

“POST ZANG TUMB TUUUM. ART LIFE POLITICS: ITALIA 1918–1943”
FONDAZIONE PRADA, MILAN
18 FEBRUARY–25 JUNE 2018

Fondazione Prada presents “Post Zang Tumb Tuuum. Art Life Politics: Italia 1918–1943,” at its Milan venue between 18 February and 25 June 2018. Conceived and curated by Germano Celant, the exhibition explores the world of art and culture in Italy in the interwar years. Based on documentary and photographic evidence of the time, it reconstructs the spatial, temporal, social and political contexts in which the works of art were created and exhibited, and the way in which they were interpreted and received by the public of the time. “Post Zang Tumb Tuuum. Art Life Politics: Italia 1918–1943” is presented with the patronage of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism.

Between 1918 and 1943 Italy was marked by the crisis of the liberal state and the establishment of fascism, and by the ongoing interdependence of artistic research, social dynamics and political activity. As emphasized by Jacques Rancière in his book *Le partage du sensible. Esthétique et politique* (The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible) (2000), art never exists in abstraction, but comes into being and takes shape within a given historic and cultural context. From this point of view, political and aesthetic aspects are interwoven. Taking this hypothesis as a starting point, the documents and photographs that prompted the selection of works in the exhibition offer a record of the artistic and cultural production of the period, taking into account the multifaceted contexts and settings in which it was exhibited: these include artists’ studios, private collections, large public events and exhibitions of Italian art both in Italy and abroad, architectural designs and city planning, graphic arts and the first examples of industrial furniture production. According to Germano Celant, the documentation found and presented in this exhibition “offers a summary of the communicative function of a work of art, and tells a real story that lies outside of the theoretical discourse of an artifact.” As “means of cultural understanding”, an expression coined by David Summers, “they ensure that an art object has a particular territory, that of appearing to a broader audience, in given social and political situations.”

The investigation was carried out in partnership with archives, foundations, museums, libraries and private collections and has resulted in the selection of more than 600 paintings, sculptures, drawings, photographs, posters, pieces of furniture, and architectural plans and models created by over 100 authors. In “Post Zang Tumb Tuuum. Art Life Politics: Italia 1918–1943,” these objects are displayed with period images, original publications, letters, magazines, press clippings, and private photographs – for a total of 800 documents - in order to question, as explained by Germano Celant, “the idealism in exhibitions, where works of art, either in museums or other institutions, are displayed in an anonymous, monochromatic environment, generally on a white surface, to connect them to period photographic testimony and reinsert them in their original historical communication space”. To reconstruct the material and physical conditions of their original presentation offers the

opportunity not only to explore the complex relations between creators, gallerists, art critics, ideologues, politicians, collectors, patrons and viewers, but also to investigate the concept of the exhibition in its different forms, as a quintessential element in the range of the symbolic forms of the period. Furthermore, this approach underlines how the exhibition of national products and images—even in international settings—was used by the fascist regime as a flexible, adaptable, modern and practical means to *reshape* Italian people and mold their experience of the world. In “Post Zang Tumb Tuuum”, the object, returned to the chaotic flow of an exhibition, becomes a living material again, a stratified construction of signifiers and possible interpretations.

The exhibition design, conceived by New York studio 2x4 in conjunction with the curator, provides an immersive experience consisting of 24 partial reconstructions of public and private exhibition rooms. These full-size recreations from period photographs contain original works by artists such as Giacomo Balla, Carlo Carrà, Felice Casorati, Giorgio de Chirico, Fortunato Depero, Filippo de Pisis, Arturo Martini, Fausto Melotti, Giorgio Morandi, Scipione, Gino Severini, Mario Sironi, Arturo Tosi, and Adolfo Wildt, among others. This presentation renews the reciprocal relationship between an artistic expression and its context, the latter in the form of furnishings, architectural elements, decoration and manners of display, so as to offer a deeper understanding of the exhibited works and their creators, and to provide a more detailed interpretation of Italian art history. This way, the dialectics are revisited between individual creators and representatives of movements, groups and tendencies like Futurism, Valori Plastici, Novecento, the Roman School, the so-called Les Italiens de Paris, the abstractionists and Corrente. These movements, with their expressive eclecticism and pluralism, all contributed to the enlivenment of the artistic and cultural scene in Italy marked by the coexistence of the avant-garde with “the return to order”, experimentation with realism, and intimism with propaganda.

Consideration of the contemporary social, political and vital context is provided by the exhibition’s presentation of architectural plans, urban planning and large official expositions like the Mostra della Rivoluzione fascista (1932), the Esposizione dell’Aeronautica Italiana (1934), the Mostra Nazionale dello Sport (1935) and the major design for the E42 project. Some of the most innovative architectural and scenic designs of this period—like the fundamental works by Gruppo 7, Giovanni Muzio, Marcello Piacentini, Piero Portaluppi and Giuseppe Terragni, among others—are presented in the exhibition also as large projections that provide a critical appreciation of their original scale and communicative, propagandistic and celebratory impact, while also exploring the process implemented by the fascist regime of aestheticizing politics and the masses.

Staged in the Sud gallery, Deposito, Nord gallery and Podium, the exhibition’s presentation is punctuated by thematic focuses dedicated to politicians, intellectuals, writers and thinkers like Giuseppe Bottai, Piero Gobetti, Antonio Gramsci, Carlo Levi, Alberto Moravia, Luigi Pirandello, Margherita Sarfatti and Lionello Venturi, whose varying stances are analyzed

during this period of the powerful radicalization of ideas, the exchange between the arts, and dialogue or open discord between individuals. In this climate, artists and intellectuals developed their own autonomy by actively participating in or remaining indifferent to the regime's recommendations, or, in contrast, being subjected to or, more rarely, criticizing the impositions it meted out in the political, cultural and artistic domains.

At the Fondazione's Cinema 29 integral newsreels, selected in collaboration with Istituto Luce – Cinecittà, distributed in Italian cinemas between 1929 and 1941. The footage documents the different install and opening phases of some of the most important exhibitions and cultural events of those times.

During the course of the exhibition, a series of film screenings will also be presented, creating a dialogue between Italian films realized between 1918 and 1943 and other ones produced in Germany, Soviet Union, United Kingdom, France, Japan and the United States in the same years.

The exhibition "Post Zang Tumb Tuuum. Art Life Politics: Italia 1918-1943" will be accompanied by a 696 pages scientific book, featuring more than 1000 illustrations, published by Fondazione Prada. It includes an essay by the curator Germano Celant and 15 critical texts by scholars, historians, and critics of art and architecture such as Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Francesca Billiani, Maristella Casciato, Daniela Fonti, Emilio Gentile, Romy Golan, Mario Isnenghi, Lucy Maulsby, Antonello Negri, Elena Pontiggia, Sileno Salvagnini, Jeffrey Schnapp, Francesco Spampinato, Marla Stone, and Alessandra Tarquini. The publication is completed by an overview composed of 64 in-depth case studies edited especially for the exhibition.

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