

Fausto Melotti. Zoagli

Galleria Christian Stein
in collaboration with Fondazione Fausto Melotti

Corso Monforte 23, Milan
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The exhibition **Fausto Melotti. Zoagli**, staged by the Galleria Christian Stein, represents a unique opportunity to discover an unfamiliar aspect of the output of this artist, widely known for his work as a sculptor, ceramist, poet and musicologist. What makes this exhibition exceptional is that it presents an extensive series of paintings in oil on canvas, dubbed *Zoagli* and executed in the small town of the same name in Liguria in the first half of the fifties and for the most part never shown to the public.

The exhibition also includes three sculptures: the *Cariatide* (*Caryatid*, 1950), on display at the center of the room, a work in polychrome glazed ceramic representing the life-size figure of a woman; *La Madonna incinta* (*The Pregnant Madonna*), a figure cast by the lost-wax method from around 1950 and *Untitled*, a precious terracotta dating from c. 1945, are both of smaller size.

The grievous wounds of the Second World War left a deep mark on **Melotti** (Rovereto 1901 – Milan 1986) and distanced him from his youthful faith in the ideal of order and perfection expressed in the abstract sculptures shown in 1935 at his first solo exhibition at the Galleria Il Milione in Milan. In this connection he declared: “The war left me in great inner torment. I think that it is not possible to do abstract art if you have in your heart something that leads you toward a certain, I won’t say despair, but the figures of despair, which are not to my liking.”

In the years after the war the sculptor slowly withdrew from the public scene, in search of a more intimate and personal dimension, and devoted himself to the practice of writing and drawing and to small-scale creations that he could realize in the reassuring setting of his studio.

It was a period of private but fertile research, in which the artist experimented with the use of different materials and techniques that stimulated his creative vein and found expression in a rich repertoire of forms. He created minimal sculptures out of metal, graffito bas-reliefs in plaster and tinted clay panels and developed the theme of the *Teatrini* or *Miniature Theaters*. The use of ceramics proved to be full of stimuli and inventive potentialities that led him to create fantastic personages and animals and vases with original forms. As well as in ceramics, his chromatic research found expression in sheets of paper covered with dense layers of paint, laid on spontaneously, and supplemented with burns and gildings. What is revealed in this variegated production is one of the artist’s distinctive characteristics: his ability to turn plain and humble materials into something precious and evocative.

The daily exercise of immediate and natural subjective expression proved liberating and gave rise to that simple Melottian universe rich in profound suggestions, a world in which nature and myth assume the forms of the archaic and of poetry, where a carefully measured blend of irony and melancholy touches the innermost chords of our individual and collective feelings.

In the painted clay panels, the densely colored sheets of paper and the rich iridescence of the glazed ceramics we can recognize the artist’s skillful handling of color and tone. After a lapse of twenty years since his first solo exhibition in 1935, he reappeared on the scene in 1956 with his second one-man show, *Le pitture di Melotti*, at the Galleria L’Annunciata in Milan, in which the artist presented himself to the public in the new and surprising guise of a painter.

Melotti the painter at Zoagli

At the beginning of the fifties, **Melotti** interspersed his activity as a renowned ceramist, which kept him busy in Milan, with brief vacations on the Ligurian coast during the summer.

In the small town of Zoagli he spent quiet days with his family. His wife Lina and their young daughters were waiting for him at their lodgings in a fine building facing onto Via Aurelia. A reporter from the *Corriere d’informazione* came there to interview him on the subject of his new pictures.

Melotti, commenting on the bustle in the street below the apartment, greeted him as follows: “These automobiles, these motor coaches, these trucks, these motorcycles that drive us crazy in the city, how enjoyable they are here, eh? viewed from above. We look down and are happy to see so many pass by.” Spontaneous words that convey the serenity and childish joy the artist felt in those days of recreation. It was with the same happiness and freshness that **Melotti** portrayed the enchanting landscape facing onto the Golfo del Tigullio, painting views, houses, vegetation and people in oil on canvas. This painting stemmed from an inner and instinctive need, from a vital yearning devoid of affectation. It was a genuine delight in existence and in the lyricism that pertains even to the smallest everyday things.

In **Melotti**'s palette even the works of humankind become nature. Buildings, streets, terraces and objects are immersed in the same enchanting light that colors the vegetation and the broad views of sky and sea. Everything is suffused in a pure and terse air that seems to be stirred by a scented breeze. Splashes of white open up among the shades of blue, lilac, purple, green, pink and ocher. Little touches of color, applied with the tip of the brush, look like the notes of one of Erik Satie's piano scores. A painting vibrant with sincere but measured emotion, in which everything appears steeped in a “crystalline and transparent fluid,” as Carlo Belli would describe it. The representation filtered by the artist's limpid gaze takes us into a world that, putting a past filled with anguish and dismay behind it, has rediscovered its order and truth and become familiar and welcoming once again.

When **Melotti** went back to showing his work in a gallery in 1956, presenting a series of these oil paintings, he declared: “I paint. In painting we perhaps still have a way of saying something, a word that has at least not been pronounced with that accent. A private way, a sort of diary. In sculpture there is nothing more to do, to say, after what has already been said and done. It is dead, for now. No one can believe in it any longer.”

This peremptory assertion of the artist about the *death* of sculpture seems almost to be a presentiment of the nature of the ethereal plastic creations of the following years that, negating volume and earthly gravity, would earn the label of *anti-sculpture*. The aspects of lightness and harmony that would characterize his airy and threadlike sculptures are matched on the canvas in the fine and faint lines, in the liquid and rapid brushstrokes, in the rarefied relationship between surface and paint. The spontaneity of execution, the economy of means, the simplicity of the representation seem instead to hark back to his swift and intuitive modeling of clay.

These oils of the fifties got a very positive reception from the critics, who initially compared them to the line of Lombard Chiarism for their tonal qualities, for the fusion of color and light in form and for the scanty use of perspective. Setting aside inadequate classifications of convenience, we can say that the *anti-volumetric* nature of **Melotti**'s painting, just as in his sculpture, is not motivated by adherence to a *manner* but on the contrary stems from a profound personal impulse that does not rely on technical expedients to define the form, but tries to convey the sense of it by evoking it lyrically. What **Melotti** has created here is a pictorial *diary* that goes beyond an account of daily existence to become the poetic narration of an intimate biography. In the canvases we can discern the effects of the painstaking creative work of the two previous decades, in which the artist had refined that *private way* of perceiving existence, of representing the world as it should or could be if human beings were to preserve the purity of their gaze. As he wrote at the end of a short account of the fanciful games of his childhood: “In all children poetry is alive. Then it is killed.”

Today the favorable perspective of a distance in time allows us to look at these paintings in a way free from preconceptions and to appreciate the multifaceted nature of **Melotti**'s activity as one of the aspects that adds value to his work. The great variety of expressive languages he adopted is only in appearance incoherent. It is in fact, as the poet Giovanni Raboni has put it, “a form of great coherence with the demands of his own inner life.” In this light **Melotti**'s pictorial work should be seen not as an exception, but as another piece added to his creativity that permits us a greater understanding of its complexity and richness.

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Monday to Friday: 10 am-7 pm, Saturday: 10 am-1 pm /3 pm-7 pm
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