

THE SIGNS
OF THE SACRED

THE IMPRINTS
OF THE REAL



EDIZIONI MUSEI VATICANI

PRESENTATION

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We need to get close to works of art, to see them close to. To contemplate them with an eye ever more attentive to seeing signs in the details, the crosshatching and the form. Intimate art, less scenographic and disruptive with respect to painting and sculpture. Intimate art, which perhaps for this reason reaches the soul of the person more directly. Born from the soul of the artist who uses signs, codes and forms, and arrives in the depth of colour which is capable of de-codifying them.

An artistic expression of this genre cannot miss in the Papal collections, although until today those have not been well known. It cannot be missed because it is actually made up of these 'Signs of the Sacred' generated by the spiritual sensibility of so many artists during the 20th century.

With this exhibition we wanted to tell the story of the 20th century graphic arts nucleus in the Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art of the Vatican Museums, an exhibition in the heart of the Vatican, in the exclusive and imposing space of the Braccio di Carlo Magno. The exhibition has been staged here in order to be able to share it with the general public, but also addressing the enthusiasts and specialists, in order that they should get to know this precious selection of masterpieces, more than 150 of over 4,000 works, including prints, drawings and photographs, which make up the collection today.

The graphic arts collection in the Vatican Museums was set up at the same time as the Collection of Modern Religious Art (inaugurated 23 June 1973) but, just like the rest of these collections of contemporary art, had to await the important advent of the pontificate of Pope Paul VI who, on 7 May 1964, just a few months after his election, called contemporary artists to the Sistine Chapel. In this historic meeting the Pontiff appealed to artists, he apologized, and exhorted them to renew the fundamental link between art and faith, between their creativity and sensitivity and the foundational values of our Church. The history of the contemporary collections has been written since this moment, but is above all evident how the Vatican continued to recognise the fundamental role of the visual message, in particular in the graphic arts, in order to transmit and divulge messages of faith and spirituality so to penetrate the depths of the soul.

The initial nucleus of 1973, some few hundred prints and about sixty drawings, was constantly increased, initially thanks to Pope Paul VI himself and his closest collaborators, the 'monsignors of art', Pasquale Macchi, Enrico Fallani and Ennio Francia, who were the architects of much work to entice artists, gallery owners and benefactors to help in the creation of a unique world collection. The important key figure of Mario Ferrazza, the CARM Curator in those first years of its existence, must also not be overlooked. He was the first

person appointed to the collection who also played a determining role in its growth in successive years. Micol Forti succeeded him in 2000. She, together with Francesca Boschetti, has continued this determining and fundamental work of acquisitions and growth of the collection – an important nucleus of works by Guido Strazza came into the collection in 2018, and this year a selection of defining works by the great artist Sigfrido Bartolini has been acquired.

The nucleus today is to all effects an important 20th century graphic arts collection; a particularly rich and extensive nucleus which documents a century of both Italian and foreign prints and drawings, and includes some exceptional works. Among the artists best-known internationally appear works by Braque, Ernst, Klee, Kandinsky, Kokoschka, Matisse, Miró, Munch, and Nolde, whilst among the Italians works by Boccioni, Cambellotti, Casorati, De Carolis, Morandi, and Lorenzo Viani stand out, names for which the Collection also conserves, in the majority of cases, paintings or sculptures.

I worked for twenty years in the Vatican collection of prints and drawings conserved in that treasure house of Knowledge that is the Vatican Apostolic Library. An incredibly rich and unique fund of drawings, prints, maps and old photographs. Witnessing to the attention which successive Pontiffs, their Librarians, Prefects and Curators have paid over the centuries to that intimate and direct form of expression, of easy and immediate divulgation which are the graphic arts. The riches of the Vatican Library range up and include works of the present day, even though they are characterised prevalently by important and marvellous prints and drawings of past centuries. For two decades I worked with that form of art which from the time of its invention in the Humanistic period has had an extraordinary capacity to transmit, diffuse and make known, in an extraordinary and replicable way, the world of images and of the content entrusted to them. That art has done it in the simplest of ways, placing those signs produced on a matrix by different techniques on the surface of a sheet of paper.

For all these reasons I could not but welcome with enthusiasm the proposal for this exhibition which Francesca Boschetti made to me – together with Micol Forti – on my arrival as Director of the Vatican Museums three years ago. An exhibition which will bring an almost unknown collection to the attention of thousands of visitors – not counting the few works which, for reasons of conservation, are displayed in rotation in certain areas of the Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art. An initiative which provides for Sacred to be transmitted and made known, so much sacred iconography which is in these ‘signs’ which the printmakers have used, in different forms, to relate the story of their spirituality and make it known. Graphic arts have always shown an original face, innovative and experimental, but this character of seeking becomes determinant for the 20th century artists who elected the printmaking, its technical and stylistic potentialities, to veritable ‘laboratories’ addressed to the renewal of the modality of narration and traditional iconography. Within this context, it is, therefore, important to remember that graphic arts, in particular that from the be-

ginning of the 20th century, has represented, and still represents, one of the most fertile and liberal places for experimentation with form and style, rethinking basic concepts of art and re-defining their sense of mission in comparison with the past and the present.

This elegant and beautiful catalogue is thus the expression of this important exhibition, coordinated by Micol Forti, and led by the forefront efforts of Francesca Boschetti. Her fundamental and exhaustive essay on the history of the collection makes a point about the importance of its constitution, its different periods of acquisitions of masterpieces by Italian and foreign artists which mark the artistic history of the 20th century, but also its many benefactors who have contributed to the formation of this unique collection. The work of selecting for the exhibition has included the overall recognition of thousands of prints and drawings in the collection, from the verification of techniques of execution, to the supports and states of conservation, followed by historic and stylistic analysis of the folios.

I therefore thank Francesca Boschetti from the bottom of my heart for her commitment and her constant work during these past years, which have enabled her to acquire such a deep understanding of the consistency and value of this collection. Francesca has also picked out the specialists who have contributed to the catalogue: a friend and one time colleague Giorgio Marini, an elegant connoisseur of the world of graphic arts, and Giuseppe Trassari Filippetto, an expert of printmaking techniques, who with their contributions give lustre to the catalogue, which is the basis of a further catalogue of the collection which I hope will arrive soon...

The exhibition presents a selection of around one hundred and fifty prints, sometimes placed beside paintings, sculptures or drawings linked to them by the name of the artist or by an iconographic or chronological relationship. The choice of concentrating attention on the graphic arts arose from the desire to reflect of the linguistic implications to be derived from the extraordinary variety of procedures offered by this type of work and from the variants used which proliferate, particularly during the 1900s, when every single artist moulded his or her technique according to their own individual expressive needs.

Both the catalogue and the exhibition itself have been sub-divided into four principal sections, each one of which covers different aspects of the representation of the 'Signs of the Sacred' and the 'Imprints of Real'.

In the first section, *The Sentiments of the Sacred and the Human*, works dealing with subjects from both the Old and New Testaments are included. But above all the subjects of the maternity of the Virgin, prayer and martyrdom, up until the war and the Apocalypse. In this section one is struck particularly by the subject of maternity – also considering the Christmas period in which the exhibition opened – with important works by Matisse, Venturino Venturi, Emilio Greco, and a splendid Thayaht. The subject of martyrdom is also rendered very effectively by the selection of woodcuts by Lorenzo Viani, with very real themes, such as shipwreck, offering and waiting. Echoes of war figure in different ways in the works of Rouault, Chagall, Manzù, Messina, and also Marino Marini and Guido Strazza, in which Christological martyrdom is united

with the horrors of war. In the second section, dedicated to *The Imprints of the Real*, attention is turned to still life, objects in daily use, landscapes created by working and urban architecture, trees as if they were people, in the search for the mysterious link between the daily round and transcendence. Here are works by De Carolis, Boccioni, Morandi, Luigi Bartolini, the great masters of the 1900s. In this section the wonderful trees of Carlo Mattioli are also placed, and sacred urban architecture, with prints by Anselmo Bucci, Nolde, Delaunay, Feininger, Klee, Vlaminck, Kirchner and many others.

The nucleus *Origin of an Idea* throws a glimmer of light on a precious and delicate moment, that of the creative process, when the idea of the artist becomes an image and begins to take shape on paper, initiating a dialogue with other shapes and materials. Among the many works, the delicate ink of Fazzini, the first design for the great *Resurrection* of the Paul VI Audience Hall, but also projects by Cecco Bonanotte for the doors for the new entrance to the Vatican Museums, opened for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

The final selection, *Sign and Colour*, analyses works of which the majority are not iconic, rather abstract, investigating the links between the use of the foundational expressive means of artistic language, which are sign and colour, and their capacity to communicate spirituality and a sense of the sacred. Braque, Hartung, Lucio Fontana, Melotti, Mario Ceroli, Dorazio, Scialoja, up until Almagno, a wide panorama which covers the whole arc of the last century and continues until today.

A challenging exhibition such as this one, which has seen a long period of gestation, has involved many of the professional personnel of the Vatican Museums, and the Restoration Laboratories, particularly that concerned with Paper, co-ordinated by Chiara Fornaciari da Passano, with Cristina de' Medici and Flavia Serena di Lapigio, that of Painting and Wooden Supports, directed by Francesca Persegati, with Bruno Marocchini, that of Metals and Ceramics, co-ordinated by Flavia Callori di Vignale and that of Marble and Plaster, co-ordinated by Guy Devereux, with Andrea Felice. The exhibition has seen the front-line activity of the Exhibitions Office, with the enthusiastic participation of Andrea Carignani, helped by Isabella Leone and Fabio Francati, the Maintenance Squad and many other groups of the Museums. The preparation of the exhibition space in the Braccio di Carlo Magno is work both creative and elegant of the architect Roberto Pulitani of the Direction of Infrastructure and Services of the Governorate of the Vatican City State, with the support of the Maintenance Staff of the Vatican Museums and Media Arte Eventi s.r.l. For this catalogue I am grateful to the Editorial Office, to Federico Di Cesare who, together with Giuseppe Mazza, Simona Tarantino and Valerio Brienza, has known how to produce this with consummate elegance. The Events Office, the Bookshop, the Images and Rights Office, that of the Web and Multimedia and all the Direction of the Museums, from Guido Cornini to Msgr. Paolo Nicolini and Roberto Romano who have been heavily involved, as always happens, in the enormous effort that an initiative of this kind requires, my most heartfelt thanks to all of you.