



WOMIEN IN BALANCE / 1955



WOMIEN / 1955  
IN BALANCE / 1965



Electa

# Contents

- 10** Stefania Ricci and Elvira Valleri  
**Introduction**
- 14** Stefania Ricci  
**Wanda Miletta Ferragamo:  
A Woman in Balance**
- 52** Flavio Arensi  
**Claire's Shadow**
- 56** Patrizia Gabrielli  
**Families, Women, and Gender  
Models: Continuity and Change**
- 80** Patrizia Gabrielli  
**Angelina Merlin: A Professional,  
Authoritative, Stylish Woman**
- 90** Adriana Castagnoli  
**Women and Businesses**
- 112** Paola Govoni  
**The Silence of Women amid the  
Sound of Machines. Work and  
Technical-scientific Professions  
in the Run-up Decade**
- 138** Lucia Mannini  
**Between Art and Design: A Brief  
Women's History**
- 164** Stefano Petrocchi  
**Women Writers and the Strega Prize**
- 178** Luca Scarlini  
**The Name and the Plot: Female  
Protagonists of Popular Publishing  
in Postwar Italy**
- 198** Simona Carlesi  
**The Female Shadow in the Popular Press**
- 212** Walter Guadagnini  
**Six Women Photographers of the 1960s**
- 260** Giulia Simi  
**Marinella Pirelli and the Adventure  
of Art Films**
- 266** Flavio Arensi  
**Gioietta Fioroni: An Artist, Period**
- 276** Emanuela Scarpellini  
**A Changing World:  
Consumerism and the Kitchen**
- 300** Laura Minestrone  
**The Domestic Space:  
Women Caught between  
the New Standard Package and  
Resistance to Innovation**
- 326** Alessandro Pedretti  
**The New Renaissance of Design:  
A Viewpoint on Objects**
- 338** Stephen Gundle  
**Women and Cinema in Italy  
in the Age of the Economic Miracle**
- 366** Dario Salvatori  
**From Talent to the Existential:  
Women who Revolutionized  
the Italian Song**
- 388** Elvira Valleri  
**"Seize the Moment":  
The World of Teenage Girls**
- 416** Stefania Ricci  
**Fashion and Women's Identities  
During the Years of the  
Italian Economic Miracle**
- 482** Davide Rampello  
**Women in Balance: Today**
- 488** Davide Daninos  
**Creating Identity.  
The curatorial project  
A Feminine Lexicon**



# INTRODUCTION

STEFANIA RICCI, ELVIRA VALLERI

In the first few months of 2022, working from a photograph, French artist Claire Tabouret painted a portrait in Los Angeles that shows a woman in the foreground, sitting in an armchair, with a view of the Tuscan countryside behind her. She looks to be over 40 and has a fine face, a well-shaped mouth and green eyes. As she gazes into the camera, she subtly conveys the impression of a playful and strong-willed personality. The painting, displayed on an easel, is a companion piece to another portrait, made by the Italian painter Pietro Annigoni in 1949, showing a mature man wearing clothes reminiscent of the romantic artists of the nineteenth century. We observe a setting in which a woman and a man gaze at each other in a silent but intense dialog, one that has been going on for over seventy years. They are Wanda and Salvatore Ferragamo, who, starting in 1940, created a close family and a business that is one of the best-known Italian fashion brands worldwide.

The history of Ferragamo is marked by two distinct eras, the watershed moment between the two being the death of Salvatore on August 7, 1960 and the problem, which emerged immediately in all its clarity, of who might carry on that journey of ingenuity and creativity, thereby ensuring his spiritual heritage.

The first period involves the personal and professional story of an exceptional talent. Setting out from a small town in southern Italy in 1915, he emigrated to the United States and soon became famous, making shoes for the stars of a Hollywood that was then in its infancy. In 1927 he returned to Italy and settled in Florence, where he set up an artisanal workshop that continued to serve his market in America. In the late 1920s, the economic depression led to the collapse of his business, but Salvatore then managed to relaunch it, making it famous once again despite the difficulties of the war, and the shortage of materials. In this he was able to draw

PORTRAIT OF WANDA  
MILETTI FERRAGAMO IN  
HER GARDEN, 1960S

on his boundless creative genius, great courage, and fierce determination to develop his business project.

The second phase began on September 1, 1960, when Wanda joined the company. Salvatore had married her 20 years earlier: a period in which, as a wife and mother to their six children, she had stayed out of her husband's profession. However, he was very fond of talking about his work, making his wife and children feel involved in his plans and projects, as well as his business engagements. In September 1960, without any experience or relevant studies supporting her, Wanda Ferragamo decided to take over the running of the business. She reinforced it and developed it, turning a small-scale company that made women's shoes, albeit a famous one, into a major fashion house with an international profile. The aim was for her children to be able to see the dream flourish that Salvatore had cherished ever since, at the age of 14, he had opened his own small shoemaker's workshop in Bonito. Wanda created and fostered a business model based on emotional engagement with the product, intuition, sensibility, and inclusiveness: a culture of care that women have historically applied to the running of a household, looking after their family and children. This caring approach Wanda transferred to her business and in a very short space of time achieved important results. Important, but never flaunted, owing to that typical tendency of women not to attach importance to what they do, either in their work or in their daily lives.

Salvatore's life is well known, by and large, also thanks to his autobiography, published in English in 1957 for the first time, in which he describes his adventurous career. In 1985, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, dedicated an exhibition to his creations which then became a traveling event. Ten years later a museum bearing his name was established, at the company offices, which showcases the colors, materials, and inventions that have brought his shoes to life.

By contrast, in many ways Wanda's existence stayed in the shadows. This was perhaps down to her natural modesty and reluctance to talk about herself, and about her role in the growth of the Ferragamo brand. The credit was always given to others, to her husband, her children, and the people who worked with her. In 1995 Wanda decided to create the museum and in 2013 a foundation, with the aim of perpetuating the work of her beloved husband and the values on which he had founded his business, in order to pass them on to the new generations. As she wrote in her notes, she perceived these younger generations as uncertain and confused, bereft of models that they could look up to. For many years Wanda was encouraged by her family, her friends, and her employees to write her autobiography, but no such project was ever completed. In 2010, Museo Salvatore Ferragamo sought to design and install an exhibition that would highlight her work and her great intelligence. To do this, it brought in the Economics Department of Pisa University, in the person of the late lamented Professor Tommaso Fanfani. The results of that initial research are partially summed up in the first essay in this catalog. However, Wanda Ferragamo wanted that exhibition, entitled *A regola d'arte*, to focus on the artisans of Florence, her employees, through the many first-hand oral accounts gathered among the people who were there at the time when the company led by Salvatore was being transformed into the business that she later headed up.

Today, just a few years after Wanda Ferragamo's passing on October 19, 2018, the time has come to "give a voice" to her modest reticence through a series of initiatives. While respecting her personal style and her own thoughts and ideas, these are designed to somehow describe her life choices and her constant search for a balance between the time she spent with her loved ones, with her family, and on her business commitments.

With this in mind, as curators, we came up with the idea of an exhibition that would not only tell of Wanda at the time when, at the beginning of the 1960s, she decided to radically change her life, but that would also look at the complex world of women in that period.

These were the years of the so-called "economic miracle," a phase marked by profound changes in Italian society. We chose to expand the timeframe to the decade 1955–65, when large numbers of women began to be involved in the various sectors of Italian society. This was a world on the move—a complicated, multi-faceted, and contradictory progress that led to many women establishing new roles for themselves and to greater freedom for all of them, contributing significantly to the construction of Republican Italy.

Moreover, the much enhanced presence of women in Italian history in the 1950s and '60s sheds light on certain aspects of the modernization of the country, a process in which they are both subject and object. Many women who in that period were protagonists of change in the various social and professional fields, often embarked in their private lives on a singular journey of discovery in search of new modes of existence. This continues to be relevant in our day, as shown by the interviews with young women, aged between 18 and 35, included in a documentary shown in the exhibition, produced by Rampello & Partners Creative Studio and directed by Giorgia Benazzo.

Every female experience that the exhibition conjures up can be seen as a uniquely original journey toward building a particular way of "being a woman," the result of the historical context and personal choices. On entering the public arena, women have sometimes opted for solutions that were the result of a certain blending, in a continual search for a new balance between work and family life. The narration of this search cannot fail to prompt us to acknowledge the continual, imaginative, extraordinary creativ-

ity that has marked—and still does—the lives of women, their choices, and their different visions of the world and of life. However, there is no doubt that gender differences have played a part in a myriad subtle ways, shaping behaviors, individual models, and social relations.

Of course, women's participation in the history of Italy cannot be summed up in a merely linear description of a process made up of equal rights, broader freedoms, and involvement in public life. For certain, these are all vitally important aspects; yet they cannot explain either the complexity of what that participation involved or the manifold relations that emerged from it. There were many setbacks along the way, and not a few ups and downs; some throwbacks to the past persisted, in terms of culture and sentiments, alongside the achievement of goals that had long been pursued. It was not an uninterrupted march, and often the way forward included long moments when progress was stalled. Our aim has been to turn a spotlight on the presence of many different women in Italian life and their industrious and prolific contribution at a time of new rights and new-found freedom.

Thus, the exhibition sets out to trace the activities of women of differing ages, and the choices they made, including working environments that up until then were reserved almost exclusively for men. This hopefully allows us to at least get a glimpse of the tumultuous and complicated changes in Italian society in the decade in question. In this period, our society consolidated its democracy and took part, albeit in differing ways and at different speeds, in a renewal of lifestyles and models mostly geared toward the "American Way of Life" and to the West, as the home of democracy and prosperity. The presence of these women in the professions, in the arts, culture, and politics not only tells the story of their own personal experiences, it also sheds light on the longer-running revolution in the contemporary era, the

one that has marked the end of the separation of roles between the sexes.

The result of this exhibition resembles a jigsaw puzzle in which many pieces are still missing. As curators, we set out to illustrate and highlight this, well aware that it is a limitation—but we hope one that may be overcome by other such initiatives.

The individual exhibition sections focus on the contexts in which gender relations as well as relations between the generations set both the workshop and the stage to recount the extraordinary variety of female figures—never culturally uniform, never a monolithic whole in terms of their geography and social background. A look at the dark side of the moon, if you will, a side that people have only recently ventured to explore (with a few exceptions), a side where women are indeed active but often invisible.

The scholarly committee is comprised of international academics and experts well known for their research into the period in question and the history of women and gender studies. For us, the committee was a constant point of reference. Its members helped us to add more valuable content, works, objects and film clips from leading public and private collections. Our thanks go to all of them for enthusiastically agreeing to take part in the project and contributing with their essay to this lavish catalog.

The exhibition design conceived by Maurizio Balò gives homogeneity to the exploration of a reality that was actually highly varied and made up of a wide range of subtle differences. The installation idea stems from the line drawings of views of Italian cities and landscapes that once adorned the Settebello train, a much-revered icon of Italy in the days of the economic boom, one that offered the world a new image of the country. The objects in these drawings are furniture and furnishings reminiscent of those in Wanda Ferragamo's office at Palazzo Spini Feroni, the headquarters of the company since 1938. In the other sections

of the exhibition reference is made to the interiors of a upper middle-class home in the second half of the 1950s: the dining room, the large bookcase, the attic, the kitchen, the lounge, the girls' bedroom, the wardrobe. Indeed, it was exactly in the ten years from 1955 to 1965 that the home increasingly became the place where women found their identity: they appropriated it and at the same time projected a part of themselves into it. The individuality, taste, and creativity of the "mistress of the house" took center-stage. Thus, the furnishings, objects, and daily practices signaled a number of changes that took place in the homes of many Italians.

Against the backdrop to this exhibition we see the many issues that the pandemic and other contemporary events continue to ask of these troubled times in which we live. In so doing they also suggest the urgent need for a more nuanced understanding of gender relations. To this end, the exhibition at Palazzo Spini Feroni includes a further initiative in digital format that sees the involvement, as passionate curators, of two young women, Pia Diamandis and Elena Tortelli, students of the Arts Curating course at Istituto Marangoni Firenze. *A Feminine Lexicon* is a project that brings together works by and testimony from 11 young international female artists, all born between 1980 and 1990. They engage in a collective examination on the subject of identity, a necessary and inevitable theme of our contemporary world. And an idea that seems once again to bear the hallmark of Wanda Ferragamo, who, in her later years, was increasingly concerned with young people's education. This included not only younger members of her own family but all boys and girls who she thought were given little consideration and space in the adult world. Indeed, she once voiced the hope that a Youth Ministry would be established and cultivated, so that the authentic issues and needs affecting the lives of young people would really, and truly, be addressed.