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WILDT

The genius of sculpture in the 20th century between Michelangelo and Fontana, Mantegna and Casorati

Forlì, San Domenico Museum
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The growing interest shown by big international collectors and the presence of his works at some of the most renowned exhibitions in the most important museums of the world are clear proof of the current rediscovery of Adolfo Wildt (Milan, 1868–1931), who is finally now considered one of the greatest sculptors of the 20th century at European level. When he was alive he achieved various acknowledgements and successes. He filled the chair of sculpture in the famous Brera and Milan Art Academy according to his merits and the appointment of Italian Academic, and as a result later entered the exclusive élite of national celebrities. Nonetheless, the appraisal by the critics has always been rather controversial.

On one hand, conservatives strongly attacked his great technical excellence and his extraordinary eclecticism. They claimed that they did not adjust to the contents of the time, still pervaded with Symbolism, or to the formal expressions, strongly influenced by the Nordic trends (gothic and expressionist) which had nothing to do with the Mediterranean tradition and state-controlled art. On the other hand, modernists questioned his loyalty to the figures, his monumental devotion, his steady dialogue with the big painters and sculptors of the past and his loyalty to sculpture, conceived as glorification of technique and the most commonly used material: marble. He was able to work this traditional material in a great way, creating some extraordinary effects, up to the highest purification of the picture.

These aspects, which have determined his misfortune for a long time, are now very appealing to us, so that only a great exhibition is able to give credit to Wildt's art. Starting from the outstanding series of works preserved in Forlì, collected under the patronage of the Paolucci de' Calboli family that played a main role in the history of the city of Forlì and Italy as a whole, it is now possible to gather a high number of wonderful masterpieces by Wildt and follow all his sculptural and painting productions.

This exhibition does not claim to be simply monographic, but it aims to represent a kind of "route" which (as is the case with the recent exhibition on Canova in Forlì) connects his works with those of other artists, either painters or sculptors, such as the old ones (Phidias, Cosmè Tura, Antonello da Messina, Dürer, Pisanello, Bramante, Michelangelo, Bramantino, Bronzino, Tazio da Varallo, Bambaia, Cellini, Bernini, Canova) and the new ones (Previati, Dudreville, Mazzucotelli, Rodin, Klinger, Meštrovič, Klimt, Brancusi, De Chirico, Casorati, Martini, Messina, Fontana, Melotti). Wildt has continuously dealt with these artists in an intense and original way, going through different art trends, such as Liberty, Symbolism, Deco, Classicism of the 20th century, and eclecticism influenced by the Quattrocento, Mannerism, Baroque and magic Realism.

His favourite subjects, the myth and the mask, encouraged his dialogue also with music (Wagner) and contemporary literature, from D'Annunzio (a collector of his works) to Pirandello and Bontempelli; he was an extraordinary portrait painter, able to create a high circle of disquieting modern idols, thanks to his colossal busts of Mussolini, Victor Emmanuel III, Pius XI, Margherita Sarfatti, Toscanini, and many others heroes of that time.

Due to his teaching experience in Brera and his very original concept of sculpture, which included the research on different materials and new effects in terms of volumes and spaces, we find his legacy in some works of his favourite pupils: Lucio Fontana (since 1927) and Fausto Melotti (since 1928). Both became main figures of a new way to conceive the form: the “cuts” or the sunken and golden rings under the eyes of Wildt’s faces surprisingly prefigure the famous Fontana’s “cuts”.

The exhaustive research by Paola Mola, undisputed expert of the artist’s works and life (author of the monograph released by Franco Maria Ricci in 1988, curator of the exhibition set up in Ca’ Pesaro in 1989 and co-organizer of this exhibition, together with Fernando Mazzocca and Antonio Paolucci), as well as the documents and wonderful old photos from the Scheiwiller Archives (the great publisher from Milan whose family’s heritage included many works and materials by Wildt), enables a detailed and very interesting reconstruction of biography, relationships and European clients of this great artist. During his time, he left some high-level works of sculpture in Forlì and in the whole area (Boifava, Drei), town planning and architecture (Bazzari, Valle), which are worth rediscovering and appreciating at this exhibition, integrated by routes and events, advisably worked out and planned. The exhibition will also bring to light the local cultural discussion and the people involved, who occasionally played a role on a national scale. Thanks to these initiatives, within and around the exhibition dedicated to Adolfo Wildt, it will be possible to reinterpret the events that occurred in the city and in the Romagna region during the 20th century.

The exhibition will be set up in the big rooms, once used as the library of St. Dominic’s Monastery, as well as the rooms on the ground floor, where the six former exhibitions have already been held.

The exhibition has been conceived and implemented by the Foundation Cassa dei Risparmi di Forlì in collaboration with the City of Forlì and San Domenico Museum.

Given the great importance of this exhibition we requested the High Patronage of the Italian Republic, the Patronage of the Presidency of the Italian Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.