato (ca. 1697 ca - 1758), *Dawn on the Carriage*, oil on canvas (*in the middle*); Allegorical female figures, fresco (*in the niches*)

## 11. Expressions of Surrealism and Abstraction



This room is named after two of the most important and complex avant-garde currents in the past century that still focused on the fundamental relationship between art and reality, with articulate but diverse results. The concept of abstraction in art implies distancing oneself from any kind of imitation of nature or visible reality and instead, encouraging the expression of interiority by means of painting. Surrealism starts with portrayals of the real world that seem to have been transformed but are combined in associations that have absolutely no rational ties; on the contrary, they are aimed at liberating the unconscious, chance, dreams and amazement.

While Wassily Kandinsky offers early twentieth century Abstract art the most lucid theoretical contribution, Max Ernst was one of the founders of Surrealism. Other members of this movement included Tanguy, Mirò and Jean Arp, the latter coming from another avant-garde experience, Dada. Paul Klee, on the other hand, was an Abstract artist friend, partner and colleague of Kandinsky in the Bauhaus movement and on display here is a pastel from the very year in which André Breton cited him in the first manifesto on Surrealism in 1924.

Indeed, the avant-garde movements were conversing: Kandinsky, for example, arrived in Munich coming from Moscow in 1896 when he was thirty, and was in touch with the French and Berlin movements. He founded the *Neue Künstlervereinigung München* (New Association of the Artists of Munich) between 1909 and 1913, followed by *Die Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider), the exhibitions of which included works by artists such as Picasso, Klee, Arp, Derain and Nolde, and offered an opportunity to compare new, diverse contemporary trends. In the meantime, his painting was gradually being freed from any kind of reference to material reality, thus creating a lyrical abstractionism that was founded on solid philosophical and aesthetical basis, with a close affinity to the language of music. In 1922 he joined ranks with the Bauhaus teaching staff, the extraordinary school of architecture, art and design established in Weimar and then Dessau and Berlin from 1919 to 1933. It was after this

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## **11. Expressions of Surrealism and Abstraction**

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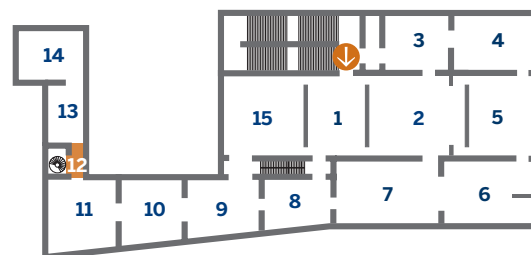
that its reflection on form, colour and space developed towards greater geometrical rigour and composition: the 1922 *White Zig Zags* on display here is testimony of precisely this stage.

The Bauhaus was closed by the Nazis. Klee sought refuge in Switzerland while Kandinsky immigrated to Paris. On his canvases that followed, such as the one on display here dated 1938, new motifs that were vaguely similar to embryonic organisms were added to the geometrical shapes.

The expressive research on these artistic trends continued until well beyond the middle of the century: on display here with a famous *mobile* from the early 1950s, Calder's abstractionism is both playful and ironic; Picasso, on the other hand, is in Ca' Pesaro for the first time - thanks to a long-term deposit - with a painting from the cycle *The Painter and the Model*, which was a constant theme in his work during the late 1960s, and in which Matisse's influence can be seen.

The works by some of the most famous exponents of Surrealism on display here go back to the 1950s as well: Max Ernst's disquieting man-animal-bird, donated to the museum by the artist; Tanguy's surreal landscape with meaningless objects; Mirò's watercolour evoking childhood visual associations. However, during this period Tàpies was also close to Surrealism: offering a bunch of incongruous objects that are a little magical and a little geometrical, the hand on display here seems to evoke both Mirò and Klee.

## 12. Transition



This room represents a 'transition' in both the true and metaphorical sense of the word.

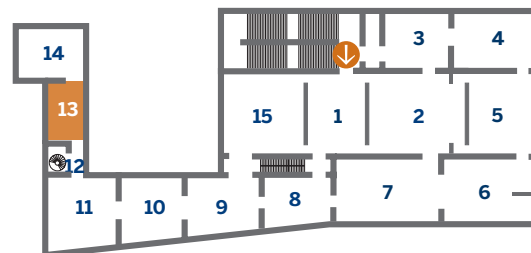
World War II was over. Europe was coming to terms with not only the material rubble but also contradictions and political failure, with human and civil drama, and with a new world to be built on a democratic basis while new threats were looming. Artists were seeking expressive forms that had nothing to do with the years of totalitarianism. A forerunner of the most innovative trends and sympathising with "the right side", on the democratic front, Picasso was the model for very many. Post-Cubism then became a dominant current, remaining as such until at least 1950. And this marked the new beginning.

Purchased by the City of Venice for the museum during the 1954 Biennale, Ben Nicholson's large canvas represents one of the most successful works of this trend. Nicholson recaptures Cubism in its different phases but he revives it, transforming the work into a sort of contemporary event that is still able to encompass its own formal history. This is how the painting's title should be understood; significantly, it includes not only the indication of the dominant colour, but also the day on which it was completed.



## 13. Abstraction of signs.

### The 1950s



This room marks the start of a unique path, offering examples from the intricate galaxy of the particular expressive moment which affected European, American and even Japanese artists in the fifties and sixties, but with different nuances, trends and names: *Informale* in Italy – that returned to the European art scene in this period, *Informel*, *Art Autre*, *Tachisme* in France, *Action painting* or *Abstract Expressionism* in the United States where New York became the most important reference point worldwide for creative innovation.

The *Informale* is not a group and neither is it an avant-garde movement; it is instead a conception of the artistic act as something individual, unique and direct, overcoming any kind of mediation, preventive codification or linguistic formalisation. It is both an existential and creative process, very closely linked to the terrible legacy of the Second World War. It aims at the freest possible expression of passion, tension and sensations, by transforming them into signs, action, colours and materials. Although it goes beyond the meaning the avant-garde attributed to this expression thirty years earlier, the matrix is therefore basically abstract. Trends that were part of this field include the abstractionism of action and of material, but also the abstraction of signs, and, to a certain extent, also Spatialism.

Exponents of these tendencies on display here include Eduardo Chillida and Marc Tobey with works that were awarded prizes at the 1958 Biennale and then donated to the museum by the artists. Chillida's sculpture is a sort of graphic sign in space that he creates with the incisions and torsions of a single piece of metal; with his interest in the linear abstraction of Oriental calligraphy, Tobey's work is also 'graphic' and is combined with research that is similar to that of American abstractionism.

During this period Tancredi also had an opportunity to carry out similar studies, in particular thanks to Peggy Guggenheim's support; the work on display here combine them with further sources of inspiration: on one hand geometrical abstraction and, on the other, the memory of light and local colour.

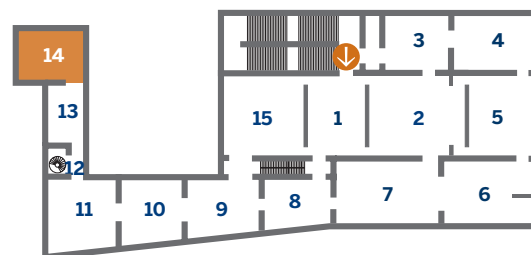
**13. Abstraction of signs.** The 1950s

The sign carved by Mario Deluigi is a study on space and the depth of the painting surface: his *grattage* not only goes beyond linearity, it also shapes the surface and reappraises the relationship between material, light and space.

An exponent of abstract art after various other experiences, during these years Bice Lazzari's work is abstract and expresses a fundamentally lyrical vision of painting.

Another artist who tried his hands at diverse styles during his development is Mirko: in the bronze sculpture on display here we can see a combination of reworkings of Oriental references with unexhausted plastic and spatial research.

## 14. Gestures and colour. The 1950s.



After the war, the Biennale reopened in 1948. The exhibitions that year included a Picasso retrospective, a Peggy Guggenheim collection and, with its own room, the group *Fronte Nuovo delle Arti*. The latter had been founded in '46 in Venice by several artists – Emilio Vedova, Renato Birolli, Ennio Morlotti, Armando Pizzinato, Giuseppe Santomaso, Alberto Viani, Bruno Cassinari, Renato Guttuso, Leoncillo Leonardi and Carlo Levi – with the aim of understanding and diffusing the latest artistic researches in Italy. This was a moment of great visibility and success for the group that, however, in an internal and international political context that was characterised by stark ideological contrasts, soon found itself questioning the role of the artist and the social function of art. The “realists” believed that direct, orthodox political commitment was necessary for the transmission of contents, while the “abstract artists” asserted the primacy of the freedom of inspiration. It was against the backdrop of this diatribe that the *Fronte* broke up in 1950.

Two years later, eight non-figurative painters including Afro Basaldella, Renato Birolli, Ennio Morlotti, Giuseppe Santomaso and Emilio Vedova founded the Gruppo degli Otto. At the Biennale in 1952 they were presented with these words: “*They aren’t and don’t want to be abstract painters ... [neither] do they want to be realist painters; they want to get out of this antinomy. If reality may be included in their arabesque image of a boat or any other object, they do not forego the enrichment that that object may give. If ... they find pleasure in a material ..., a poetic harmony of colour, the effect of a shade, they don’t renounce it. They aren’t puritans in art like the abstract artists: they accept inspiration on any occasion and they wouldn’t dream of denying it*”.

No less than five of the “Otto” are in this room: Emilio Vedova, one of the greatest Italian exponents of the gestural trend of the *Informale*, is here with a work of abstract expressionism in which colour is the absolute protagonist; Giuseppe Santomaso and Renato Birolli, with two paintings reflecting the definition of the “abstract-concrete” that characterised the group: for both artists the starting point is an everyday life subject, becoming an occasion or pretext for a work of lyrical abstraction in which colour plays a fundamental role. Moreover, in Morlotti’s painting the informal use of colour and dense matter still conveys an interpretation

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**14. Gestures and colour.**The 1950s.

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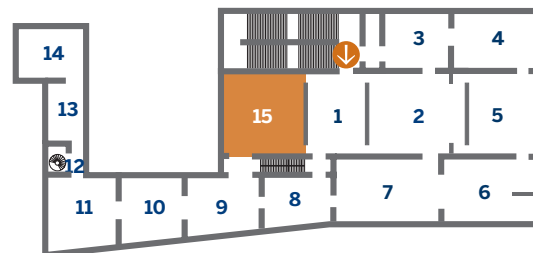
of recreation of nature. Afro joined the *Otto* after visiting the United States. This experience gradually resulted in a transition, as can be seen in the work on display here, from a Cubist-style expressionism to the freer, more emotional ground of informal abstraction.

After having fought in the Resistance movement, Leoncillo joined the *Fronte Nuovo delle Arti*. In 1953 he was commissioned with a monument to a Partisan woman fighter from the Veneto. As in all his works, he made it using multicoloured majolica: the pride and dynamic nature of the fight for liberation are evoked by the primary colours, and masses and voids of the moving figure. The one on display here is the first version of the work that was refused by the people who commissioned it because of the red colour of the scarf around the neck; it was purchased by the museum after a second version, made without the scarf around the neck and placed in the Venice Giardini, was destroyed by a Neo-fascist bomb.

Zoran Music was taken to Dachau and once he was freed he lived in both Venice and Paris. His sources of inspiration alternated between the hallucinated visions of his experience in the concentration camp, and the poetic memories of the Dalmatian landscapes he saw when he was young. The work on display, dating from the end of the nineteen fifties, is inspired by the latter and is an expression of his abstract experimentation, characterised here by curved forms, splashes and sandy shades.

**The itinerary continues in room 15,  
go back to room 9 and then turn left**

## 15. Spatial Art in Venice.



In 1946 Lucio Fontana wrote the *White Manifesto* in Buenos Aires, thus laying the theoretical basis for the *Spatial Movement* that sought an integral art that was no longer subjected to the limitations of the canvas or material and that could expand through new forms and expressive techniques.

Fontana returned to Milan in 1947 where he welcomed followers and conceptual criticism to his movement; in May of the same year he then drafted the First Italian Manifesto, formulating one new manifesto a year until 1958, resulting in a total of eight fundamental documents.

“... regarding those spaces as reality, that vision of material universal, of which science, philosophy, art, in the form of knowledge and intuition, have nourished the spirit of man” is just one of the statements in the 1951 Manifesto where the “Venetian” signatures of Anton Giulio Ambrosini, Mario Deluigi, Virgilio Guidi, Berto Morucchio and Vinicio Vianello appear for the very first time; the following two manifestos were also signed by De Toffoli, Tancredi, Edmondo Bacci and Gino Morandis.

The adhesion of the Venetian group that gravitated around the intellectual circles of Galleria del Cavallino became concrete with the “Spatial Exhibition” that was organised in Venice in 1953; it was here that Fontana’s original Spatialist vision, explicitly empirical and technical in nature, shifted towards overcoming both the abstract tendencies and the tendencies of the informal that were based on the bond man-nature; instead it was to concentrate on his own research of portrayal, or rather, on the creation of space in art and on the personal perception that is formed in emotive experience. Gesture and the subject matter of painting played a particular role in this, thus transforming the finely developed and carefully analysed Venetian tradition into an innovative tool.

These suggestions and tendencies were already implicit in the 1950 paper, *Proposal for a Regulation of Spatial Movement*: “the Spatial Artist no longer imposes a figurative theme on the viewer, instead, he puts him in the condition of creating it

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**15. Spatial Art  
in Venice.**

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himself, with his fantasy and the emotions he receives". One characteristic of the Venetian artists is their study of the constitutive values of creating art, of solids and voids, and of light and dark, tackling the theme and problem of light in original terms: the curved space, an absolute void onto which the entire evocative capacity of colour can be projected. It is the development of these 'grammars' that **Room 15** wants to present; the heart of the room is clearly Bruno De Toffoli's canvas: *La nuvola: Evento* [*The Cloud: Event*], painted in 1955 and which is remarkable for how it gives an account of the challenge taken up by the Spatial Movement as regards the third dimension. Two paintings by Anton Giulio Ambrosini are significant: *Pittura* [*Painting*], 1961 and *Motivo n.1* [*Motif no. 1*], 1962; both are testimony to how one of the movement's theoreticians fully confirmed his reflections and poetical intentions in his work. Exponents of later Spatialism, Bacci and Morandis study the relationship with tradition: Edmondo Bacci, *Avvenimento 321* [*Event 321*], 1958, with his penetration of the very atoms of colour and material, and Gino Morandis with *Immagine N. 140* [*Image N. 140*], 1962 with its wealth of description that is both agitated and of the utmost rigour. Luciano Gaspari and Bruna Gasparini are 'rediscovered' with two works, *Attrito di natura* [*Friction of Nature*] from 1962, and *Immagine spaziale* [*Spatial Image*] from 1958, both of which are of great emotive impact and full linguistic authority. Vinicio Vianello's canvas from 1949, *Alba*, is a testimony to the transition between the artist's different languages which are all in perfect harmony with the spirit's movement; in a manner of speaking on the borders of Spatialism, with *Momento di Natura* [*Moment of Nature*], from 1958, Saverio Rampin unites pictorial research with a study on reality.

The works by the artists Mario Deluigi and Tancredi are not on display here but can be admired in Room 13, which is devoted to the abstraction of signs. .

*Above the door:*

Gerolamo Bruscaferro (1677-1745), *History and Fortitude* (West door);

*Love of the Homeland and Venice* (East door), circa 1702, frescoes in stucco cornice

**Please return this card**

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