

1927

THE RETURN TO ITALY

**SALVATORE FERRAGAMO
AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY VISUAL CULTURE**

MUSEO SALVATORE FERRAGAMO
PALAZZO SPINI FERONI, FLORENCE
19 MAY 2017 - 2 MAY 2018

UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF

Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali
e del Turismo
Regione Toscana
Comune di Firenze

EXHIBITION PROMOTED AND ORGANIZED BY

Museo Salvatore Ferragamo
in collaboration with
Fondazione Ferragamo

EXHIBITION PROJECT CONCEIVED BY

Stefania Ricci

CURATED BY

Carlo Sisi

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Lucia Mannini
Susanna Ragionieri
Stefania Ricci

SCENOGRAPHY

Maurizio Balò
in collaboration with
Andrea De Micheli

VIDEO INSTALLATIONS AND VIDEOS

Vincenzo Capalbo and Marilena Bertozzi
(Art Media Studio)
Daniele Tommaso

INTERVIEWS

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Curated by Alessandra Acocella, Caterina Toschi
(Senzacornice): Ugo La Pietra, Alessandro Mendini,
Stefania Ricci, Luca Scarlini, Carlo Sisi, Lea Vergine

FILM INTERVIEWS

Francesco Fei

**WORKSHOP BETWEEN ART AND DESIGN IN ITALY
1927-2017: THE INNOVATION PROJECT**

by Design Campus, Dipartimento di Architettura-
DIDA, Università degli Studi di Firenze.
Supervised and curated by professor Francesca Tosi
Projects by: Martina Follesa, Serena Gentile, Nadia
Gutnikova, Angelo Iannotta, Dalila Innocenti, Margaret
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**EXPLANATORY EDUCATIONAL PANELS
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Neri Conti, Olimpia Miniati, Benedetta Noferi,
Bernardo Sarti, students of Liceo Classico
Michelangiolo (IV A) in Florence, supervised by
professor Stefano Fabbri Bertoletti within the
framework of the Alternanza Scuola-Lavoro-MIUR
programme in agreement with Fondazione Ferragamo

CATALOGUE EDITED BY

Stefania Ricci
Carlo Sisi

CONTENTS BY

Alessandra Acocella, Maria Canella, Daniela
Degl'Innocenti, Roberta Ferrazza, Ugo La Pietra, Lucia
Mannini, Alessandro Mendini, Isabella Patti, Paolo
Piccione, Susanna Ragionieri, Stefania Ricci, Luca
Scarlini, Carlo Sisi, Maddalena Tirabassi, Caterina
Toschi, Francesca Tosi, Elvira Valleri, Lea Vergine
Skira editore, Milan, 512 pages with illustrations

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1927

THE RETURN TO ITALY

THE EXHIBITION

The year 2017 marks the ninetieth anniversary of Salvatore Ferragamo's return to Italy in 1927, after twelve years spent in the United States. On the occasion of this important anniversary, the Museo Salvatore Ferragamo will hold an exhibition whose common thread is the theme of the journey, and will present visitors with a comprehensive view of Italy in the 1920s. It is now commonly believed that the 1920s were a breeding ground of ideas and experiments that were performed with an open mind, devoid of prejudice or ideological conditioning.

In 1927 Salvatore Ferragamo returned to his native country after living in California for twelve years. That same year, Massachusetts witnessed the tragedy of the two anarchists Nicola Sacco, a shoe factory worker, and Bartolomeo Vanzetti. It was also the year that Charles Lindbergh made the first non-stop flight from New York to Paris.

Not yet seventeen, in 1915 Salvatore Ferragamo sailed from Naples, a third-class passenger on the *Stampalia*, to further his education, just like the many young people who leave Italy to study abroad today. He didn't set out in search of a job, following in the footsteps of many of his fellow natives or in those of his elder brothers. Salvatore already had a life and a job as a skilful shoemaker in his native village, Bonito, in the Irpinia region. At the age of eleven he was already the owner of a shop with six people working for him, all of whom older than him, where he made custom-made shoes for the women in town. But Salvatore wanted to learn more about footwear. His obsession to create the perfect shoe took him to Naples first, and then to the United States. He believed that America was the right place to quench his thirst for knowledge. The first sewing machines used to stitch the upper to the sole had been invented there, and the footwear industry had reached levels of progress that were unthinkable in Italy.

Salvatore returned to his country, this time travelling first class, on board the great ocean liner *Roma*, of the General Italian Navigation, a ship whose maiden voyage had taken place in 1926, with stops in New York, Genoa and Naples. Salvatore was a successful man. He had learned everything there was to know about shoes, sizes, and fit. He had become famous thanks to his shop in Santa Barbara on the California coast where he repaired and crafted custom-made shoes. So famous, in fact, that in 1923 he was able to open an elegant shop in Hollywood, where the Hollywood stars would purchase their shoes. He had witnessed first-hand the great revolution that had been fueled by the movies and the radio in the world of

communication. In the United States he had earned a reputation for being the “shoemaker to the stars”, an enviable status, reinforced by the American press far and wide. The demand for special shoes, ones that were comfortable as well as being attractive, a must for the new lifestyle for which well-being was such an important factor, had grown from day to day. That was why Salvatore decided to take a trip to Italy. America was immense, magnificent, modern. It was home to that *joie de vivre* that could be seen in the unbridled fun, music, dancing, women’s liberation, as described by Francis Scott Fitzgerald in 1925 in the novel *The Great Gatsby*, and that was being imitated by all of Europe. The continent’s only desire was to free itself from the nightmare of the Great War that had just ended and bury the past. But Salvatore believed that Italy was the only place where he would be able to find shoemakers who were good enough to satisfy his demanding clients’ expectations and uphold the high level of quality that his models were famous for. His intention was to teach these Italian shoemakers everything he had learned in California and combine this with the local craft tradition, carrying out what still today we hope will happen to those who leave Italy to learn more about their professions: that they will come back one day and make available to others what they have learned for the benefit of their country. The initial idea was to set up a factory that made shoes by hand, which could be shipped on a regular basis to the United States; Salvatore’s plan was to return to California as soon as possible so that he could run his shop and oversee his clients personally. But only a part of his plan was implemented. Salvatore did not merely open a workshop in Florence, the city he had chosen by virtue of its undisputed fame as the symbol of Italian culture and style; he chose to settle permanently in the Tuscan capital city. He would return to the United States only occasionally to oversee his shops as well as the branch that was to open later on in New York.

His decision to remain on Italian soil can be interpreted in many ways, but one thing is for sure: the expansive model of the American economy, which would eventually collapse on “Black Thursday” in October 1929, encouraged entrepreneurs on both sides of the Atlantic to imitate the United States, which appeared to be the new world leader. For Ferragamo, building a bridge between his native country and the American way represented the ideal crowning of his youthful decision to migrate, at a time when the European economies were being restructured after the crisis that followed the end of World War I. Neither Hitler nor Roosevelt had appeared on the government scene as yet, nor had Mussolini started working on the technocratic overhaul of Iri, Istituto per la ricostruzione industriale (Institute for Industrial Reconstruction).

This was not the only motivation that encouraged Ferragamo to change his plans in such a radical way, however. To those coming from outside, after so many years away, Italy seemed like a new country. In the United States, the place where Ferragamo was returning from, the advent of fascism and Mussolini at the helm was seen as something positive, the perfect remedy for the political instability that Italy had encountered after World War I. Italy seemed to be making every effort to catch up with the other European countries as concerned modernity, in search of a new style, one that was capable of fulfilling the needs and expectations of modern society and that could be identified, for the first time after the

Unification of the country, as being truly Italian. The starting point was represented by the concept of unity in the arts, urban studies, architecture, technology, and crafts, to which was linked the return to the trade and the tradition of the Renaissance *bottega* (workshop), considered to be the perfect example of syncretism. What emerged, in consequence, was the figure of the artist-craftsman, who was assigned an ethical and political role as a guiding spirit of the modern times. The cardinal point of the project was the remarkable rise in the importance of the decorative arts, which enjoyed a season of great creative ferment with the founding in 1922 in Monza of the University of the Arts, and the organization, from 1923 to 1930, of biennial expositions held in Monza's Villa Reale. The latter event would eventually evolve into the Milan Triennials.

FLORENCE IN 1920s

In Florence as well, the decade was filled with events aimed at reappraising the leading role of the decorative arts and crafts in general, and this led to the founding of both the EAT (Ente Attività Toscane) and the Art Fairs (Fiere d'arte) of 1923 and 1924. These initiatives were boosted by the educational work of the Regio Istituto d'Arte di Porta Romana, truly a breeding ground for both Tuscan and national creativity. When Ferragamo arrived in Florence, the word "return" could be heard everywhere: there was a return to order, a return to trade, a return to the great Italian traditions. And this exhibition will try to tell the story of this transition: a practical transition, the founding of an industry; the transition of taste, Salvatore Ferragamo's perception of the culture of his time. It is a story, developed over several chapters, that the public will be able to analyze as a whole, like a *Bildungsroman*, i.e. a coming-of-age story.

Starting from this premise, Carlo Sisi, the curator of the exhibition, assisted by the scientific committee, developed a plan for the exhibition that unfolds as it follows the common thread of the transatlantic voyage taken by Ferragamo to return to Italy. It is also the theme underpinning the exhibition installation designed by the set designer Maurizio Balò, and it is a metaphor of the intellectual path that Salvatore Ferragamo follows in the visual culture of 1920s Italy, extracting from it the themes and the works that influenced, whether or not directly, his poetic workshop. All the cultural and social issues that characterized the renaissance that took place during the post-World War I period, on the eve of the rise of the Fascist regime, are examined here as well.

EXHIBITION PATH

ROOM 1 – SALVATORE FERRAGAMO RETURNS TO ITALY

The first section of the exhibition is dedicated to Salvatore Ferragamo's return to Italy on board the *Roma*, one of the great motor vessels of the General Italian Navigation fleet. The theme of the ocean liner can be seen in the montage of photographs depicting the lavish surroundings and the luxury enjoyed by the passengers on board. Also on display are the brochures publicizing these majestic vessels, as well as a cross-section view of the interior. At the centre of the room a large video installation documents the young Ferragamo's family and his experiences in America, where he was in contact with the world of cinema. The collection of press releases on display bears witness to his great success in Hollywood. On display are his travel documents and the certificate proving he was a U.S citizen when he came back to Italy, as well as shoes, the most important models he made during that period, which were special orders for the movie stars. Symbolizing Ferragamo's voyage to the United States is the painting by Pippo Rizzo, *Il nomade* (The Wanderer), oil on canvas, 1929, from the Galleria d'Arte Moderna "Empedocle Restivo" in Palermo; the artist has portrayed the modern traveller ready to broaden his mind by expanding the horizons of his experiences and his opinions. In the foreground of Mino Maccari's *Natura morta* (Still Life), oil on canvas, 1926, generously loaned to the exhibition by the Gallerie degli Uffizi, Galleria d'arte moderna di Palazzo Pitti, is a box that reads "Italy", foreshadowing the future exporting of Italian products around the world.

ROOM 2 – TWENTIETH-CENTURY FLORENCE

The next room is devoted to Ferragamo's arrival in Florence and it invites viewers to imagine what this man, by then a U.S. citizen, saw when he arrived in the city that symbolized the myth of the Renaissance, a man accustomed to rather different horizons and a completely different contemporary world. On display here are several twentieth-century masterpiece paintings: from the painting of *Piazza Santa Trinita* by Giovanni Colacicchi, to the works of Egisto Ferroni, John Baldwin, Giuseppe Piombanti Ammannati, and Ottone Rosai. From his early works, the latter artist portrays a vision of Florence dominated by the silence and peace of its neo-fifteenth-century taste. This particular cultural climate is also perfectly expressed in the magazine *Solaria*, where art, literature, music and even cinema are discussed. What Florence looked like when Ferragamo arrived has been reconstructed in the sequence of aforementioned paintings, illustrating the city's architectural and urban characteristics, as well as depicting the atmosphere found by the many "cultured" tourists who travelled there. Screened at the centre of the room is the film made by Salvatore Ferragamo himself upon arriving in the city: it is a rare glimpse of Florence in the 1920s that has come down to us.

ROOM 3 – FOLKLORE AND THE DECORATIVE ARTS IN ITALY

The third section of the exhibition illustrates the themes of folklore and regionalism, indicated as the pathway to renewal of the contemporary decorative arts in Italy, because of their lavish repertoire the source of inspiration for Ferragamo's own creativity.

Taking as a starting point the 1911 Ethnographic Exhibition held in Rome, exemplified here by some of the garments collected on that occasion for every region in the country, and now loaned to the exhibition by the Museo Nazionale delle Arti e Tradizioni Popolari di Roma, the theme of this room is represented by some truly remarkable works: the Sardinian artefacts of Federico Melis and the Roman ones of Duilio Cambellotti, the wonderful production of the Triveneto, represented by Vittorio Zecchin and by the Futurist sequences of Fortunato Depero.

This is a journey through the applied arts that from the time of the first edition held in 1923 the Monza Biennials unveiled to Italy and the world. It is also thanks to such events that Italian taste developed, the idea of a "Made in Italy" style that was based on popular art, and therefore on national identity, that would be crucial for the company of Salvatore Ferragamo as well.

ROOM 4 – ITALIAN WOMEN

In the early post-World War I period the female figure became liberated in every way possible: no longer just the mother and child-bearer championed by Fascism, but a woman who made her appearance in society, in literary circles, in sports competitions, and who created – after the *femme fatale* of the end of the century – a new taste, the one that Ferragamo would use in his remarkable products as well. A suitable amount of space has been assigned to such an important theme, represented here by a selection of pieces from women's wardrobe – day and eveningwear –, paintings of famous women in their surroundings, and photographic portraits of female artists, photographers, writers, actresses, politicians who influenced and characterized the decade. Marquise Luisa Casati, Margherita Sarfatti, Alma Fidora, the Wulz sisters, Edina Altara, Paola Borboni, to name but a few.

ROOM 5 – “INDUSTRIOUS” FLORENCE OF THE 1920s

Connected to the second section of the exhibition is the fifth room, including a selection of works made in Florence in the 1920s illustrating how, akin to Ferragamo’s footwear, the great skill of the craftsmen and the immense variety of materials and decorative motifs aimed to express an innovative as well as typifying artistic language. Gio Ponti’s vases for Richard-Ginori, Carlo Scarpa’s glass designs for the Cappellin shop in Florence, majolicas by Cantagalli, cut-glass bowls by Balsamo Stella for S.A.L.I.R, textiles by Lisio – all these objects offer proof of the capacity to renew tradition in both a functional and contemporary key. Thayaht (real name Ernesto Michaelles) represents the perfect example of the amalgamation between the fine arts and the decorative arts during that period of time. The eclectic artist was the author of sculptures and paintings, as well as of furniture and objects, a creator of fashion and a master graphic artist.

Those were years when Florence cultivated, inside the Regio Istituto d’Arte, the harmonious union between what were referred to as “sister arts”: young artists, initially coordinated by the renowned sculptor Libero Andreotti, produced designs and objects for major national events, even publishing their works on the covers of *Domus*.

ROOM 6 – THE ITALIAN HOME

In the decade that stretched from 1920 to 1930 in Italy, the design of the home and everything around it was the testing ground for what was to become the “Made in Italy” style in the 1950s. During those years, there was a return to the debate on the organic conception of architecture, the ultimate focus of all the arts.

This room is dominated by a video installation reconstructing three models for homes designed in that period: Casa d’Artista (Artist’s Home) by Balla and Depero, Casa Neoclassica (Neoclassical Home) by Gio Ponti, and Casa Razionale (Rational Home) by Terragni and Guppo 7, identified by Casa Elettrica (Electric House) presented in Monza in 1930, the container of objects and new sensibilities.

The video installation includes contemporary recreations of those designs made by a group of young students at the Design Campus (Dipartimento di Architettura – DIDA, Università degli Studi di Firenze), who were asked to ponder the theme of living without overlooking its relationship with tradition (especially with the excellence of the know-how that is inherent to Italy’s productive culture), its attention to modernity, and the opportunities offered by technological innovation. This resulted in interpretations of actual and present possibilities, as well as of visions of future technology and lifestyles.

ROOM 7 – THE BODY IN PARTS

Taking into account the fact that starting in the 1920s the aesthetic of the object was closely connected with the exact perception of physicality, the harmony of the joints, the laws of movement and proportions, a large section of the exhibition is devoted to the idea of the “body in parts”. Here, the theme of the body, which was so important to the aesthetics of that day and age, is expressed in all its possible variations through a sort of game that ranges from its Futurist and Cubist deconstruction to its reconstruction. This was a sort of “return to order” that specifically in high fashion and in the chance to bestow the body with refined details led to the woman’s public appearance in dance, sport, anatomical study, and the technique of measurement.

Indeed, a new body culture is dated to this period, aimed at valorizing both physical and psychological well-being through sport and physical exercise, the recent dance forms, massage, beauty parlours, cosmetics, plastic surgery. The emphasis on measurement, in particular, is reflected in the work of Salvatore Ferragamo, in his search for the perfect shoe, and in the fashion system in general; it became the focus of the trade magazines and specialized studies, exhaustively documented in this exhibition: it was a modernist and systematic vision of fashion, in which new concepts of rationality, order, scientific rigour, technical discipline were clearly visible as prelude of the size system development and normalization during the second post-war period.

ROOM 8 – THE BODY AND ITS AESTHETICS

This room focuses on the body as the aesthetic instrument of dynamism, a core theme in twentieth-century culture in the late 1920s. In line with the new perception of the body, the harmony of the joints, the laws of movement, and the proportions that characterized that period, several significant works are displayed that delve into multiple iconographies where the “reasons” of the body are explicated, between the avant-garde and the metaphysical, all the way to the “dawning” of the fashion system: Dario Viterbo, Alimondo Ciampi and Giacomo Balla for dance, Thayaht (Ernesto Michahelles), Francesco Messina, Umberto Primo Conti for sport, Mario Broglio and RAM (Ruggero Alfredo Michahelles) for the glorification of the forms and of “solar fashion” against the background of the essential and luminous beauty of marine nature, and, lastly, Fillia (Luigi Enrico Colombo), Mino Rosso, Depero, and Luciano Baldessari, who expressed the metaphysics of the mannequin and the mechanized body in all its facets.

CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS

This exhibition becomes a chance for study and research, an educational tool and a stimulus for contemporary reflection. A yearly appointment at Museo Salvatore Ferragamo that, if we look back to the past, aims to contribute to a better understanding of the present and offer ideas for the future. The project would not have been complete without a contemporary glance provided by the interviews that were carried out with intellectuals and specialists in the world of culture and design (Ugo La Pietra, Alessandro Mendini, Stefania Ricci, Luca Scarlini, Carlo Sisi, Lea Vergine) on the topics at the heart of this event (available on the Salvatore Ferragamo website) and by the results of the workshop entitled "Tra arte e design in Italia 1927-2017: il progetto dell'innovazione" (Between Art and Design in Italy 1927-2017: The Innovation Project) – curated by professor Francesca Tosi (Università degli Studi di Firenze, Dipartimento di Architettura – DIDA, Design Campus). The educational panels explaining the contents of the exhibition, as well as the contents of the audio guides are the result of the museum's collaboration with other institutes as well. These were written by four fourth-year students (IV A) of Liceo Classico Michelangiolo in Florence, coordinated by professor Stefano Fabbri Bertoletti, for the project *Storytelling Ferragamo* as part of the educational project Alternanza Scuola-Lavoro (school plus work training) – of the Italian Ministry of Education in collaboration with Fondazione Ferragamo.

MAURIZIO BALÒ

Studied architecture at Università degli Studi di Firenze, where he also began working with the university theatre ensemble. In 1975 he began designing stage designs and costumes for numerous prose theatre productions, performed in the major Italian theatres. In particular, we should mention the works he produced for the director Massimo Castri (for texts by Pirandello, Ibsen, Goldoni, Pasolini, among others) in the civic theatres of Rome and Turin, Umbria and Emilia-Romagna. For Berlioz's *La damnation de Faust* at the Teatro Comunale in Bologna in 1982, he created his first installation for opera. This was followed by other productions for the same genre: the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, Teatro La Fenice in Venice, Teatro San Carlo in Naples, Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, Opéra Bastille in Paris, Arena di Verona, Opernhaus in Zurich, Metropolitan in New York, Teatro la Maestranza in Seville, Teatro Regio in Turin, Teatro Massimo in Palermo, Palau de las Artes in Valencia, Opera in San Francisco, Teatro dell'Opera in Rome, Greek National Theatre in Athens, among others; these numerous productions include ones for the directors Giancarlo Cobelli and Werner

Herzog. In 1983 he was awarded a prize at the Prague Quadriennial of Performance Design and Space for Berlioz's *La damnation de Faust*; later, in Italy, he was awarded five Ubus (1994 for Euripides's *Electra*; 1997 for Goldoni's *Il ritorno dalla villeggiatura*; 1998 for Pasolini's *Orgia*; 2002 for Mishima's *Madame De Sade* and for Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman*; 2011 for Molière's *Misanthrope*); two ETI-Gli Olimpici del Teatro awards (in 2003 for Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman* and for Miller's *All My Sons*; in 2004 for Pirandello's *Questa sera si recita a soggetto* and *Quando si è qualcuno* di Pirandello); two Le Maschere del Teatro awards (2011 for Euripides' *Andromache*; 2014 for Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*). In 2000 he received the Premio Samaritani for *Tristan und Isolde* by Wagner, in 2008 the Premio dell'Associazione Nazionale dei Critici di Teatro for *Three Sisters* by Cechov, and in 2009 the Premio internazionale Cinearti La chioma di Berenice for the set design for *Porcile* by Pasolini. For the Museo Salvatore Ferragamo he has curated the installation of the exhibitions *Audrey Hepburn A Woman, the Style* (1999-2001), *Greta Garbo. The mystery of Style* (2010), *A Palace and the City* (2015), also hosted in other museums both in Italy and abroad.

STEFANIA RICCI

A graduate of Università degli Studi di Firenze, holding a degree in the Humanities with an emphasis on Art History, Stefania Ricci began collaborating with the Palazzo Pitti's Galleria del Costume and Pitti Immagine in 1984, overseeing the organisation of exhibitions and the publication of catalogues like *La Sala Bianca: nascita della moda italiana* (Electa) in 1992, in addition to the *Emilio Pucci* exhibition (Skira) for the 1996 Biennale di Arte e Moda in Florence.

In 1985, Ricci curated the first retrospective on Salvatore Ferragamo at Palazzo Strozzi in Florence and various stops along its tour at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (1987), the Los Angeles County Museum (1992), the Sogetsu Kai Foundation in Tokyo (1998) and Museo des Bellas Artes (2006), as she began organising the company's archives. Since 1995, she has been Director of Museo Salvatore Ferragamo and oversees Salvatore Ferragamo cultural events around the world. Since then, she has curated all the exhibitions organised by the museum and the exhibition catalogues, including *Audrey Hepburn A Woman, the Style* (Leonardo Arte, 1999), *Evolving Legend Salvatore Ferragamo 1928-2008* (Skira, 2009), *Greta Garbo. The mystery of Style* (Skira, 2010), *Marilyn* (Skira, 2012), *The Amazing Shoemaker* (Skira, 2013), *Equilibrium* (Skira, 2014), *A Palace and the City* (Skira, 2015), *Across Art and Fashion* (Mandragora, 2016). She was named Director of Fondazione Ferragamo in 2013.

CARLO SISI

Was director, until 2006, of the Galleria d'arte moderna di Palazzo Pitti in Florence and of the Galleria del Costume where, in addition to working as a conservator, he was involved in promoting, via exhibitions and other events, an understanding of nineteenth- and

twentieth-century art. For the same Galleries he also curated their entire renovation and the edition of the *catalogue raisonné*.

Until 2016, he was president of the Museo Marino Marini in Florence, and is currently a member of the Scientific Committee for MART in Rovereto. He specializes in the study of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Italian and European art, to which he has dedicated volumes and various essays of an interdisciplinary nature. Among these is the series *L'Ottocento in Italia. Le arti sorelle* (tre volumi: *Neoclassicismo, Romanticismo, Realismo*) published by Electa, and the supervision of the volume *Motivi e figure nell'arte toscana del XX secolo* (2000).

He recently curated: *Americani a Firenze. Sargent e gli impressionisti del Nuovo Mondo* (2012, Florence, Palazzo Strozzi); *Les Macchiaioli. Des impressionistes italiens?* (2013, Paris, Orangerie); *Corcos. I sogni della belle époque* (2014, Padua, Palazzo Zabarella); *Bellezza divina* (2015, Florence, Palazzo Strozzi).

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OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

FROM 19 MAY 2017 TO 2 MAY 2018

TIMING

10 AM – 7:30 PM

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