# ITALY. A COUNTRY SHAPED BY MAN.







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# ITALY. A COUNTRY SHAPED BY MAN.

A GIOVANNI AGNELLI FOUNDATION TRAVELLING EXHIBITION

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## The exhibition project.

This exhibition was projected and carried out by the Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli:

Direction: Marcello Pacini Program Officer: Piero Gastaldo General Organization: Giovanni Granaglia Executive Organization: Dario Arrigotti

It was implemented with the help of Intercon AVS Italiana that has attended to the design, the artistic coordination and the production of the audiovisual aids.

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### Art objects.

The objects exhibited have been kindly lent by the following museums, whose directors have taken a very active part in selecting them:

Archivio di Stato, Turin; Isabella Ricci, Director Biblioteca Casanatense, Rome: Francesca Di Cesare, Director Fondazione Horne, Florence: Ugo Procacci, President Museo Capitolino, Rome; Eugenio La Rocca, Director Museo Civico "Ala Ponzone", Cremona; Ardea Ebani, Director Museo degli Argenti, Florence: Kirsten Piacenti, Director Museo della Casa Fiorentina Antica, Palazzo Davanzati, Florence: Maria Fossi Todorow, Director Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche, Faenza; Giancarlo Bojani, Director Museo Leonardiano, Vinci; Marta Romanelli, Director

Museo Navale, Genova Pegli; Vincenzo Oddi, Director Laura Secchi, Keeper of the collections Museo Nazionale degli Strumenti Musicali, Rome; Luisa Cervelli, Director Vescovado di Arezzo; H. E. Mons. Telesforo Giovanni Cioli.

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artistic heritage. We wish to give a special thank to:

Hon. Oddo Biasini Secretary of the Department of Cultural Heritage Prof. Luciano Berti Superintendent for Historical and Artistic Heritage, Florence Prof. Dante Bernini Superintendent for Historical and Artistic Heritage, Rome Prof. Adampiero Torriti Superintendent for Historical and Artistic Heritage, Siena Prof. Francesco Sisinni Director, Ufficio Centrale per i Beni Librari, Rome Prof. Marcello Del Piazzo Director, Ufficio Centrale Beni Archivistici, Rome Prof. Guglielmo Triches Director, Ufficio Centrale per i Beni Artistici e Storici, Rome

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#### Photographic Exhibits.

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The multi-image show includes pictures by:

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The photographs of the art objects published in this catalogue have been taken by

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# WHY "A COUNTRY SHAPED BY MAN "?

#### Italy and the United States: the reasons for a program.

It was in 1978 that the Turin based Agnelli Foundation initiated a program of activities designed to enhance the image of Italy and of the Italians in the Americas and, particularly, in the United States. By enhancing we mean, of course, improving the concept or — perhaps we should say — the multiple concepts of Italy and of the Italians already present in the minds of the people. Another goal of the program is to contribute to the improvement of the cultural relations existing between Italy and the most important American countries, with particular reference to the United States.

Finally, this program aims to create and to foster — for the first time — cordial relationships with American citizens of Italian origin.

The three goals — to improve channels of information about Italy, to foster cultural relations with American countries, and to establish a friendly rapport with the Americans of Italian ancestry — are different facets of the same activity, different aspects of a coherent program which, although theoretically easily distinguishable are in effect difficult to differentiate in practice.

Actually the general purpose of this program is, to provide insights or, at the very least, a possible key for interpreting that complex phenomenon which constitutes contemporary Italy. It is, in fact, essential for a modern country like ours, open as we are to international, political and economic collaboration, to provide the world outside with accurate information and precise knowledge about its current realities and its probable future. It is an obligation, in fact, for a nation to state clearly what it stands for, where it has come from and finally, toward which direction it plans to move. If this was important in the past, it is even more important today in a world in which nations are becoming increasingly interdependent, while, at the same time, remaining in intolerable states of political and economic tension.

The goal of our program, therefore, could be summarized in the slogan: Let us understand each other better in order to collaborate more effectively. This is also the spirit with which we hope to establish a new relationship with the communities of Italian origin, that play an important role in projecting a comprehensive image of Italy in each country in which they have settled.

Of the many nations of the Americas where communities of Italian origins live and prosper, the United States undoubtedly has the most successful and the most numerous. Today, in fact, about twenty million American citizens of first but mostly second, third and even fourth generation, maintain close and important ties with Italy and with Italian culture. Sometimes these ties are maintained consciously; more often, only casually or by pure chance.

Since the numerical aspect is certainly less significant than the political and cultural ties, the importance of the Americans of Italian origin must be considered in light of the fact that their community has played an integral and decisive role in the life of a country, the United States, that is in the forefront of any effort to shape the future of Western civilization.

It is superfluous to recall here the numerous ties already existing between the United States and Italy in the cultural, political, economic, and military fields. This observation reinforces the conclusion that it becomes mandatory for Italy to provide the American public with an accurate view of its reality and of its future. Much, in fact, in Italy's destiny, depends on a precise and fruitful relationship with this great country.

It was not through sheer chance, as a matter of fact, that the idea for this cultural program grew out of a symposium, in 1978, organized by the Foundation. Its theme was the reciprocal influence that caracterized the cultural relations between the United States and Italy. The most important result that the convention emphasized was the need to make the Americans understand the truly profound roots

1 RIGHT Italy and the Mediterranean seen from a satellite, in a picture by Telespazio.

2 OVERLEAF Map of Italy by Battista Agnese, published in Venice in 1554.







and meaning of Italian contemporary society in order to avoid the dangerous misunderstandings that could eventually have jeopardized a solid and necessary rapport of alliance and friendship.

Furthermore, since the establishment and maintainance of such rapport is crucial, it is necessary to avoid the risks that could derive from an under — or over — estimation of Italian problems gleaned from misinformation concerning the real conditions of Italian society. This can be achieved through a better informed and realistic image of Italy in the United States.

The program of the Foundation could, therefore, be considered a new "discourse on the facts of Italy"; conceived, this time, not for the courts of the Renaissance, but for the American ruling class as well as for the general American public.

From this point of view, it is particularly relevant to strengthen the existing ties between the Americans of Italian heritage and the country of their forefathers by presenting them with a realistic image of Italy. They already have an "image" of Italy, which cannot but determine and influence the attitude of the United States towards Italy; but the truth is that the image they have is not necessarily the most accurate and realistic; in fact it is often more stereotyped and less well-informed than that of other Americans.

In 1978, the year when the Italian Communist Party seemed to be about to enter the government coalition, the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations took a poll on the attitude of the American public — and also of its leaders — towards the most important countries in the free world. The results of the poll turned out to be extremely interesting. While 80% of the American leaders acknowledged the fact that Italy represented a vital area of interest for the United States, only 36% of the general public recognized such a fact. In no other country, of the 24 examined in the poll, was the dichotomy between the American leaders' opinion and the general public's opinion more profound. The attitude towards Italy definitely improved when, in the same polls, questions were asked on the so-called "degree of sympathy" that Italy inspired in the public: Italy came out sixth after Canada, Great Britain, France, Israel and

3 RIGHT Swamp in the Natural Park of Maremma, Tuscany.

4 OVERLEAF One of the aqueducts supplying water to ancient Rome.

5 OVERLEAF Roman column in Sardinia.

6 OVERLEAF Roman bas-relief showing the cutting of the primeval furrow. Museum of Aquileia.







Germany, the difference among the countries also being minimal.

What is clear in the data provided by the polls is that in the eyes of an average American, Italy is a country that deserves to be loved more than esteemed; a country that is, in the United States, more emotionally felt than rationally known.

If we could analyze the results in terms of ethnic responses we would undoubtedly find that the Italian-American community is largely responsible for the image of Italy that these data produced.

Many stereotypes concerning Italy and the Italians also refer to Americans of Italian origin. There is no doubt that the prejudice that often surrounds Italian-Americans generally has its origins in the negative image Americans have of Italy. Italians and Italian-Americans in the eyes of many Americans, are viewed as organ-grinders or mandolin players, or, less artistically, as vindictive people always ready to use their stilettos. Undoubtedly these types of bias are based in part on a "certain idea" Americans have of Italy.

In 1932 a research study conducted at Princeton University indicated that when asked to describe Italians, students responded that they were (in the following order): artistic, impulsive, passionate, musical, imaginative, very religious, talkative, etc.

In to many books devoted to the Mafia the words "Italian, Sicilian, mafioso and vendetta" are associated, in ways that are often more ridiculous than offensive.

The way Americans picture Italy and Italians is also influenced by the image they have of Italian-Americans. The different images that Italy projects of itself in the various American countries are in fact largely influenced by the perceptions that Americans have of the cultural expressions of the local Communities of Italian origin. It is also true, however, that the image that Italian-Americans have given of themselves, has been rapidly evolving and improving over the years with their rise on the social ladder in the different societies in which they have lived. But the fact remains that in most cases Italian-Americans have served as a magnifying glass which has further distorted the image Americans had of Italy. To attempt, therefore, to improve the image of Italy in the United States one must provide an adequate amount of information that can rationalize an image often linked to emotional factors, incomplete notions, and an over-estimation of phenomena which are often irrelevant.

The importance of the emotional characteristics and of the over-estimation of such phenomena are not only responsible for the incorrect image of Italy but, more generally speaking, for the skewed picture of any country one might want to depict.

As a scholar once wrote, the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century were considered in Italy much more liberal and radical than they were in reality. This was the reflection of *the dream* of a certain Italian radical and laic bourgeosie that had created this image out of its own hope and political choice, basing it on the limited data available rather than on accurate information on the life and reality of America of that period.

If we can realize that the global images of nations are generally created by myth and intuition and that they are largely influenced by the cultural environment in which they are formed rather than by correct information on the social reality they represent, then we can appreciate that, but, with regard to Italy, this same process took place exaggerating and amplifying its socio-cultural realities, especially its weaknesses.

It is also essential to clarify that when we talk of the level and the quality of information on Italy in the United States we refer to the general public opinion and not to a particular cultural or social élite.

The research conducted by the Council on Foreign Relations, cited earlier, proves, beyond any doubt, that there exists a dichotomy between the way Italy is pictured and appreciated by American leaders and the way in which the general public pictures it.

The Agnelli Foundation's program is designed to reach both the cultural and social upper classes and the wider public but the initiatives it promotes are conceived to clarify concepts and rectify mistakes throughout the entire public sector.

The exhibit, for example, has been put together for the general public and although a visitor already well-informed

7 OVERLEAF Cultivations on hills in Tuscany.

8 OVERLEAF Rice-fields in the area of Novara, Piedmont.

9 OVERLEAF Terraced vineyards near Carema, Aosta Valley.

10 OVERLEAF Terraced olive groves above Manarola, in Liguria.







on Italy will hopefully find it interesting, it has been created expressly for the average American who has, over the years, through textbooks and mass media, been provided with some or all of the following misinformation:

- a) Italy is a poor and overpopulated country.
- b) Agriculture is, for Italians, the must important source of income, although the methods used are not technologically advanced; in fact, Italy is a country with a low level of industrialization.
- c) The only interesting periods in Italian history are ancient Rome and the Renaissance.

The main goal is, therefore, to change an image that would tend to picture Italy as a poor, farming country. In fact, a recent preliminary research conducted by the Harvard University Graduate School of Education confirmed the fact that this is the most usual and common idea that any American student would have of Italy by reading the textbooks used in most American secondary schools.

Another important source of misinformation that surely contributes to complicate the situation, is the fact that the majority of Italian-Americans have family memories that are too old and too oriented toward specific, atypical scenes to be of any use in creating a truthful image of the country of origin.

In the following pages we will give some examples of the stereotypes that accompany the false concept of Italy, since we feel that when it comes to Italy most people are full of contradictions. Some love it while others hate it. It seems as if Italy, thanks to the many fields in which it has excelled or to its long history, has always compelled an observer to express a radical judgment: of affection or antipathy; of friendship or of scorn. Furthermore some peculiarities of Italian history have definitely favored the creation of stereotypes.

First of all, the immigration of mostly poor and uneducated masses of Italians into the new world at the end of the 19th century contributed to the consolidation of particularly negative stereotypes.

Another important factor is that in recent history little has been done by Italian authorities to give a better image of the country abroad. The Fascists attempted to improve the situation but the image they fostered was vitiated by the ideology they espoused.

We must admit that our program — to rationalize and improve the image of Italy — is extremely ambitious, and we feel that to achieve such a goal we need time and everybody's cooperation. This is the spirit that convinced all of us at the Agnelli Foundation to organize a long range program of which this exhibit is only one-but a fundamental-step.

#### The use of history in this exhibition.

The purpose of the exhibit is to provide the average American with a key to understanding Italian history as well as to interpreting Italy and Italians as they pursue their everyday life. Non-Italians need this background to understand and interpret even the daily news about Italy.

Many pictures devoted to the past are included in the exhibit and the first impression may be that the exhibit serves the purpose of giving a general overview of Italian history. But this is not the case. We think it is important to provide the foreign public with an effective tool to approach the study of Italy, so that the Foundation has recently commissioned a team of historians to prepare a series of essays — to be published later — on Italian history since the Middle Ages. In this exhibit, on the other hand, our intent was to embrace various aspects of Italian life in different historical periods. Its main objective, however, remains to provide a global view of the country through an effective use of audiovisual tools. The images of the past are therefore present in the exhibit both to make people understand what the past was like and to indicate how much of it still survives in today's Italian lifestyle.

Without a clear understanding of the past and of the multi-cultural components that influence Italian society profoundly, it would be practically impossible to understand how, for example, a totalitarian ideology like Fascism gave birth to a weak, and in its own way tolerant state, nor could one understand how — although harassed by a var-

11 OVERLEAF Montebello farm as shown in a map belonging to the Badia di Coltibuono, in the Tuscan hills of Chianti.

a transa dei Peiere di Monutello di profit eni della Veiere Badia di Lorenze a Chibiana pene gel Popole di Marcellia, Jerze di Guide Reaneract Rada Vicartate di Coralio Il campe delle Gunchen di Stine nueve Block di une famme di tit, un Chere delle Gunchen di Stine nueve Block di une famme di tit, un Chere delle Gunchen di Stine nueve Block di une famme di tit, un Chere delle Gunchen di Stine nueve Block di une famme di tit, un Chere delle Gunchen di Stine nueve Block di une famme di tit, un Chere delle Gunchen di Stine nueve Block di une familie di Stine di Pareceli dell'este di Stine nueve Block di fam di Stine and Record te stan Caraci. It in 2 aug. Dourest Composite Guncana all Record Michael All Conception di Stine au-Inte di Biocesti un nueve Ioni di Colorano tempese Ioni in the Stine nueve

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iety of social and economic problems — the Italian postwar democratic system is capable of producing a lively cultural life and a solid industrial economy. Before, during and after the Fascist period, the government has often lost its struggle to harness the dynamism of Italian society, and of its multi-regional, multi-cultural components. The ancient role of cities in Italian life, the validity of deeply rooted local cultures, the disenchanted attitude of Italians towards the State — although elections register a 95% participation — are all elements that are rooted in the past but that still constitute the very core of the Italian spirit. The very fact of their longevity is a sign of vitality and not of age.

The exhibit is composed of a group of audiovisial materials which include an introduction, four sections related to specific themes and one general section devoted to two photographic exhibits and an art collection.

All the sections are expressions or moments of the same Italian civilization. The rationale for the two photographic exhibits and the art collection are clearly stated by the organizers in their introductory articles. Here, I would like to stress the reason that motivated the choice of one of the two photographic exhibits: it includes the pictures taken from the famous Alinari collection, referring to the period from 1890 to 1920, which is particularly important in the history of Italian immigration to the United States. In fact, this is the only part of the program which does not serve the purpose of clarifying the fundamental characteristics of contemporary Italian society. The reasons for including these impressive pictures in the program lie in the fact that we considered it essential of the descendants of the immigrants to be reminded of the Italy their forefathers had been forced to leave. These pictures depict an Italy of rural communities but with a social structure already distinguished by a dynamic economic life, a nation - despite its many contradictions - which was girding itself to build and shape along with other western countries what has become the Europe of today.

The Alinari collection constitutes the section of the exhibit in which Americans of Italian origin will rediscover their families' memories of the immigration. They will appreciate, too, what it meant to cross an ocean abandoning not only their native village but a unified family structure and a system of relationships which lent stability and security to their lives. They depict vividly a country, at the turn of the century, characterized by the obvious contradictions of huge masses of individuals forced to abandon the solid security of community life, at the very time that growing modernization and industrialization were about to produce impressive results. The irony is that these results became apparent in the years following the period of emigration.

The emigrants were thus leaving not only the old traditional small villages built on hills, on the Appenines, the Alps, the coast but also a country which was already entering the era of the growth of modern industrialization.

#### Views of Italy and stereotypes.

I have tried, up to this point, to emphasize the complexity of the Agnelli Foundation program and the goals it attempts to achieve in "redefining" contemporary Italy to an America audience. One major problem we had to face, in putting the exhibit together, was related to the criteria for the selection and proper use of audiovisual materials. We wanted our selection to include at least two different aspects of the country we were to present: its extremely rich history and past and its present status as an industrial country. In any case, the exhibit, more than for its scientific value, should be of interest to you since it affords a rational explanation — through the views of the country and its people — of the Italian deeply-rooted-in-the-past contemporary society as analyzed and described in its various facets.

The emotional impact the exhibit will have on the audience also serves the purpose of providing a "possible key" to appreciating Italy. We did not wish to write a historical volume on the basic characteristics of Italians, or a sociological text on contemporary Italian culture, or even on essay on the problems of the Italian political system. Our "ex-

12 OVERLEAF Miniature by S. di Pietro, from the Codice delle Monache (Nuns' Code) showing the month of June and harvest time. Municipal Library, Siena. er hi Scipanhm rm fu kl Voigha m gvinkl Naturtas avn kl rvmbvi kl Scozi ob m c v kl om kl Scozi apl fplickl Comemoza Lecht qui cp179f? ri10bis bapte.

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planation of the country" uses few words but depends instead on an attractive, magnetic sequence of audiovisuals and the beauty of the artistic pieces that are part of the exhibit. These, you will agree, succeed in presenting a vast range of information which is both logically and artistically organized.

We realize, of course, that the lens we have used in interpreting Italy comes out of the tradition and system of values which have been, over the years, an essential feature of the cultural activities of the Foundation. Undoubtedly, our vision is personal and far from being the only one possible. A Marxist interpretation of the same situation for example, would definitely have focussed on different aspects, and its analysis would possibly provide different — if not entirely opposite — conclusions on contemporary Italy.

It is, in fact, important at this point to clarify to the American reader that one of the past and present fundamental characteristics of Italy has been to be identified to a high degree with social pluralism. This is responsible for contradictions and diversity which surface continuously with undiminished vigor.

This pluralism is also the principal reason why it is practically impossible to show abroad a unified and unilateral vision of Italy. No individual, institution of group would, in my opinion, be capable of providing a view of Italy in which all Italians would recognize themselves. We did not even try to make this possible but opted, from the very beginning of the Project, for a solution that was, indeed, more "personal" but certainly more in harmony with the values we at the Agnelli Foundation subscribe to. Although not shared by all, the vision of Italy we propose would undoubtedly find a vast *consensus* in Italy.

Allow me at this point to reconstruct the different phases that made this exhibit a reality. A parameter we used was to identify some stereotypes of Italy. A stereotype as we know is a form of incorrect knowledge or, rather, of pseudo-knowledge, which is nevertheless important and crucial since it has an influence both on the person who believes it and, whether for good or bad, on the person or the concept which is the object of this false or partially false information. 13 Mountain huts and barns, Badia Valley, Dolomites.

14 Farm-house in Torre d'Isola, in the plain of Lombardy.

15 Traditional houses in the Venetian lagoon.

16 House on the hills of Tuscany.

17 A baroque farmers' house in Lesina, Apulia.

18 A farmers' house in Campania.













Some stereotypes, like Italy being "the country of great art tradition" are obviously meant to be positive. In effect, however, most stereotypes have a negative connotation simply because they implement and reinforce a false knowledge or, at least, a partial knowledge of a phenomenon. Italy has always been exposed to a great number of generalizations and stereotypes mainly because it has always generated strong feelings about itself. A particular process has been the "generalization of the exception". A typical example of this process is the general belief that Italians are naturally predisposed to "il bel canto" and that they have a special musical feeling. While it is true that music and singing have played an important role in our culture to the extent that Italian musical terms have been accepted and included unaltered in the English language - a fact which is in itself unusual - it is definitely an arbitrary statement to assert that the majority of Italians have an innate ability for appreciating music or singing.

In more recent times we observe a similar attitude when it comes to Italian fashion designers. It is indeed correct to grant that Italy is in the avantgarde in this important field but only if, at the same time, we are aware of the impressive worldwide role the country is playing in producing machinery, special types of steel, the building of warships, etc.; not to mention the Italian contribution to research especially in physics and astronomy.

Although the result may be less dramatic, we feel that objectivity demands that we portray a truthful image of the country. We must, therefore, focus on the good standard of the average industrial product, for instance steel or ships, rather than stress a few top "records" as in the fashion field. Since it would be impossible to discuss the multitude of stereotypes that have masked, in America as elsewhere, an accurate view of our country, we have decided to devote our attention to particular biases that have either "cultural dignity" — meaning that they were created by culturally important personalities — or have originated so far back in history that they are now deeply rooted in everybody's cultural background.

The first question that arises is: how do we dismiss or discuss stereotypes and furthermore what kind of information do we have to provide in order to correct stereotypes? 19 Village on the Island of S. Giulio d'Orta, Piedmont.

20 The hill village of Orte, Latium.

21 Ostuni, agricultural town in Apulia.

22 Pentadattilo, a mountain village in Calabria.



The criteria for selecting information on the past as well as on the present have been based on the principle that it would have been more effective — through the exhibit to concentrate on structures rather than on events; on long range periods of time rather than on incidental episodes. We gave priority, therefore, to those aspects of Italian life such as economics, agriculture, architecture, and urban structures, that, in our opinion, would provide the best tools for correcting a false image of the country. We realized, for example, that while the entire world knew about the masterpieces of the Renaissance, little or nothing was known about the socio-economic structures that allowed such an extraordinary artistic period to take place. These "material structures" constitute the ideal line of continuity that ties together profoundly different centuries of Italian life.

The hopefully coherent and certainly original vision of Italy that the exhibit provides, will also help visitors to "re-think" the knowledge of the country they may have acquired from stories told by relatives, school books, or visits to our country and to interpret information they will receive about Italy in the future from the mass media.

#### Is Italy a "fertile and happy country blessed by nature"?

Italians are primarily responsible for the misconception of Italy as a fertile and happy land blessed by Nature. It was, in fact, the Latin poet Virgil who first extolled this country as "*magna parens frugum*": great mother of harvests.

The corollary to this myth is the notion that in this land blessed by the Gods, lazy and joyful people can permit themselves the luxury of giving full sway to their natural temperament which, as Princeton's students observed in 1932, is "artistic, impulsive, passionate..."

It is true that the myth has played an important part in the history of our culture. Italy became the pole of attraction of many Northern intellectuals, such as Goethe and 23 RIGHT ABOVE Sixteenth century print of Milan, by G. Braun and F. Hogenberg.

24 RIGHT BELOW Turin in a print of the second half of the Eighteenth century. Bourlot Collection, Turin.


the British romantic poets, who moved South towards the land where "lemons blossom". Although it may be appropriate from a literary point of view to appreciate Goethe's Journal or Byron's lyrics, and interesting to consider their descriptions of Italian daily life of the past centuries, it would be a serious mistake to interpret their accounts as reliable scientific and historical/sources.

The fact is that, despite Byron's verses, Italy is not "the home of all art yields and nature can decree", or, if it is, it is so in a way which differs totally from the poet's imagination. If we want to focus on foreign travellers, we would do better to read the words of Michel de Montaigne who in his extensive travels through Tuscany was awed by the surroundings of the city of Lucca. In 1581 he wrote, "one can never praise enough the beauty and the usefulness of their way of planting on the mountains right up to the very top". In about the same years, Francesco Guicciardini speaks of an Italy with lands planted not only on "the plains and on its more fertile regions but also on montainous and sterile tracts".

The land was all used and farmed; this is the important point to remember. Although, especially from the times of the Renaissance, the land was reclaimed and shaped to conform to some definite principles of aesthetics, one cannot believe that this is what convinced Italian farmers to create examples of land-art on the most impenetrable slopes.

The reality is another: what foreign observers interpreted as natural fertility, was, in effect, the result of man's struggle to survive, to compensate with the sweat of his brow for nature's hostility. What to today's travelers looks like nature's benign attitude towards this country is, in fact, the testimony of centuries of hard labor in a land that had to be conquered and whipped into shape in order to produce anything.

The myth of Italy as "mother of harvests" is valid only if we compare the Italian situation to that which exists in other Mediterranean countries, although many scholars agree on the fact that even in the pre-Christian era, Italian farmed territory was not sufficient to satisfy the population's needs. The solutions Italians found to alleviate the chronic dearth of arable land have always been of two 25 RIGHT Medieval town of S. Gimignano, Tuscany.

26 OVERLEAF The ideal town, anon., Fifteenth century. National Gallery of the Marche, Urbino.

27-27b OVERLEAF The plan of Palmanova, Friuli, a Renaissance model fortified town built in 1593; on the right in a print of the Eighteenth century; on the left, a bird's eye view of the town today.









kinds, and they have become fixed continuing elements in the history of the country: the intensive exploitation of available resources through a constant use of appropriate technology; and emigration outside of the territory although for profoundly different reasons at various periods of Italian history.

## The responses to scarcity.

If we analyze the way Italians use suitable technology to compensate for the scarcity of land, the first thing we notice is how "unnatural" Italian farming land really is: 40% of the entire territory of the peninsula can be classified as mountainous, 40% as hilly, and only 20% as plains. Even the apparently fertile area of the Northern plains — considered the most favored region in Italy — is marred by arid spots and swamp that only hard labor has transformed into productive fields.

Turning again to the opinions of Renaissance observers, when in the sixteenth century other European countries in Fernand Braudel's words — were sending their ships to search for new worlds over unknown oceans, Italy was deeply involved in colonizing its own land and in reclaiming great extensions of land in order to make it productive.

And the best proof of the artificial nature of Italy's socalled natural resources is found in what we know of some tragic periods of Italian history. Let us consider, for example, the degradation of the land that took place between the fifth and the ninth centuries during and after the fall of the Western Roman Empire. Some writers of the time talk about "cities that look like corpses". Gregorius Magnus, for example, bitterly wrote: "What good, I wonder, is left in this world? The cities have been destroyed, the forts are in ruins, the fields have been abandoned, the land has become a wilderness. There are almost no farmers left on the land..."

What was happening? For a long time historians accepted the explanation that some type of natural catastrophe — such as a sudden impoverishment of the soil —

28 Portoferraio, fortified harbour in the Island of Elba.



had hit the peninsula, facilitating, if not causing, the simultaneous fall of Roman imperial society. Today, scholars tend to agree that the opposite happened: the deterioration of the standards of community life and of its social institutions and, therefore, of the work capacity of the Italians caused a decline of the civil structures that had made Italy "the garden of the empire." The country which had been great because of man's work was retrogressing to its original and natural state which was definitely not one supported by a benevolent nature.

When, therefore, Goethe (but it could have been any other North-European traveler) writes that "everything leads us to understand that a blessed land that provides plentifully what satisfies man's primary needs, produces people whose temperaments are happy. They can confidently expect the tomorrows to bring what the today has brought, and live, therefore, without undue concern" the poet's words express, in an exemplary manner, the stereotype we have been trying to define. We must obviously not place any faith in them.

Since nearly nobody talks anymore, nowadays, about the "natural" fertility of Italy, we could be led to think that the stereotype in question is not a dangerous one and that, with it, its logical corollary — that Italians are "naturally" lazy — had also disappeared from the contemporary cultural scene.

The fact is that such is not the case. Italian economy, for example, when being favourably compared with the American, was nonetheless described, in an article published by an influential American newspaper, as "famous for traits other than its efficiency."

While it is true that Italian economy struggles daily to overcome serious problems, it is altogether false to depict its industries as inefficiently run and its workers as lazy. If this were correct, we could not possibly explain how Italian rates of economic growth have been the highest registered in the Western world in 1979 and 1980, and finally we could not explain the very survival of Italy as an industrialized society.

Even from this point of view Italy was not favored by Nature. The country lacks, in fact, all the natural resources that are essential to an industrially advanced economy:

29 A Baroque mansion of Turin reflected in modern architecture.



from energy to basic materials such as ore, coal or petroleum, not to mention easily traversed routes for the transportation of goods.

The utilization of an appropriate technology to compensate for this situation has deep roots in the past. The entire Italian economic system has been shaped from the very beginning so that it would improve productivity while avoiding waste: from a careful use of terrain — such as the terracing cited by Montaigne — to the use of alternative forms of energy such as water and natural gas. In fact, if we had to point to an essential element of continuity in the centuries-old Italian economy, we would indicate the never-ending struggle to avoid the waste of resources, energy, raw materials and farming land.

The theme of conservation attracted the entire Western world's attention only after the 1973 oil crisis. For Italy, on the other hand, it has always been a well-known fact of life from its very birth as a country.

The scarcity of resources and the consequent thoughtful utilization of the "little available" have been the birthright of the Italian economy and one of the reasons for its survival. This is clearly illustrated in the audiovisual materials devoted to energy and scarcity as well as in some parts of the multi-image show.

What are the definite results of this secular process of capillary exploitation of every useful inch of terrain, of the rational utilization of the entire territory? That the end result is pleasent and aesthetically worthy of note is undoubtedly true.

To sum up this topic, however, we feel that it would be useful to add that what took place in Italy — the total domination of human ingenuity over Nature, and the redefinition of the original "natural" features of the country through man's work — would be of interest to all nations, since Italy is indeed a country shaped primarily by man.

Furthermore, we feel it would not be unreasonable to state that — because of this long arduous process — Italy finds itself once more in a frontier position. It can, in fact, point out to other countries the equilibrium it has achieved between technology and economy on one side, and respect of the quality of life represented by aesthetically and culturally outstanding results on the other.

30 RIGHT ABOVE A Roman road in the ancient town of Ansedonia.

31 RIGHT BELOW A highway in Sicily.



#### Italian labor abroad.

The appropriate agricultural technology has often been insufficient, however, to sustain a population grown too large for the limited natural resources available. In the past, handicraft as well as mercantile and commercial activities have always constituted the necessary complements to farming.

From this lack of resources has emerged one of the fundamental characteristics of the Italian history and people. This aspect of the Italian spirit should not be omitted: first of all because if has played an incredibly impressive role in the shaping of Western civilization and secondly because of its importance in contemporary Italian society.

Much of Italy's success today depends, in fact, on the Italian capacity to shape its economy on the fundamental traits of the activities that brought prosperity to the country's cities from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries.

It is the kind of economy that welcomes international trade and encourages the establishment of important enterprises abroad, thereby assigning a decisive role to international economic relations in maintaining an adequate level of life for the Italians.

This basic trait of the Italian character has been shaped over the centuries and has produced a wide range of results. On one side, it has allowed rich Italian bankers to influence the policies of foreign courts, but at the same time it has caused the innumerable personal tragedies of millions of poor and ignorant peasants who faced the uncertainty of an ocean crossing with absolutely no resources but their will to work. At other times, this trait has made it possible for technicians or scientists in many fields to be invited to work abroad.

The capacity to leave Italy and work in foreign countries is a basic reality of our life. It has, however, generated stereotypes, sometimes in contradiction among themselves, which will be mentioned because they are a good barometer of the ups and downs of Italian destiny, of this rich but tormented history of our Italian society.

Let us begin with the period in which somehow, the world started to consider the inhabitants of our peninsula as "Italians," that is to say, the period of the Middle Ages, 32 An Etruscan gate in the walls of Volterra, Tuscany.

33 A Roman gate in the walls of Spello, Umbria.

34 A gate in the walls of Erice, Sicily.

35 A gate of the rural village of San Gusme on the Chianti hills, Tuscany.



let's say the last part of the twelfth century. European countries dealt mostly with Italian traders, merchants or bankers. These were generally thought of as greedy, shrewd, tortuous, extremely rich, fearful people. About them, the German Alexander of Roes, wrote: "Itali denarios accumulant": Italians are money makers; and since most merchants were known by their regional origin, or by the name of the city from which they came, people soon began generalizing about the "ingenuity of the Lombards" and the "astuteness of the Tuscans" in much the same way that they talked about the "fury of the Teutons" or the "stupidity of the Britons." One should not wonder that the Italians of the period attracted - because of their activities — so much attention and blame: the opulent Italian cities, in an European economy dominated by agriculture, were an anomaly that appeared incredible to most observers.

Commerce and international finance were the "frontier" of the Italians of the Middle Ages: their answer to demographic increase and to urban development. In 1280, for example, it is the Italian bankers who collect the ecclesiastic taxes in Portugal, in Hungary or in Greenland where the Squarcialupi of Lucca accept, instead of currency, seal furs and whale teeth. During this same period, fourteen Italian banks are operating in London where a street is also named after the Lombards, while in Paris twenty banks belonging to Italians flourish. Bankers from Lucca financed Edward I's conquest of Wales and Florentines provided Edward II with the money he needed to fight Scotland. Again Florentines financed Edward III in the first period of the Hundred Years War.

During these same years, another important emigration — this time of an elite — took place. This type of activity became increasingly important to the point of its becoming a dominant one: engineers and skilled workmen, clergymen and politicians became advisers and ministers in Peking and Paris. Later on, until the end of the eighteenth century, a flood of Italian musicians, architects, painters, sculptors, goldsmiths, theatrical figures, dancers, astrologers invaded Europe, carrying with them more a gamut of sophisticated and educated techniques than "artistic temperament." As Braudel wrote, this was "a complex irradia-

36 Medieval square in S. Gimignano, Tuscany.



tion, under the guise of adventure, of a multi-faceted culture, and of money gained from shrewdness and craftmanship; in effect, the final proof, if one were needed, of a preeminence of Italian thought and culture throughout the world."

The reason we mention this emigration is not to recall Italy's grandeur: in fact, some of these emigrations took place in one of the worst periods of Italian hystory, during the great crisis that hit the country in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. This escape from Italy was largely due to the contrast between the cosmopolitan education which many Italians received at the time, making them appear and behave like citizens of great powers, and the second rank position Italian cities had sunk to in reality, thus limiting the intellectual horizons of so many welltrained minds.

Even when the emigration involved a limited group of individuals (although sometimes not too limited, as in the case of the 4,000 families of Venetian technicians and merchants which scattered, in the sixteenth century, in the Middle East while Venice had a population of only 150,000) it was always an answer to scarcity, or a kind of safety valve against the great changes in the economic and political context. If we look at this phenomenon with this particular lens, it definitely becomes easier to find one thread connecting very different periods of Italian history such as the military expansion of ancient times, the success of the Maritime Republics, the elite emigrations, and finally, the mass emigration to the Americas at the beginning of this century and towards Western Europe from 1945 to 1960.

The great emigrations — at the end of the nineteenth century and during the course of the twentieth — that witnessed the departure of millions of Italians, are even more closely related to the paucity of resources in our country. As Giovanni Haussman wrote, whenever Italian peasants, "in periods in which agricultural and industrial activites are in imbalance, find themselves without enough with which to survive in a world that is rapidly changing, they will be obliged to take the route of expansion outside of their territory in a form which is new for them, since the conquest of empires has declined. A new, but not unusual

37 A square with Renaissance elements in Pienza, Tuscany.



form of mass emigration of peasants with practically no saleable skills, but with a surprising capacity to adjust to a new environment and to excel in any vocation..."

# A break in continuity between past and present?

Is it bad to have had moments of grandeur in the past? The question is tied to what many foreigners firmly think about Italy and refers to the clear distinction they see between the great Italian past and the squalid present. For most, Italian excellency lies in the culture of Imperial Rome or of the Florence of the Renaissance; for the more sophisticated, in the life of the medieval cities or the more ancient network of abbeys and castles. In reality, Italy is a country that has, maybe more frequently than any other alternated between periods of greatness and others of decadence. According to those who believe in a decided schism between the past and the present, today represents the low point of the parabola. This dichotomy is also evident in other nations as, for istance, in post-Byzantium Greece when compared with the ancient Greece of Pericles and Praxiteles; and, generally speaking, in all the countries that constituted the great empires of the past. In the same vein, a sense of discontinuity must also be noted during the period between Imperial Rome and the society of the Middle Ages if not that of today. The most outstanding and well-known example is certainly the disruptive effects that Christianity had on pre-Christian ethics. A close look at Italian history, however, points up at least one remarkable fact: that Italy has always transmitted its culture even when it has alternated between disastrous decadence, and moments of renewed, flourishing splendor.

In effect, in our opinion, it would be more correct to talk about the presence of elements of the cultures of the past in the present, rather than of a dichotomy between the two. Innovation and tradition, creative fantasy, and memories of the past as well as a spirit of adventure and a tradition of conservation, may be considered the mortar and cement that have been used to stabilize the Italian

38 RIGHT The Cathedral of Amalfi.

39 OVERLEAF A Renaissance square in Vigevano, Lombardy, built in the late fifteenth century.







society that continues to endure in spite of incredibly harsh periods in its existence.

The surprising fact is that the stereotype of discontinuity between past and present was born precisely among those foreign intellectuals who were particularly friendly to Italy. Poets like Joachim Du Bellay wrote in the first half of the sixteenth century: "Newcomer, who seeks Rome, in Rome, and will find nothing of Rome, in Rome/". But even more important are the British observers of the eigtheenth century. During that period, they confirmed a similar idea of a schism between contemporary Italy and the past in the images of Italy they drew in their Journals. For them, the Italy of the eighteenth century was an example of the detrimental signs of popery, of moral decadence, and, last but not least, provided a literary opportunity to recall the beauty of classicism and of the Renaissance. Their rediscovery of Italy soon became a "grand tour" marked by a rehashing of literary commonplaces. Not only is this view shared by mediocre writers, but even by great ones such as Gibbon, who noted the sharp contrast between the ruins of ancient Rome and "the barefoot monks who chanted the Vespers in the temple of Jupiter." And even Shelley and Byron, albeit with a completely diverse sensitivity, stress analogous concepts: "the bridge between past and present has been cut." They talked about Rome as "the city of the dead" in the same way that the French romantic writers wrote about Italy as "the land of the dead." It was Shelley, himself, however, who noticed that the fields of Lombardy and the Veneto were beautifully farmed and that, in this respect, Italy was far superior to France. What he did not realize, on the other hand, was that those fertile sites were the most convincing proofs of the continuity of the past in the present both in relation to the daily life of the Italians and its economic and agricultural diversity.

Those fields have passed — without a break in continuity — through the Etruscan civilization, the Roman agricultural system of the "centuriatio", the land reclamations of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, to the irrigation processes of the eighteenth century, leaving, as air photography has recently documented, living vestiges of each civilization.

40 The Baroque façade of Palazzo Madama in Turin.



We could talk, therefore, of the continuity of life and not of total ruin. As the Italian historian Giuliano Procacci wrote, what can be said about things, can also be said about people. "Everything in Italy" — he remarked — " from the shape of fields to the quality and preparation of food; from the way the land is farmed to the way roads are laid out; from the refinement of learned people to the 'learned' ignorance of the simple ones; everything contributes to give to whomever lives in this land, the sense of an unbroken and persevering continuity resulting from labor and hardship." We can only talk about the Italian crisis of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries if we understand how that decadence occurred between a long period of grandeur and a period of renascence from the cultural, economic, and political points of view, which, as the most alert observers noted, started in the middle of the eighteenth century.

Moreover, despite the desires of well-wishers, it is surely senseless to talk about "Italian primacy" after the seventeenth century. At the same time, however, there is no point in talking about a Italian timeless, eternal underdevelopment, especially if one considers the constant proofs of evolution and improvement along with the crises. Those who saw the lands in the Papal State or in the Kingdom of Naples in the nineteenth century, would have every right to describe the present in negative terms. But, at the same time, it is totally inappropriate to attribute the cause of such decadence to some kind of unchangeable characteristic of Italian people. It would be as though an inevitable fate of misery had to accompany the very fact that Italians were Latin, Catholic, etc.

# Continuity and discontinuity in today's Italy.

But what is important is to turn to modern day, contemporary Italy. As we noted earlier, contemporary Italian life is a mixture of the ancient and the modern, of tradition and of innovation. I believe, for example that some impor-

41 Present day architecture of Eur district, Rome.



tant elements of the past have played an important role in the history of Italian political institutions. The city states that were created in the Middle Ages, later becoming regional states maintained their autonomy for centuries. This situation contributed extensively to some problems — such as the lack, at times, of a unified Italian spirit — that seem to afflict Italian society.

The attempt of Piedmontese bureaucracy in the nineteenth century to build a centralized state with "gentlemen's methods", and the Fascist "hard" attempt to organize a rigid state, both failed. Today's Italian institutional life more than ever, in fact, finds itself in the position of having to restore their autonomy to cities and regions for a variety of motives that would be too difficult to analyze thoroughly in these pages. The original idea that the Italian intellectual Carlo Cattaneo proposed in the middle of the nineteenth century — to build the country's unity on a federation of local governments rather than on a central power — is finally becoming a reality.

Recent times have seen Italian cities more than ever involved in a revitalization of their cultural traditions. An increased availability of funds has, for example, favored the establishment of museums and the planning of cultural initiatives designed to foster the preservation of local traditions. But the continuity with the past does not imply merely the conservation of the past and the opening of museums. The flourishing of small local enterprises such as the textile industry of Prato and Biella, the fashion industries scattered in Tuscany, the production of ceramic tiles in Sassuolo, to mention only a few, owes a great deal of its success to having chosen to specialize in those fields — by bringing to life again the vocations that are clearly identifiable in the historical past. All these small but extremely efficient industries are, in fact, a modern version — open to wider international markets — of the ancient craftsmen's activities, not only because their production structures remain limited, but also because the quality of their final products remain unaltered. What was once the fruit of the good taste of a simple craftsman, is today, the work of a skilled designer.

The section of this exhibit devoted to artifacts as well as the audiovisual materials dedicated to Italian design, indi-

42 Old and new buildings in Milan.



cate exactly the degree of continuity that exists between the aesthetic solutions of ancient craftsmanship and those created by modern designers.

Finally, special attention must be paid to the commitments — political, cultural, and economic — that every Italian feels for preserving the ties with the past, through the conservation of the physical mementoes of the past.

The Italian population has increased over the years to 57 million and only recently has it become stabilized. In the past thirty years, important internal migrations and extensive urbanization projects have accompanied the industrial development of the country. While these problems have also existed in other Western countries, only in Italy did the inhabitants have to face additional difficulties which complicated enormously the possibility of finding solutions to them. The economic and industrial developments took place, in fact, in a "fragile" environment which was the result of the historical nobility of every tract of soil, of the constant surfacing of archeological ruins, of the formal perfection of every city and village, of the aesthetic results of the past which it would be impossible to duplicate. In most cases, our industrial transformation took place with respect for the past — apart from a few isolated cases that attracted international censure and the worldwide attention of the press.

The need for conservation has been so general that it has involved practically every soul in the country. Nor could the problem be solved by centralized legislation since any decision had to keep local necessities and facts in mind. Anybody running a factory, heading a Ministry or a village administrative bureau was - sooner or later - confronted with the problems of keeping the past alive. Conservation, therefore, became an element of generalized culture — a duty imposed by civilization — since it was felt that it was not merely a question of preserving the past of the Italians, but rather that of guarding-sacredly-monuments that belonged to the *whole* of humanity. And let me reaffirm it once more. In most cases Italians took the job seriously and succeeded. This is the reason why tradition cannot be considered an "object" which belongs in a museum. It must live, instead, as a vital element of Italian contemporary life.

43-48 Windows of Italian houses from Romanesque to late Baroque.



Although one could continue to provide additional examples that would indicate how the past survives in the country's present, it is more useful, at this point to discuss a stereotype — analogous to the one about the schism between past and present — which has played and continues to play a leading role in presenting a false image of our country.

### The false image of a poor Italy.

Surely this stereotype is not based on incorrect information but rather on a complete lack of knowledge of what has been done in Italy during the past twenty years.

Let us take, for example, the brilliant book by Luigi Barzini, "The Italians," published in 1964; a book that enjoyed a tremendous success in the United States and that certainly influenced the concept Americans have of our country.

One of the chapters dedicated to the poverty of Italy is not the result of stereotyping but a rather accurate description of the nation of the time: only seventeen years have elapsed since that was written, not centuries.

Nevertheless, it is almost impossible to recognize the same country, simply because social and economic changes have transformed it profoundly. "Italy," Barzini wrote "still is an extremely poor country... and today's average standard of living corresponds to the one the United States enjoyed in 1914, France in 1924, and England in 1927." A description follows, among other things, of the malnutrition of the Southern population, of the poor conditions of retired people, and so on.

The truth is another. Today's Italy, although not yet one of the richest countries in the Western world, has an average *per capita* income which does not differ to any great extent from Great Britain's, and it is simply absurd to list the country among the "very poor" nations. Even if we analyze the data concerning areas of activity and social services in which the nation has not achieved impressive results, we would still come out with the picture of a country well in line with others in the Western world. Infant

49-54 Elements of minor architecture.



mortality, which was 36.1 per 1,000 in 1964, is today 14.9, not far from the American index of 14.0; the number of doctors for 1,000 people is 2.9 in Italy and 1.6 in the United States; and finally, the number of hospital beds for 1,000 people is 10.3 versus the 6.4 in America.

The typical Italian meals have also changed over the years: the consumption of meat, *per capita*, in a year, which was 77 pounds in 1960, today is 171 pounds.

The country has also achieved impressive gains in the industrial sector. Italy was, in 1979, the second European producer of steel — after Germany, but before France and Great Britain; but it also was first in the production in Europe of cement; third for cars — even before England —; fourth worldwide, in exporting arms, ahead of Germany and England. One thousand Italians now own 322 cars, more than do the Japanese (294) or the British (256); almost 60% of the population owns at least one home.

### A nation of individualists?

This frequently expressed statement — shared by many - asserting that Italians may be geniuses as single individuals but are incapable of acting as a group, still remains a dangerous stereotype. Winston Churchill pointed out that two hundred Florentines were the only reason that allowed Italy to be talked about in history books. In any event, texts tend to personalize any reference to Italy, citing single personalities such as Dante, Columbus, Machiavelli, Michelangelo, Verdi, Marconi, etc. Individual talents have indeed contributed greatly to the renown of this country, but it should not be necessary to remind readers that this stereotype can be contradicted from at least two points of view. First, geniuses are never isolated and — as in the case of the Renaissance period — art or, better still, the environment in which art is created, is always the result of a general spirit that involves the entire community, or how else could one explain the work of a Giotto or a Michelangelo?

Secondly, it is not true that Italians are incapable of collective actions given the fact that the goals they achieve

55 Tools and signboards of craftsmen's guilds in a Codex of 1602. Orvieto, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo.



are as valid as those of other countries reputed to "act in groups". Because of the different relationship which exists in Italy between society and political power these results tend to assume different forms and expressions.

### Genius and general creativity.

Are geniuses the expression of a creative social reality and of a general artistic attitude or are they giants in a desert? Foreign observers, usually but hastily tend to take the latter view.

In reality, they represent the evidence of a creative talent which is widespread throughout the country, and, to reinforce this belief of ours we have selected, for the section of the exhibit dedicated to the arts, nearly exclusively masterpieces by unknowns.

In our opinion, in fact, Italian ingenuity finds its greatness not in Michelangelo or Leonardo or Giotto, but in the "anonymous" artistic expression that can be found in every Italian village, near the seashore as on the mountains, on the hills as in the plains. It is the same artistic ingenuity which shaped every inch of land without violating the essential nature and harmony of the landscape in the cities as well as in the rural areas. It is well-nigh impossible to define the moment when craftsmanship becomes art, or when the monotonous repetition of models turns into personal creation. The same question arises each time when, travelling through Italy, we discover a little village church, a piazza, a small chapel, an ashlar-work, a fountain — all creative expressions of outstanding aesthetic principles. There are small towns that host museums in which exceptionally beautiful artistic items can be found, as each traveller who leaves the main routes to discover Italy "by paths", will find out. Along with this will come the recognition that the beauty of Italy is not preserved in glass cases, but manifests itself in the variegated aspects of everyday life and in the objects that people use daily.

The Italian way of life has some unique characteristics that are difficult to be found in others. One of the most remarkable is definitely the important role allotted to beau56 RIGHT Fifteenth century Italian ships by Beato Angelico; Tryptych of Perugia, St. Nicholas meeting a messenger from the Emperor.

57 OVERLEAF Pilot chart of the Mediterranean Sea by Iacopo Maggiolo, printed in Genoa in 1561. The latest geographical discoveries in North and South America are placed in Africa. Naval Museum of Genova Pegli.






ty as this exhibit clearly points out in the part dedicated to Italian design. Simple objects used daily for sleeping, eating, and walking, are often thought of and conceived to meet well established aesthetic principles and requirements as well as to serve utilitarian purposes.

## Collective action.

Finally, let us analyze the problem of the supposed Italian incapacity to act collectively, or, if you prefer, of the lack of a national ethos. Obviously this image of Italy grew within the common cultural Western framework, which, precisely because it is shared, makes comparisons possible and invites comment on differences and voicing of opinion. The delay with which Italy started its process of industrial modernization reinforced the stereotypes — generally speaking — and, in particular, emphasized the negative aspect inherent in the political and geographical divisions that characterized the country until 1861.

Industrialization and efficient governmental institutions provided the parameters used to judge a nation's modernity. And the Italian political system was undoubtedly far from adequate, when compared with other European standards.

In fact, the late achievement of political unification and economic modernization necessarily slowed down the process that permitted other Western countries to enjoy efficient administrative machinery and political systems capable of finding quick solutions to problems. But this fact had not all the negative consequences one could imagine: today's Italy is the seventh industrialized country in the world and, although through means different from those employed by other Western societies, can overcome its problems. The capacity for collective action that is often missing from the Italian political system is expressed through the initiative of the society as a whole.

A clear example of this capacity to react collectively to general difficulties can be found in the way the country responded recently to the energy crisis that undermined all Western economies. Many economic and political obser58-59 RIGHT Italian merchant-ships in the harbour.

60 OVERLEAF S/S "Castoro Sei" pipelaying the undersea gasduct from Algeria to Italy.







vers were awed by the rapid and prompt recovery of our economy, especially since it took place without the constructive help of the political system.

The dichotomy between an inadequate political structure — based on a rigid parliamentary system and an overestimation of the power of parties - and an active, selfgoverning society undoubtedly exists. The situation becomes even more complex when we realize that a great deal of decision-making in political power is also maintained by the trade unions and the regional and city governments. When, in 1946, the founding fathers of the new Italian republic had to prepare anew the basic principles on which to reconstruct the country, they had to deal mainly with a nation that never - as we demonstrated earlier - overcame the reality of its historical, social, cultural, and regional differences. The results of this fundamental choice — to distribute power to many entities were therefore both positive and negative: negative, for example, in terms of the lack of speed in government decision-making, especially if compared with the usual effectiveness of presidential systems. On the other hand, it became a positive factor because if it had not made the choice, the political struggles among the ideologically different political groups at the end of World War II, would have degenerated unquestionably into a fearful state of tension.

Confronted by this complex situation, Italian society reacted according to its historical tradition: it ignored the inefficiency of the political system and took every initiative to achieve its social and economic goals. This lack of effectiveness of the political system in dealing with the problems of the nation is what differentiates the Italian system of government from that of other Western countries. While this difference is a fact, it would nevertheless be arbitrary to accept it as proof of the alleged incapacity of Italians for collective action.

The fact is that collective action, when you have a highly complex and structured society coupled with a not very effective political system, arises out of a liberal rationale backed by countless independent decisions, rather than from any centralized rationale embodied in planned and carefully programmed action. It is a rationale that emerges

61 RIGHT The "Robogate" system of car assembly in an automobile plant in Turin.

62 OVERLEAF Containers ready for shipment in an Italian harbour.







as the result of a very broad "marketplace" of ideas. In other words, Italian society is far less centralized than it looks, and, lacking any effective regulator like the political systems in other countries, it must regulate and program itself.

There are also good reasons to believe that the position Italy has acquired among the industrialized countries will be maintained regardless of the many problems that still wait to be solved.

It is important that foreign observers — particularly those who tend to doubt the Italian capacity to survive as a civilized country — reflect on two terms that are often used in conjunction with the Italian situation. One is the word "crisis", referring to the political system, which is definitely over-used, giving the impression of a constant, incipient danger of a ruinous fall of the entire social structure; the other is the term "*miracolo italiano*", Italian miracle, every time an important goal is achieved by the country.

Foreign observers should focus rather on the relationship between the political system and society at large. By doing so, they would avoid an overestimation of Italian difficulties and would find rational explanations to describe Italian successes. Everything the nation has ever achieved is the result of labor and ingenuity, never that of free gifts dropped from Heaven.

And the achievements of contemporary Italy are not understandable without thinking about the structures of this country of ours, so deeply integrated into the West and at the same time so uniquely itself as to require the right "code book" to grasp its essence and its substance.

# An Optimistic Conclusion.

One may wonder whether the *modus vivendi* between the political system and society, in other words between the center and the periphery, is still capable of confronting the difficult twenty years that will mark the end of this century. Our answer is definitely positive. Italian society is solidly anchored in its cities: Turin, Milan, Genoa, Venice, Bologna, Florence, Rome and Naples (the eight possible capitals of Italy according to a French observer of the past century) and a hundred more that have, from the beginning, shaped the history of the country. One could note that a multitude of local events could fragment the nation. The fact is, as history has always confirmed, that Italian cities have been and are deeply integrated in the wider European community. Localism and cosmopolitanism have always been the two sides of the same coin.

Let us not forget, for example, that while remaining the country of "a hundred cities", of the many little "nations" included in one, Italy is also the country in which public opinion has most widely supported the idea of a United Europe, as the massive participation of Italian voters to the recent European Parliament elections proved.

French historian Edgar Quinet in 1848 noted that Italians in every moment of their history lived more in cosmopolitan than in national terms. When confronted with the alternative "the country or the world" Italians always chose the world. As a result of this according to Quinet, there has never been a country but "splendid atoms," such as its cities or its open-minded attitude to the world. Today Italy exists, although still composed of splendid smaller "atoms" and it still has something to say to the entire world. Most certainly, it will also overcome any difficulties it will find along the path that leads to the new century.

How can we be so optimistic? It may sound useless to some people to talk about continuity between past and present, to have hopes for a country so often and dangerously troubled by problems. But to support our conclusions we have facts, solid facts, that are couched in clear language: some we have cited here, some other are contained in the audiovisual sections of the exhibit, many others we will not mention.

Secondly, we have tried to clarify and stress the importance — when talking about Italy as well as other nations — of separating events from the basic framework. This, in order to avoid a confused image of the country based on conclusions drawn from a single fact which is mistaken for a fundamental characteristic. The Italian terrorists, for example, are no more than a few hundred individuals. Even if they succeeded in creating turmoil in Italian public life, the impact the phenomenon will have on the destiny of the country will be nil. Yet, they have been accepted by many foreign observers as symbols of the decadence of an entire nation.

The instruments and perspectives history provides to read the present, constitute the best antidote against these over-simplifications. The essential spirit of a country is to be found in the whole of its history and not on the front page of a newspaper. When we affirm that Italy still has an important role to play in the world community, it it simply because we can trace a continuum in its history. Its nature, shaped by man, still remains something special and important for the entire planet.

We started our analysis of stereotypes by talking about how *man* created what most observers thought of as "freely provided by nature". We would like to conclude by recalling the idea that what centuries of labor have done in Italy, still is to be done in many younger nations for which the Italian experience can be of help and guidance.

It has taken the Agnelli Foundation eighteen months to plan and create this exhibit. The Foundation's staff has, in order to achieve this goal, worked to the very best of its capacities. I would like to thank them all publicly for the excellent work they have performed.

My special thanks go to Piero Gastaldo for his collaboration in preparing the scripts, including this introduction, and in finalizing plans. Let me express my gratitude and thanks to Giovanni Granaglia who was responsible for the general organization of the program in the United States and Italy, to Dario Arrigotti, and finally to Alberto Contri and Bruno Wicki of Intercon Italiana for their valuable help in making all this possible.

Marcello Pacini

# ITALY THROUGH THE CAMERA'S EYE

The invention of photography, announced in Paris in 1839 by Louis Daguerre, was unquestionably a flash of creative genius coupled with technical skill. It was also one of the many achievements of that grand and endlessly complex artistic, philosophical, and scientific ferment that had begun to bubble more than four centuries earlier with humanism and the Italian Renaissance.

All the technical knowledge needed to produce photographic images derive directly or indirectly from the approach to art — and, for that matter, to the world pioneered by Brunelleschi and his friends in early 15thcentury Florence. Before he turned his talents to architecture and began work on his soaring masterpiece, the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore, he spent years studying perspective, applying the rules of Euclidean geometry; as a demonstration of the conclusions his studies had led him to, he did two paintings on wood panels of the Piazza della Signoria. While both were seminal in establishing new dimensional canons in building, one was crucial: it laid down a new and scientific law of vision.

In this panel Brunelleschi drew the first optically accurate perspective of the piazza and, to help people grasp the analogy between this vision and the way the human eye actually sees, as well as underscore the instrumental relationship between man and nature, he painted no sky. What he did was to lay in a ribbon of silver that reflected the real sky. As further proof of its perspectual perfection, Brunelleschi's painting could not be viewed directly: the viewer had to look at it through a hole in the middle of the back of the painting, and see its reflection in a mirror set in front of it. As Leon Battista Alberti says in his "Treatise on Painting" (1438), dedicated to Brunelleschi: "Saratti a conoscer buono giudice lo specchio; ne so come le cose ben dipinte abbino nello specchio gratia... Adunque le cose apprese dalla natura si emendino collo specchio." [You of all people know how fine a judge the mirror is; I know how kindly the mirror deals with things that are rightly painted ... So do natural perceptions gain correction from the mirror.]

Alberti's treatise spread the new aesthetic canon all over Western Europe. Besides setting the mirror image as a criterion for judging the beauty of a painting. Alberti hints at expanding the cage of perspective with the "camera obscura", whose trick of reflecting the upside-down shadows of what it could capture through a tiny aperture had, until then, been viewed as nothing more than a strange phenomenon worthy only of idle curiosity. From then on enlightened artists and thinkers, from Leonardo and Gerolamo Cardano to Giovan Battista della Porta, would study its principles, seeking to make the flickering shadow steady and to make its image clearer by placing one or more lenses over the aperture. Their sketchy knowledge of the laws of optics, and the equally primitive skills of their lens grinders meant that they would not near their goal until the threshold of the 17th century.

#### The world through a lens.

Galileo's success with his telescope in the early 1600s was a giant step forward in optics. Painters, too, took advantage of this discovery, when they began using cameras with good lenses to take an analytical look at the forms they would be painting. Just as the discovery of perspective had changed the way we see space, the look of the world through the camera lens made an equally radical change in the tonal quality of structural perspective and in the inner time of the painted image. In the cityscapes of Europe from Venice to London and Dresden, painted - with the help of the "artificial eye"-by Venetians Canaletto and Bellotto, the most famous painters of the 18th century, every trace of subjective invention was rooted out, as was any hint of allegory; and in the perfect reflection of reality in every detail set down, as in the absolutely natural gradation of light and shade, viewers were shown the faithful truth of everyday life in the infinite variety of its human gestures, captured forever by the artist's brush at the splitsecond peak of their performance.

Now we can understand how a Venetian nobleman, count Algarotti, might dream of the day when "it would be granted to man to see a painting fresh from the hand of Nature herself." That wish was granted 77 years later, as photography came to birth in France and England: it was no mere happenstance that the first book containing photographs, written by the British inventor Fox Talbot, was entitled "The Pencil of Nature."

# The Alinari brothers' views of Italy.

The peculiar social and political conditions prevailing in Italy during the first half of the 19th century meant that its great tradition in the area of the visual arts was momentarily overshadowed by literature and opera which, in the works of Alessandro Manzoni and Giuseppe Verdi, seemed to better embody the ideals and aspirations of the entire nation.

Italian photography, too, suffered thereby and in the history of that period we find no such towering figures as those of Nadar in France or Matthew Brady in the United States. The situation did not take a turn for the better until after the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy.

In 1865, the infant state chose Florence as its capital. Florence was one of the cities most truly representative of Italian urban culture and the center of Tuscany, a region then in the vanguard of the economy. For Florence, those days ushered in an explosion in the numbers of photography studios pioneered a few years earlier by the brothers Leopoldo, Giuseppe and Romualdo Alinari.

The primary business of this studio, and the source of its enormous fortune, was reproduction of the works of art to be found in Italy. Those reproductions were widely sold in Italy, a newly restored country which was seeking the roots of its own unity in the grandeur of its past, and were even more sought-after in Europe and across the Atlantic because those works of art were perceived as the common





Alinari Archives. Milan: Corso Vittorio Emanuele at the turn of the century: in the background, a view of the Duomo.

heritage of all of Western civilization. Between 1865, the year when they opened their spacious studio on the Via Nazionale, and 1890, when the last surviving founder died and the helm was taken over by Vittorio, son of Leopoldo, dozens of crews fanned out over the country, and the thousands of plates they exposed constitute a catalogue of almost all the Italian art treasures, from those of the greatest masters to the handiwork of the most obscure craftsmen.

The young Vittorio determined to expand the activities of the house of Alinari considerably and, while constantly updating its archives of works of art, began a campaign of systematic photographing of Italian territory. Under his careful stewardship dozens of photographs were made to document the more significant architectural and urbanistic aspects of every city and region, along with the prevalent aspects of their economies, and the most typical of their habits and customs. From these photographs emerges what is surely the truest picture of Italy in the late 1800s and early 1900s, a nation with an ancient culture albeit very young, without natural resources but caught up in industrial expansion backed by sound and deeply rooted artisan traditions, and by an agriculture swiftly making the shift to mechanization; a country (especially in the South) with more than its share of problems and in the throes of social transition, yet boasting cities with proud civic traditions and important trading centers.

The canons of the Alinari views differ radically from those of the genre of photography then prevailing internationally: a pictorialism which, by clumsy manual trespass over the inescapable features of the actual medium, sought to confer artistic dignity upon photography via imitation of the subjective and murky atmospheres of the worst hack painting of the time. The Alinari pictures go back to the canons of absolute perspectual clarity and objective fidelity to real forms found in the great Italian landscape paintings, while remaining faithful to the idiom of photography. While these photographs do not aspire to the heights of personal creativity, they retain to this day a peerless power to communicate.

The importance of these images, Filippo Zevi declares, also stems from the fact that "whole generations of Italians



Alinari Archives. View of Superga, in the hills around Turin, with the majestic Basilica completed in 1731. In the foreground, the cog railway that connected Superga to Turin. have shaped their knowledge of their country, their visual education, on these photographs, on these frames, on these interpretative canons of the landscape. Looked at with this in mind, the modest, dedicated work of a family of craftsmen is no longer simply a curiosity, merely a tool for scholarly research: it becomes an integral part of the Italian cultural idiom." The decision to photograph the Italian landscapes Dante describes in the *Divina Commedia* is the truest and the most moving evidence of the deep rapport between Vittorio Alinari's photography and the culture of his country, an undertaking approached late in his life during World War I, " not for profit of any sort ... but simply out of abiding love for beautiful Italy."

# Contemporary Attitudes.

Since Vittorio Alinari's death, no professional photographer has come forward to claim his heritage, and the most interesting photographs produced during the Thirties are the work of a handful of gifted amateurs, and of artists and architects like Bruno Munari, Luigi Veronese, and Giuseppe Pagano, working in Venice and Milan. Photojournalism in the modern sense was not born until the eve of World War II, in 1939, with the appearance of Alberto Mondadori's weekly Tempo, where its leading exponent was reporter Federico Patellani. When the war was over those amateur photographers formed the "Bussola" [Compass] Club and, in 1947, issued a famous manifesto inspired by the aesthetic criteria of Benedetto Croce, whose merit was to start a debate so far-reaching as to determine the future course of Italian photography.

Following the example of the Bussola Club, Paolo Monti founded the club known as "La Gondola" in Venice, where Ferruccio Leiss was already working. The Gondola Club, while continuing to pay scrupulous attention to composition and tonality, took a keen interest in the ideas embodied in the neo-realist films of Rossellini, De Sica, and Visconti, working out the "lyrico-realist" style that was to mark most of the young photographers who followed it, from Fulvio Roiter to Gianni Berengo Gardin. In 1954 Paolo Monti retired from his career as a corporate executive to become a full-time professional photographer. He moved to Milan, already the hub of the nation's economy, and there he pursued his particular experimental vein and, at the same time, going back to the patterns the Alinaris used to use, he plunged into a monumental cataloguing of the high points in Italian architecture, from the Renaissance architectures of Comacchio to the spontaneous buildings of the Island of Procida, and on to the latter-day achievements of Scarpa, the architect whose restructuring has given new life to some of Italy's oldest museums. The work of Monti, who has also done photographic analyses of the work of Brunelleschi and Leon Battista Alberti, bears faithful witness to the uniqueness of Italian cities, to the only country in the world where one can gaze at 18th-century Venetian paintings while strolling through a palace with Roman foundations, medieval walls, and 20th-century windows of crystal and steel.

The year 1954 saw the debut of another "La Gondola" photographer, Fulvio Roiter, with a book on Venice, where he lives, and which he leaves only to take pictures that have carried him around the world, making him famous. The photographic language of this artist does not hark back to the skeletal, essential style of his master, Paolo Monti, but leans more toward the delicate, lyrical tones of Ferruccio Leiss. With this visual structure, to which he couples a sometimes sentimental use of color, Roiter has captured, in long years of observing, the lives lived and the trades plied far from the inquisitive eyes of the tourists in the splendid setting of the Venetian lagoons.

Mario Carrieri, is the quintessential voice of the unruly generation that bloomed in the Fifties and attracted nationwide attention in 1959 with his book, "Milano-Italia" which, along with the one by William Klein on New York, became a landmark for the new breed of photoreporters. Following that exploit, Carrieri became a photographer of works of art and design, a field in which he is now one of the most sought-after professionals on the international market. He has, however, continued to explore all the various and least-known aspects of Italian life: particularly significant in this portion of his work are his photographs of the vineyards in Piedmont, where some of Italy's finest



ALDO BALLO A table by designer Aulenti in a Palladian villa - in the background, a fresco by Paolo Veronese.



GABRIELE BASILICO The Pirelli skyscraper by architect Giò Ponti, Milan.



GIANNI BERENGO GARDIN Inside the homes.





ALFA CASTALDI Portraits of Milanese people: a designer.



ELISABETTA CATALANO Portraits of Italian women: S. Sandrelli, actress.







PAOLO MONTI Contemporary glass windows in the medieval Castelvecchio, Verona.





Toni Nicolini In a museum, Milan.





FULVIO ROITER A bird's eye view of the "barene" (shoals) of the Venetian lagoon.

wines are grown, and those showing lovely towns, pristine and unpolluted, of the Ligurian back country.

Gianni Berengo Gardin, who grew up in the Venetian "La Gondola" club, is a full-time photographer, too; he has now settled in Milan after several stays in Paris which gave him a first-hand look at the special approach to reality pioneered by Willy Ronis and Robert Doisnau. These stimulating influences make him one of the most surehanded and dedicated reporters in Italy, to whose regions he has devoted a series of eloquent books. For some time Berengo Gardin, perpetually concerned with the conditions under which Italians live and work, has been doing less spontaneous but more thoughtful and descriptive photography — "Inside Houses" is one of the best examples of such sequences — displaying his skill at capturing in a few images an ideal identity for the nation.

Toni Nicolini's approach to photography is similar to Berengo Gardin's: his targets are the courtyards — noble and not so noble — that are one of the typical sights in the old quarters of Milan, simultaneously catching the daily lives of the people who dwell in them in all their pulsing vivacity: he snares the dealers on the stock exchange, schoolboys visiting a museum, and the old men dozing in an "osteria" [tavern] on the edge of town.

Gabriele Basilico, though, absolutely bans any human presence from his pictures, but floods them with vivid, piercing light. This young photographer uses makes his personal idiom work for him as he dissects the most interesting creations of modern Milanese architecture out of the dense urban tissue, from Muzio's Angelicum theater to Giò Point's Pirelli skyscraper, underscoring their perspectives and structural features. Sobriety and spareness are the traits we discern in these buildings and streets — yet they are merely a reflection of the men who created them. We can read those characters plain and clear in the human faces upon which Alfa Castaldi trains his camera. While Castaldi's pictures are portraits of some of our major architects and designers done with proper simplicity, Aldo Ballo's photography shows us some of the works that have made the Italian "line" world-famous. This way of making even the humblest objects that people our day-to-day horizons is certainly an approach deeply rooted in Italian tradition, as Ballo shows us so clearly in one of his best pictures, done for a Gae Aulenti piece in Caldogno's Palladian villa.

The lofty Italian craftsmanship tradition is no longer confined to small workshops of high fashion and furniture; it is thriving most vigorously in such middle-sized, hightechnology plants as Pininfarina Industries, in Turin, where they design or actually build automobile bodies for the most prestigious cars in the world. The pictures of the wind tunnel where the new models are tested come to us from the perceptive eye of Nini Mulas, who, thanks to having devoted close study to developments in contemporary art in the work of its most prestigious practitioners, from Andy Warhol to Mario Schifano, has captured in depth the majestic beauty of form in those structures.

Where there is no substitute for the human hand, where creativity guided by man is still basic, is in the world of music, whose most gorgeous "temple" is La Scala: here the weekly EPOCA's photographer, Giorgio Lotti, spent months on end to bring us his firmly controlled images of the enchantment that flows from the notes, the colors, and the movement of a lyric opera or a ballet.

Recording a different cultural world, Rome and its leading lights for many a year is Elisabetta Catalano, famed for her protraits of Federico Fellini, Alberto Moravia, and Pier Paolo Pasolini. Equally spare and probing are the pictures this photographer has caught of more or less famous Italian women, images that are basic to our understanding of where we now are.

Italy is a small country encompassing a truly extraordinary variety of environments. This is due to the way the land is shaped as well as to its history. The only one who has successfully captured this complexity is Mario De Biasi, editor-in-chief for photography at EPOCA, which certainly owes part of its success to his pictures. De Biasi has looked at Italy from every angle, by land, at sea, and in the air, and for these 30 years he has been "Italy's eyes", through pictures bursting with scarcely controlled astonishment that have rediscovered for all of us the secret and unexpected beauties of our country.

Edward Rozzo, the latest and youngest of the artists in this review of photographs of contemporary Italy, is sym-
bolic of the close ties that have always bound Italy to America. Born in New York of Italian-American parents, Rozzo became a photographer at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, under the tutelage of Harry Callahan. On completion of his studies, he decided to go back to the land of his ancestors, and has now settled there permanently. Having grown up in America, the most technologically advanced country in the world, Rozzo has found in Italy those same values on a different scale. His pictures show a man who is building Italy's future on the unique and fundamental pattern of its own past.

## Giovanni Chiaramonte

## ANOTHER FACE OF

This exhibition intends to offer through a selection of objects and anonymous works of art a means to approach in an unconventional manner the Italian artistic civilization. Usually, one immediately associates the current image of Italian art with that of its more diffusely spread masterpieces. Indeed, the concept itself of "masterpiece", as at present still is used at the most diverse cultural levels, was born precisely in Italy in the sphere of the Renaissance.

It was then widely diffused in the Romantic period, mostly in reference to Italian art of the "Golden Age", until becoming today a prevailing clichè. Thus, the visitor will be surprised and perhaps a bit disappointed in realizing that in this exhibition there are no venerated masterpieces and the attempt to offer a synthetic image of Italian artistic creativity is entrusted to a sampling of works which usually are defined as minor, applied, or industrial arts, according to the particular object. It seems indispensable to us, therefore, to specify the reasons for our selection which is dictated by a precise critical assumption.

The attention paid to the so-called "minor arts" and to that which today is called "material culture" has assumed lately a particular emphasis, especially through the impetus of anthropological thought which has strongly influenced recent tendencies in art history. One has today a major awareness of the fact that a work of art cannot be called such merely because of its function or because of its intention to be this. The old division between major arts and minor arts, therefore, are as worthless as those even more ancient divisions which assume qualitative differences between a "history" painting (an altarpiece, for example, or a mythological subject) and a *genre* painting (a landscape or a still-life, for instance). Above all, one knows today that a commonplace object of everyday use born from a long and complex artisan tradition and executed with skill and love

1 A late 16th century Florentine polyhedral sun-dial, with 25 sides. Used as a portable sun-clock; unlike simpler models, it did not require compass orientation. Museo Navale, Genova.



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2 ABOVE Carpenters' trade tools with S. Vittore and S. Giuseppe, the Guild's Patron Saints. Also, the coat of arms of the Sforzas, Dukes of Milan. From an illustrated Codex of 1478 from Cremona (Lombardy). Museo Civico di Cremona. 3 OPPOSITE Wrought-iron keys of the Renaissance. An example of a long-standing tradition of craftmanship in Lombardy. The monogram of Christ can be read among the letters on the ward. Museo Civico di Cremona.







4 LEFT Mirror with a polygonal bone frame. Made in the workshop of the Embriachis, a 15th century family of carvers. Horne Foundation, Florence. 5 ABOVE A Florentine 16th century rock-crystal bowl with grotesque engravings. Museo degli Argenti, Florence. or, on the other hand, a painting, sculpture, or even a simple hand-manifactured decorative article born from the anonymous talent of the community can transmit to us countless signals and information about the different levels of a culture and of a civilization, to the same extent, even though in different ways, as the works of art born to satisfy the most elevated needs of the culture of the upper classes. One can ascertain, in the most recent trends of art history another process which repeats on various levels a similar scheme. Indeed, as the attention of art historians directed initially toward the major arts was turned also toward the minor arts and the expression of them was re-evaluated. attention was extended at the same time from major centers considered traditionally the "centers of masterpieces", to minor centers, thus expanding Italian artistic geography. It is intended, in such a way, to rescue the works from their "lofty isolation", to make them live again in the complex environmental and cultural atmosphere in which they were born, to insert them in the stream of everyday life and of productive processes.

The bond which ties the major arts to the minor arts, the masterpiece to the object of applied art intended for either refined or popular circles, is somewhat analogous to the bond which occurs between the main centers of artistic production and the places of minor importance which participate, nevertheless, in the culture radiating from the larger city.

If we run through the history of critical reflection on art, we realize that a distinction between the two different levels of artistic production took place rather late. Indeed, in antiquity and until the threshold of the Renaissance, the figure of the artist was not distinguished conceptually from that of the craftsman, i.e. the intellectual moment of artistic creation was not disassociated from the practical and manual one. In the intention to confer on the figure of the artist a professional dignity and a social prestige that differentiated him from that of the craftsman, the theoreticians of Humanism, from Ghiberti to Leon Battista Alberti, strove to underline the intellectual and scientific aspects at the basis of artistic creation. Consequently, this creation was raised above simple manual activity and was made equal to mathematics as a scientifically precise instrument

6 Madonna with Child. A wooden statue probably from Iacopo della Quercia's workshop in Siena; about 1440. The statue was covered by a coat of plaster and glue until it was restored and brought back to wood some years ago. No trace of the original polychromy. Castelnuovo Berardenga (Siena), Chiesa di S. Maria a Villa a Sesta.



for understanding reality through the perspectival representation of man and space.

In the middle of the sixteenth century, having attained by then a position of prestige in humanistic society, the artist could dedicate himself to tasks of great craftsmanship without being degraded for this to the rank of a pure mechanical executor.

A paradigmatic example of this new attitude of the awareness of the artist was offered in Florence during the period of the Medici court. Figures such as Benvenuto Cellini, Bernardo Buontalenti, or Baccio Bandinelli dedicated themselves to the execution of small objects of great refinement for the Grand Duke with the same attention as to the creation of statuary groups destined to beautify the city.

Collecting by the Medici, widening the field of its interests, did not limit itself exclusively to masterpieces of painters and sculptors.

It turned to precious antique objects frequently completed and embellished by mounts designed by the Florentine artists active in the Grand Duke manufactories which, especially under Cosimo I and even more under his sons Francesco and Ferdinando, assumed particular prominence.

Until the late eighteenth century in the grand-ducal workshops, innumerable craftsmen executed various objects in crystal and semi-precious stones, frequently based on drawings provided by painters and sculptors thus realizing in practice a fusion between the major and minor arts.

Further evidence of the bond which ties painting to the applied arts derives from the manufacture of ceramics and majolica of Pesaro, Urbino and above all Faenza, in which the most famous pictorial examples of the sixteenth century, diffused through engravings which just at that time began to circulate, became stylistic and iconographical models.

These artisan products, as a result, constituted a means to spread the contemporary pictorial language.

In addition to a few objects intended for refined circles on which famous artists worked, the exhibition presents above all objects of everyday use coming from different Italian centers and destined for popular circles. 7 Small carved chest by 15th century Sicilian craftsmen. Museo della casa fiorentina antica, Palazzo Davanzati -Florence.



These, perhaps more than the former, can document the qualitative level of the production of applied arts and the domestic customs of the Italian population.

Even though they are products created anonymously, they testify the attentive care of the craftsman in the execution. The presence of decorative motifs did not prevent the form from always remaining closely tied to the function to the point that they remained substantially unchanged until the coming of the Industrial Revolution.

The Italian artistic culture always paid particular attention to the depiction of human work and its tools.

In northern Italy, for example, on the doorways of the Romanesque cathedrals, we find the representations of different occupations in relation to the various months of the year. On the other hand, in the relief panels on the bell tower of the Cathedral of Florence, the agricultural and artisan activities fall within the most complex system of liberal and mechanical arts. This thematic material was not limited to the field of sculpture, but was extended also to tapestries and to manuscript illumination. We find representations of the arts and occupations not only in the encyclopedical treatment of the Tacuina Sanitatis, diffused in the area of Lombardy in the fourteenth century, but also in the very simple illuminations which constituted the frontispieces of the registers of the guilds of smiths and of masons (such as the manuscript from Cremona shown in room 6).

This type of interest did not remain limited to the culture of the Middle Ages. Indeed, in the eighteenth century, the thought of the Enlightenment turned with renewed attention to man and to all of his productive activities of both an intellectual and manual nature at all levels and began again to describe, as in the volumes of the Casanatense Library or in the Piedmontese drawings exhibited here, the work of the artisan and all of its tools with the same attention as the French Encyclopedists dedicated to the liberal professions.

The ability to make art in all of its forms, that is to express oneself artistically or to produce objects of artistic value, has been widely diffused in Italy in all periods. This also is a commonplace, which in the past has created in Italy feelings which were foolishly apologetic or national8 Low fruit bowl with a corrugated rim, known as a "crespina". Made in Urbino in the late 16th century. Representing the influence of the Planet Venus according to the astrological tradition: young couples accompanied by musicians (in the foreground), and Venus with Cupid on the chariot (above). Museo delle Ceramiche, Faenza.



istic. Like many others commonplaces, however, this one has a basis in truth.

It is a widespread ability both in a geographical sense, i.e. dispersed extensively in the different regions of Italy, and in a social and economic sense, i.e. diffused in the various levels of society. Indeed, there have been many centers in Italy from which styles radiated from the Middle Ages until the end of the Baroque period, and it is not easy to adopt a simple criterion to distinguish the main centers from the minor ones. It is a distinction which risks creating the same errors and distortions or stereotypes which have brought about an arbitrary distinction between major arts and minor arts.

One usually thinks that the "capital cities" with their tendency to concentrate political and economic power are those which succeed in imposing a lasting artistic domination on the surroundings. In Italy, on the contrary, there were many "capital cities" and there were even more small centers which, in turn, can be considered centers of expansion and of formation of artistic schools, because of their productivity in the field of art.

It is true that the variety of the situations which are present in the territory of Italy has been endless and also that the changes which these have undergone through the various periods have been extremely remarkable. This variety and the changeability of sutuations reflected in the field of art derive from the great diversity of the geographic physiognomy of Italy (from the Alps to Sicily) and from the continual variation of political and economic conditions (from the Middle Ages until modern times). Thus, it is difficult to establish a permanent definition of major and minor center. Very early in modern Italian history, between the tenth and twelfth centuries, one perceives from the settling of relations between town and country the rise (or the rebirth) of intermediate centers of production and exchange, which developing through time very soon became radiating centers of artistic activity. Later, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a few medium and small-sized centers were chosen as location of advanced experiments in the urbanistic field. These contained very notable works of architecture, painting and sculpture and developed into laboratories of minor arts. This is the case,

9 A Florentine 16th century silver jug with traces of gold-gild. Museo degli Argenti, Florence.





for example, of Pienza, Castiglione d'Olona and Sabbioneta. There are, moreover, many less spectacular cases of tiny cities or towns which assumed a qualified artistic importance through the initiative of great feudal families, or of Signories.

This is a situation which also occured in other European countries until the consolidation of national unity, until the strengthening of the monarchies and until the consequent concentration in capital cities of power, richness, and culture.

In Italy, on the other hand, this situation lasted longer than elsewhere, because of the richly diverse nature of the country and, above all, because of the delay in unification which facilitated the persistence of local cultures and traditions.

For some of the above reasons and for yet others, it is clear that it is not easy nor useful to define which are the general and permanent characteristics of Italian art, admitting that they even exist. The predominant expression by Italians in the "formal norm" as well as the constant remembrance of a classical norm and the prevalence of an intellectual structure are maintained to be the typical characteristics of Italian art.

One can also say that "drawing" was one of the strong points in the means of expression of Italian art.

But one cannot draw forth indications or arrive at conclusions which cannot be other than a balance sheet of historical happenings, and not the result of a structure which has always repeated itself and must necessarily repeat itself in the future.

This exhibition, anyway, did not have this aim, but rather that of demostrating that not only great art but also minor art determine both the visible form of our creativity and the real richness of the major and minor centers. In one word, of Italy.

**Giuliano Briganti** 

10 Apothecary's vase, decorated with foliage and large fruits. Late 16th century Venetian majolica. Museo delle Ceramiche, Faenza.



## Soundtrack of the multi-image show.

G. ROSSINI, La Gazza Ladra (ouverture), DGG A. VIVALDI, Concert in F major, P. 274, ERATO L. BERIO, The female prisoner, CBS L. BERIO, Folksong, CBS Florentine anon. of the 14th century, Lamento di Tristano, ARCHIV C. MONTEVERDI, Toccata dall'Orfeo, ARGO T. ALBINONI, Concert in D. Minor, Op. IX, 2, ERATO Anon., Antidotum Tarantulae, H. MUNDI Anon., Chorea, EMI Gregorian chant, Rorate Coeli Desuper, MPS C. MALVEZZI, "Dal vago e bel sereno" and Sinfonia from "La pellegrina" (1589), ARGO G. GABRIELI, Canzon VII toni no. 2, CBS A. VIVALDI, Concert in D Minor, RV 541, ERATO G. TORELLI, Concert for trumpet, PHILIPS G. VERDI, Nabucco (ouverture), DGG A. VIVALDI, Dixit Dominus, PHILIPS



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