

Fausto Pirandello
1899 – 1975

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Fausto Pirandello 1899-1975

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Front cover: *Father and Son (Youth)*, c. 1934

Introduction

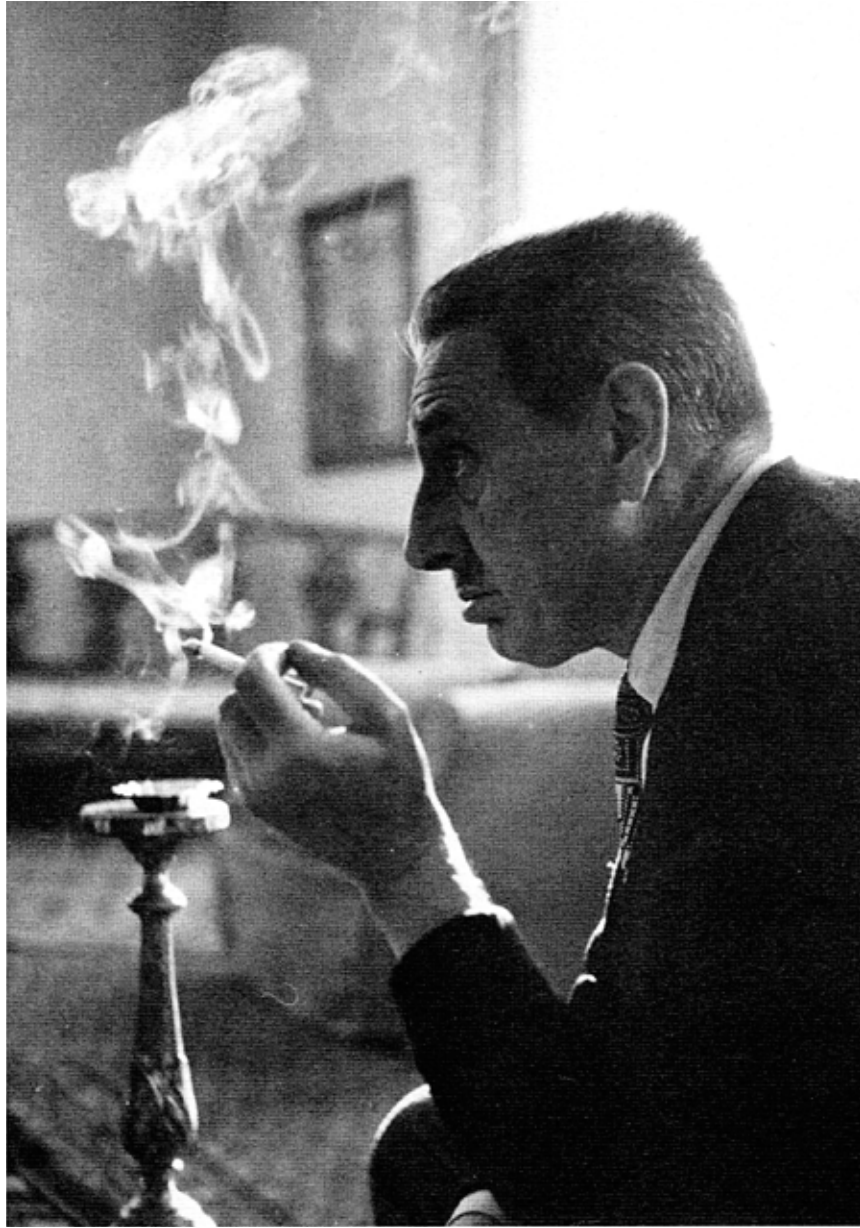
There is perhaps no modern Italian artist more deserving of a wider audience than Fausto Pirandello: a painter whose remarkable achievements have undoubtedly been overshadowed by those of his celebrated father, the writer and dramatist Luigi Pirandello. It is therefore with immense pride that the Estorick Collection is hosting this exhibition – the first in the United Kingdom to be devoted entirely to his work.

Pirandello's true significance is perhaps still not fully understood. His densely-worked and somewhat tortured imagery foreshadowed that of artists associated with the Corrente group during the late 1930s and early 1940s, having a particular resonance for Renato Guttuso. The reasons for Guttuso's enthusiasm are not difficult to fathom. Whilst more sombre than his own works, Pirandello's claustrophobic interiors and unforgiving portrayals of the naked human form are profoundly painterly images that exude a marked sense of disquiet – one transcending the merely personal or individual, and seeming to reflect the wider tensions, strains and anxieties of life in Fascist Italy.

For anyone interested in the fluctuating fortunes of figurative art during the twentieth century Pirandello's robust, lugubrious imagery will come as something of a revelation. This exhibition comprises some of the artist's most characteristic and significant works, and can justifiably claim to provide a concise yet comprehensive overview of his career. We are extremely grateful to Fabio Benzi for his tireless efforts in identifying and securing these important loans – and to the lenders themselves for their enthusiastic response to our project: Serena Corvi Mora, in particular; Laura Biagiotti, Giuseppe Boemi, Maurizio Corvi Mora, Francesco Galvagno, Carlo Guarnieri, Giuseppe Iannaccone and the Galleria Russo. My thanks also go to Maria Vittoria Marini Clarelli, Daniela Porro, Andrea Grifi, Nelly Cabrera, Paolo Carrara, Agnese Sferrazza, Paul Nicholls, Istituto Matteucci, Elisabetta Vannozi, Lucia Borromeo, Luca Chiarini and Fabrizio Russo for their help and dedication. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Associazione Fausto Pirandello and Dora Pirandello for their important contribution. Last but not least, my thanks also go to Pierluigi and Giovanna Pirandello, and Luigi Troja, for their support for this exhibition.

Finally, we are much indebted to Flavia Matitti and Francesco Leone for their illuminating catalogue essays.

Roberta Cremoncini
Director





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Fausto Pirandello: From the Early Years to the Second World War

Fabio Benzi



Composition, 1923

The beginnings of Fausto Pirandello's artistic career can be traced to his apprenticeship in the school of Sigismondo Lipinsky – a phase that is consistently overlooked by scholars. Lipinsky was both a painter and an engraver who employed a particularly clean and sharp line. Along with his friend Otto Greiner he was the last heir to that generation of *Deutsch Römer* (German Romans) able to trace its ancestry back to Böcklin and Klinger.¹

At an early age Pirandello was therefore exposed to an artistic vision that was insistent and emphatic in nature, possessing an almost surgical lucidity in its investigation of the more grotesque and unappealing aspects of the human figure – a characteristic typical of the German tendency. This was perhaps an unusual path for a young Italian artist to take at

this time, his peers more commonly being drawn to French culture or Secessionist schematics. One can discern the influence here of Fausto's father – the great playwright Luigi – whose own education had been marked by a sustained and decisive exposure to Mitteleuropean culture in Bonn. Undoubtedly, Fausto's choices were determined by his father's sympathies and preferences.

Upon leaving Lipinsky's studio, Pirandello entered that of Felice Carena, one of the greatest Italian (or more correctly, Roman) masters of the 'return to order' during the immediate post-war years.² In March 1922 Carena opened an art school with the sculptor Attilio Selva, his enthusiasm attracting a number of promising young painters who would go on to make a substantial contribution to the evolution of Italy's artistic culture: Pirandello and Emanuele Cavalli enrolled in 1922, Giuseppe Capogrossi in 1923. Accustomed to the imposition of rigidly academic rules, Carena's students were encouraged to discover their aptitudes and develop their own personal forms of expression, with the consequence that the maestro was a beloved figure among many young Roman artists during the early 1920s. From Carena's own restless research Pirandello's work absorbed a hard chromatic plasticity, yet one not devoid of intellectual complexities.

He began by painting pastoral images of the peasantry in the archaic style of his teacher, but quickly started to introduce a realistic, contorted and 'ugly' carnality that was entirely his own, and which can be seen as prefiguring that of Lucian Freud. Deliberately ungraceful nudes, rustic peasants and sun-bleached landscapes were typical of Pirandello's work at this time – images that concede nothing to the hedonism of the classicists but which abandon

¹ Such painters were also a point of reference for Balla, Severini, Boccioni and Sironi before they embarked upon their Futurist adventure. This period is so undervalued in the critical literature on Pirandello that Lipinsky has often been referred to as a sculptor.

² Cf. F. Benzi, *Arte in Italia tra le due guerre*, Turin 2013.

themselves to a form of painting highlighting its own rich materiality. Capogrossi and Cavalli, with whom Pirandello was to be a protagonist of the Scuola Romana (and of the renewal of Italian art more generally) during the early 1930s, were more strongly influenced by the silent magic of the master's works, and evolved a softer style of painting focusing on subjects pervaded by an atmosphere of primordial mystery.

In 1928 Pirandello decided to move to France. A contingent reason for this choice (which may also explain one aspect of his somewhat tormented and labyrinthine psychology) was that of his marriage to Pompilia, a model from the small town of Anticoli Corrado on the outskirts of Rome that was very popular with artists. The humble origins of the young woman, the fact that she was expecting a son by Fausto, and the foreseen and feared disapproval of his celebrated father over the union were all factors that determined his decision to move to the French capital, hiding everything from his family. The explanation he provided for this stay was that it constituted a study trip – one which was to last until 1930, when Fausto finally decided to reveal his new family situation to his father (a truly 'Pirandellian' story in its tormented, psychological aspects). Regardless of the reasons for it, his stay in Paris was extremely fruitful in many respects, disappointing in others.

Certainly, the artist encountered and deepened his understanding of the city's many pictorial trends, gaining valuable inspiration and insights for his own work. He absorbed the earthy tones and densely applied paint of Cubist images, as well as their broad, monochromatic planes. From Surrealism he deduced the power of strident and irreconcilable images, of scenes suspended midway between the mysterious and the dreamlike. From Soutine's style of painting he developed his interest in carving into matter – into flesh – and from Derain a sense of classicism modulated by synthetic forms. However, his principal lessons were gleaned from a group that had only recently formed in the French capital, the 'Italiens de Paris' (1928-1933), but which had already come to constitute a significant

part of that city's cultural landscape. Gravitating around de Chirico (who Pirandello cited as an influence in an interview of 1928)³ and Severini, the group comprised a handful of world-class artists including Campigli, Giacometti, Savinio and Tozzi. As described by the then influential Parisian critic Waldemar George, their position was one of hostility toward the Surrealists (from whom de Chirico had broken away in a polemical manner) and of autonomy within the panorama of Parisian art, alongside the Cubists and the Purists. The identity of the Italiens de Paris was simultaneously national (Italian) and international; not classicising but classical (or rather Mediterranean) in substance, and yet open to research that did not eschew the languages of the avant-garde, from Cubism to Surrealism, elaborating them critically in a manner that was far from reflecting a commitment to Italian artistic autarky. The vertiginous glimpses into the unconscious suggested to the Surrealists by de Chirico's works were reclaimed in autonomous, polemical, proud terms and refashioned in a 'Mediterranean' key.

Pirandello attempted to join the group but was excluded on the basis of his youth, along with his friends Cavalli, Capogrossi and Di Cocco, who had also arrived in the French capital in the meantime. It was with Cavalli and Di Cocco that Pirandello organised his first exhibition (limited to drawings only) at the gallery of Madame Bovy. During this period he developed a style of 'magic realism' that harmonised with that of the other 'Italiens' but which remained autonomous due to the gritty realism of his figures and the almost hallucinatory objectivity of his style – qualities which would remain constant features of his artistic vision. Paintings of 1928 such as *Composition* and *Women with Salamander* are emblematic examples of this phase, as are many of his drawings, which also express an interest in spirituality that he shared with Cavalli.⁴ This fascination with all things spiritual reflected Pirandello's upbringing – theosophy having been explored in the family home. The surreal character of many of his works (even later images, such as *The Staircase* and *Women in a Room*) certainly derives from esoteric philosophies which, if not actually

³ R. Vailland, 'Le fils de Pirandello est peintre à Montparnasse', in *Paris-Midi*, 8 October 1928. De Chirico is cited along with Picasso, Braque and Derain.

⁴ While in France, the latter was in fact initiated into an esoteric society named the Brotherhood of Miriam, which explored mysticism and alchemy.



The Bath, c. 1934

subscribed to by Fausto, were at least known to the artist and held a vague fascination for him.

The most significant development in his career following his return to Rome, around the time of the first Quadriennale, was his affiliation with the nascent Scuola Romana group.

Its first exhibition took place at the Galleria di Roma – at that time the showcase for the capital’s avant-garde circles, having already served this purpose for those of Milan and Turin.⁵ An exhibition comprising work by five Milanese and five Roman painters had been conceived by its insightful and original owner, Pier Maria Bardi, as a ‘football match’ between two teams.⁶ The former, more heterogeneous, group of artists included Birolli, Sassu, Bogliardi, Ghiringhelli and Soldati. There is no doubt that the Romans formed a much more close-knit ‘side’ – a group in the truest sense of the term. Cavalli, Capogrossi and Pirandello were friends from the time of their training with Carena during the early 1920s, and had mounted exhibitions and undertaken pictorial

research together that had already attracted attention from the critics. The young Corrado Cagli (nephew of Massimo Bontempelli, the greatest literary exponent of magic realism) was for his part already fully aware of the new trends in European art, and was closely united to his three colleagues, all four having conceived important projects together and engaged in detailed discussions about one another’s work.⁷ Consequently, Cagli’s painting triangulated closely with that of the older friends. The art of the fifth member of the group, Vinicio Paladini, was more varied in nature. Having been associated with Futurism, he was at this time undertaking neo-Metaphysical and Surrealist research that also took him close to German *Neue Sachlichkeit* painting, and was drawn to the younger artists primarily on philosophical (or rather, theosophical) terms – particularly Cavalli.⁸ The Roman ‘team’ emerged as the undisputed winners of the game (the rules of which dictated four paintings were to be exhibited by each artist) presenting works in a new style that was to revivify Italian art during the 1930s.

However, from that moment on Pirandello began to pursue a more solitary path, albeit one that remained linked to that of his friends. A not yet fully understood Colossus of Italian painting, he continued his incisive investigations into the material nature of bodies and objects, creating images resonating with a sense of disquiet and angst.

The more complex maturity of his art, elaborated during the course of the 1930s, is highlighted by its exceptional quality. Having contributed to the ‘tonalism’ of the Scuola Romana,⁹ he provided its material and visionary, haunted and haunting interpretation through figures rendered in heavy impasto adopting everyday positions and performing quotidian actions, yet trapped

⁵ Opened in 1930, the Galleria di Roma had that year hosted the first major exhibitions by Scipione and Mafai, and continued to promote new artists with an original programme of shows and an emphasis on the younger generation. In 1932 it had exhibited works by the ‘Sei di Torino’ group and the Milanese expressionists, as well as chronicling the first steps taken by those young painters who would shortly afterward go on to represent Lombard abstractionism; however, Roman art was given a privileged position. The gallery’s originality was noted by certain contemporary critics, such as Corrado Pavolini: ‘The series of exhibitions by new artists taking place in Via Veneto are the only really interesting ones to be found in the capital; except, of course, for the large syndical and national exhibitions, which are of an entirely different character’. ‘A. Pincherle e C. Cogli alla Galleria di Roma’, in *Il Tevere*, 18 April 1932.

⁶ This analogy was noted by Pirandello who, recalling the occasion in a letter to Guzzi (see F. Benzi, ‘Materiali inediti dagli archivi di Virgilio Guzzi’, in L. Stefanelli Torossi, ed., *Virgilio Guzzi*, Rome 1986, p. 63), described the group of five Roman artists being ‘opposed to the same number of Milanese painters in a comparative show that was almost like a match (such as a game of football)’.

⁷ Something confirmed by a number of letters to Cavalli dating from 1932 onward; cf. F. Benzi, *Emanuele Cavalli*, Rome 1984.

⁸ This shared interest is documented in several interesting letters; cf. F. Benzi, cit., 1984, p. 141.

⁹ A pictorial language that was to become the common heritage of the most innovative young painters working during that decade.

in rhythmical and unnatural compositions: figures dominated by immanent, disturbing and surreal anxieties. Entirely distinct from the dreamlike surrealism of Scipione with which it is sometimes associated, Pirandello's art gives form to those empty spaces that consciousness cannot fill in its complex relationship with reality through configurations of distorted, unstable and skewed spaces. The painful human condition is communicated without rhetoric, and through simultaneously rough yet sumptuous painterly surfaces, in images possessing an extraordinary spiritual power. This dry, scabrous technique constitutes the singular interpretation of tonalism characteristic of Pirandello's painting. During the second half of the 1930s he was to leave behind the earlier, surreal imagery, and move toward a shocking and dark realism. Anti-psychological, like that of his friends, Pirandello's work aimed not to create a dream world, but clearly to expose a condition suspended midway between pure form and naked reality: a paradox that lays bare the insoluble dialectic between suffering matter and sublimating spirit, held in check by the inevitability of existence. According to his own words, the painting *Drought* was inspired by clay figurines of the damned created by Neapolitan craftsmen as popular votive images, expressing a sense of universal destruction through simplified forms. His still lifes depict rough, simple objects in a non-rhetorical approach that is faithfully reflected in an equally simplified palette. His figures are stripped of any psychological dimensions, with their gestures appearing to form part of a timeless (and perhaps meaningless) drama; carnality is expressed with an anti-hedonistic objectivity, highlighting the defects and imperfections of the body, making no concessions to formal piety and starkly rendering the effects of time and nature.

His raw vision of reality was entirely coherent with the tragic, war-ravaged conclusion of the decade, expressed through flaking and iridescent still lifes that contain objects resembling flotsam and jetsam, portraits and figures immobilised by petrifying

anxieties, and bathers crowded together like characters in an existential purgatory – groups of naked men and women arranged along shorelines, illuminated by a grey, ashen light.

The latter compositions were to inspire Guttuso not only to compose a memorable essay of 1941 but also to create his famous and dramatic series *Gott mit uns* of 1944-45 – a paradigm for Italian art of the revolt against Nazi-Fascism – as well as such early agitated and expressionist masterpieces as *Flight from Etna*. Their existential character was described by the artist as follows:

'These agonised characters carry around their inhuman form [...]. They are neither men nor women, despite the cruelest accentuations, but figures from other planets standing on a rough, dry clay beneath grey, cloudless skies, where even the storms do not resemble those of this world. Earth, sky, sea, animals, men and women all cracked and dried by a midday heat produced by a distant sun that manages to blaze, but not to shine'.¹⁰

The 'bathers' theme was one of the most intensely explored and characteristic of Pirandello's entire oeuvre. These are compositions of explicit and painful – almost ineluctable – carnality, of tangled bodies whose nakedness is immodest yet not celebrated, exhausted by an existential fatigue. However, from the 1950s such imagery was lifted by purer, more brilliant, colours.

These paintings have repeatedly drawn the attention of students of Pirandello's work. Obviously so, perhaps, insofar as an analysis of such a large and prominent aspect of his art is fundamental to any understanding of his career as a whole. The series originated at a precise moment at the end of the 1930s, and should not be confused with the various, apparently similar, compositions of bathers that Pirandello had painted since the 1920s. The latter works can be related to an ancient tradition that was to have its great revival in the nineteenth century through the work of Renoir

¹⁰ R. Guttuso, 'Una mostra di Pirandello', in *Primato*, II, 6, 15 March 1941, pp. 18-19 (p. 19). On Pirandello's *Bathers* series, see F. Benzi, ed., *Fausto Pirandello: bagnanti*, Rignano Flaminio 2010. On Pirandello's work more generally, G. Giuffrè's volume *Fausto Pirandello*, Rome 1984, is still useful; see also C. Gian Ferrari, ed., *Fausto Pirandello. Catalogo generale*, Milan 2009.

and Cézanne, and which through their example was to continue to find a place in twentieth-century art as an exercise in pure style, pure formalism. It was to have illustrious exponents in Picasso and Derain, and in Italy was, unsurprisingly, to have as its champion Pirandello's teacher Felice Carena. Bathers on the beach or the river as exercises in life drawing outside the enclosed spaces of the academy; a modern vision of a formal necessity of contemporary art. But the bathers that Pirandello subsequently began to paint form part of an entirely distinct series, one that has no ties (other than those of a thematic nature) with the past. This is apparent from the agitation that makes these innately classical compositions 'groan' unnaturally, and above all from the obsession that drove Pirandello to produce this huge nucleus of works that would only come to an end upon the artist's death.

However, a more profound interpretation of the motif has never been attempted, and it is easy to understand why: Pirandello himself never revealed the origins and impulses that gave rise to this persistent theme, one that may therefore appear to constitute a mere formal exercise – albeit laden with clear inner tensions.

To explore the topic more deeply, a crucial point must be considered: when exactly did this theme emerge in Pirandello's painting? In the Lazio Syndicate exhibition, which opened in Rome on 23 May 1938, we find the first trace of this lengthy series: work no. 9 (*Bathers*) being the progenitor of the entire sequence of paintings that was to recur in Pirandello's work from that moment on. Subsequently, in February 1939, Pirandello exhibited another two paintings at the Rome Quadriennale that revealed the progression of the theme: *Bathers* and *Red Curtain*. However, the figures in these works – flushed, dazed by the salty atmosphere and shaken by the summer wind – that appear time and time again in Pirandello's

imagery were surely not the products of abstract reflections but of concrete summertime experiences: something suggested by the realistic character of the scenes. Accordingly, they must date back to the summer preceding the first of the aforementioned exhibitions – that is to say, 1937. Attempting to establish a plausible date for the commencement of the series is not an irrelevant matter. In December 1936 Fausto's father Luigi died, following a long and affectionate process of rapprochement between the two men. This had been finally established during a trip to Venice: the weary Luigi struggling to visit the Biennale where Fausto was exhibiting. Father and son subsequently spent the summer together in the peace of Villa San Filippo, in Anticoli Corrado, where Fausto had started painting while enrolled in the school of Felice Carena. A month after the death of his father, Fausto's second son, Antonio, was born. A striking 'Pirandellian' contrast, one might say, between the painful end of one life and the beginning of another – one also circumstantially painful, but symbolic of a hope ultimately undermined by the promise of death.

Pirandello's notebook contains a passage titled 'Heavy Seas'.¹¹ Despite not bearing a date, I believe this can be dated precisely to the summer of 1937, being a vivid description (albeit without a precise iconographical reference) of himself as a bather being whipped by the waves, parched by the sun and dried by the wind, while the sea whispers a mysterious and threatening prophecy and the gloom gathers against the background of a skeletal pine-forest: "That which you are looking for, you will find" the old sea reminds me'. Another shorter text surely dates from the same year, given the nature of its content – or at least relates to the same experience of that sultry beach which was to prove so revelatory and prophetic a place for Pirandello, and which would remain indelibly imprinted on the artist's imagination: 'The young girl sitting on the sand hugs her knees and moves sensually, freed

from all conventions, like an animal, a state of nature heightened by the burning of the sun that has reddened and swollen her face, her shoulders...'.¹²

The above passages illuminate the significance of those jumbled bathers – a significance already perfectly intuited by Giuffré solely on an iconographical basis. Human prisoners of their existence, 'unprotected from invisible aggressors more relentless than the sun, and helpless before them', 'victims of a ferocity that is sometimes in the air itself and in the implacable sun, in the flesh and in the senses, the bearer of an invisible death that corrodes body and spirit from within'.¹³ Giuffré also accurately articulates the existential meaning of these almost apocalyptic, but silently objective

compositions, which presage the incipient human disaster of the war, of a dark and inevitable tragedy.

Whilst remaining existential in this sense, Pirandello's bathers were also to become a formal compositional element in his post-Cubist, expressionist paintings of the post-war period. Nevertheless, these crowded figures continued to be the bearers of a deep spiritual significance – one all the more intense for being implied and anti-rhetorical – being stripped to the bone and deprived of protection from a life which they would be unable to dominate in any case. Metaphors for the contrast between life and death as perceived and introjected by Pirandello in 1937, where the figure of the bather signifies humanity blown like a leaf on the wind and dried by the sun.



The Massacre, 1941

¹² F. Pirandello, *Piccole impertinenze*, ed. by M. L. Aguirre d'Amico, Palermo 1987, p. 56.

¹³ G. Giuffré, cit., pp. 129, 131.

Fausto Pirandello: Matter and Form in the Post-war Period

Francesco Leone



Biscuits and Spirits, 1957

The path followed by Pirandello during the post-war era was marked by the same tormented autonomy characterising that which he had taken during the 1930s, making it a unique reference point in Italian artistic culture and producing exceptional results capable of absorbing the most intense contemporary European aesthetic investigations into its original hendiadys: accretive matter / ordering form.

Pervaded with existential moods, 'vulgarised' by a profound sense of reality through its ruthlessly objective analysis of objects and bodies, deprived of the reassuring eschatological hypocrisies of civilisation, denuded by a lacerating dialectic between a love of life and a painful awareness of decay that had its roots in the baroque world – the position from which the artist resumed his work between 1944 and 1945 had already been effectively

characterised by Renato Guttuso in 1941, in the dark and harrowing atmosphere of war, to which the visceral, dull pain of Pirandello's existential painting seemed perfectly attuned. On the occasion of an exhibition at Rome's Galleria delle Terme, Guttuso commented on the primordial bathers that thronged the artist's imagination and imagery at this time, representing a metaphor for existence: 'These agonised characters carry around their inhuman form [...]. Earth, sky, sea, animals, men and women all cracked and dried by a midday heat produced by a distant sun that manages to blaze, but not to shine'.¹

At the end of 1944, in a Rome exhausted by Nazi occupation, the authoritative pen of Fortunato Bellonzi wrote equally effective lines about Pirandello's nudes on the occasion of another exhibition by the artist, this time at the Galleria del Secolo: 'The nudes are not depicted in a naturalistic manner, but they have firm flesh and a skeleton of bone, even if the flesh is inglorious and one feels that the bones within are close to disintegration, as in the poem by Montale'.² Which is to say that Pirandello was not concerned with achieving a superficial verisimilitude, but rather with undertaking a deep, unforgiving probing of harsh reality. During one of the three Venice Biennales that took place between 1938 and 1942 the ungraceful nature of these withered figures – tormented by the wind and dried by the sun – that had so thrilled Guttuso and Bellonzi, and which would later enthuse other influential critics, was the subject of an amusing scene between Pirandello and Ugo Ojetti, a

¹ R. Guttuso, 'Una mostra di Pirandello', in *Primato*, II, 6, 15 March 1941, pp. 18-19 (p. 19).

² F. Bellonzi, in *La Domenica*, 10 December 1944.

'holy cow' of the Italian artistic establishment, who was unable to grasp the extraordinary novelty of those naked figures constructed with incomparable compositional skill. Among the artist's papers is an undated note in which Pirandello recalls walking through the rooms of the Biennale with Ojetti, who was accompanied by an 'ugly lady':

'He stopped me to ask me why I painted ugly women. I replied that I could not find any that were more attractive. "Eh!" he said "look around you!" At which point, as I dutifully turned my gaze toward his ugly companion, came the lightning follow-up: "I mean, a bit further away"'.³

From this point until 1946-47 Pirandello's painting was characterised by its oscillation between fleshly ostentation⁴ and the sublimation of form; between an advance toward one or the other, and a consequent withdrawal from one or the other. This was not a sign of hesitation or of knowing compromise, but the seismographic fluctuations of a troubled inner earthquake. It is illustrated by still lifes, landscapes and figures in which one moves from isolated and rare naturalistic hints to geometrical distortions obtained by means of the projection of inclined and unstable spatial planes that invade the stage on which the figures seem to camp. It is likewise evident from Pirandello's fields of colour and tonal recesses, incorporating bold expressionist outbursts: works in which the colours (now intense and diverse in a manner distinct from those of the 1930s) become thicker, the material more dense and the figures blurred, and which contain powerful echoes of Kokoschka, Soutine, Ensor, Scipione (honoured with a retrospective at the Biennale of 1948), the teachings of Pirandello's exuberant first teacher Carena and the contemporary expressionist research of Stradone, Scialoja, Sadun and Ciarrocchi.

In terms of pictorial language, the deconstructed modules of Cubist painting can be glimpsed in Pirandello's paintings of 1947 in respect of their material qualities and thickly applied paint. Such elements were a common feature of Italian art during the immediate post-war years, but had already been widely employed during the 1940s when attempts were made to link the revival of figurative painting to the question of the artist's social role according to the model of Picasso. A series of bathers dating from this year are emblematic of such an approach,⁵ as are *Still Life with Mannequin* (Bergamo, private collection),⁶ *Antonio in Violet* (ex-Estorick Collection)⁷ and *The Flute* (Turin, Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea).⁸ All of these works are remarkable for their advanced levels of stylisation, elaborated under the influence of Gleizes, Metzinger and Braque. Despite Pirandello's claims to the contrary it was perhaps the work of the latter, more than that of Picasso, which provided the key to his understanding of Cubist structuralism during his stay in Paris in the late 1920s. The year 1947 was a crucial one for Pirandello, during which he explored a number of formal hypotheses before 'screwing them up', as one does in the heat of the moment with a poorly executed drawing. This inner torment was to last until 1950-51. The explosive mixture of formal content deformed by an expressionist charge recurs, for example, in the Van Gogh-esque *Sunflowers* of 1948.

The date 1947 is not coincidental. Between September 1946 and January 1947 the exhibition *French Painting Today*, curated by Balthus, was held at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome, featuring representatives of the Nouvelle École Française. Many of these, already well established before the war, had resolved the problem of the new

³ F. Pirandello, *Riflessioni sull'arte*, ed. by C. Gian Ferrari, F. Matitti, Milan 2008, p. 21.

⁴ In reviewing Pirandello's works at the 1952 Biennale, Virgilio Guzzi would speak of a 'spectacle of carnage'. V. Guzzi, 'Fausto Pirandello', in *XXVI Biennale di Venezia*, exh. cat., Venice 1952, p. 103.

⁵ Cf. C. Gian Ferrari, *Fausto Pirandello. Catalogo generale*, Milan 2009, cats 336-342, pp. 151-52.

⁶ *Ibid.*, cat. 354, p. 154.

⁷ *Ibid.*, cat. 348, p. 153.

⁸ *Ibid.*, cat. 359, p. 155.



Atmosphere and Self Portrait, 1956

reality of pictorial space and its content in terms of an interaction between Cubism's structural compactness and a Fauvist approach to colour. This solution would have already been familiar to Pirandello, who in 1928, while in Paris, had declared: 'In terms of contemporary art, Picasso and Derain are my teachers here', adding: 'I also admire Braque and my compatriot Chirico'.⁹

In terms of Italian art, an exhibition of works by Corpora, Fazzini, Guttuso, Monachesi and Turcato was held in December 1946 at Rome's Galleria del Secolo, coinciding with that at the Galleria Nazionale. This selection

of works – and an accompanying manifesto published on the occasion – made explicit reference to the 'formal consciousness' (i.e. not simply the external style) of Cubism as a tool with which to develop a new figurative reality through a revived pictorial language capable of reflecting the aesthetic and civic sensibility of contemporary society in the immediate aftermath of the Liberation. Connoted politically and ethically (as in Picasso's heartfelt denunciation *Guernica*) the formula of neo-Cubism was one of the few points of connection between those Italian artists of different generations who came together in 1946 under the banner of the Fronte Nuovo delle Arti in the name of freedom of expression. Comprising painters with very different backgrounds and diverse pictorial languages – some being committed to the new realist formulas and others gravitating toward a more abstract formalism – the Fronte represented a kind of national artistic solidarity pact, albeit an ephemeral one due to its lack of a common purpose beyond this basic point of agreement. At the height of his aesthetic consciousness, and being almost fifty years of age, Pirandello had attentively followed its first steps without actually taking part; just as he was to witness its dissolution in 1950, when internal tensions between realists and formalists (a simplistic and extremely reductive description of the much more complex and fluid character of post-war Italian art) became irreconcilable. These tensions increased markedly following the Italian Communist Party's decision to endorse the realist wing.

This composite framework – which included such important associations as the abstractionist Forma 1 group, established in Rome in 1947, and the Movimento Arte Concreta (MAC) founded in 1948 – was comprehensively reflected at the Venice Biennale of 1948¹⁰ alongside artists belonging to the older

⁹ In R. Vailland, 'Le fils de Pirandello est peintre à Montparnasse', in *Paris-Midi*, 8 October 1928.

¹⁰ The first of the post-war period.

generation and retrospectives dedicated to the great masters of the recent past. Along with that year's Quadriennale, this exhibition confirmed the remarkable repositioning of Italy's artistic and cultural establishment in the immediate aftermath of the war. Pirandello was among its participants (with five paintings), and in the large room devoted to Picasso, located in the pavilion occupied for the most part by contemporary Italian artists, visitors were able to admire as many as 22 paintings by the Cubist leader, including *Night Fishing in Antibes*. It was a critical phase for Italian formalism of the late 1940s, and one of deep reflection for Pirandello who, by the end of the decade, had begun to paint objects and figures in which he strove to dam the expressionist flood of matter – the existential weight of reality – by means of fragmented modules that tended to order and synthesis, yet without ever abandoning the plastic and figurative yearning that had always distinguished his artistic vision.

The mature fruits of this research, begun by Pirandello at the end of the 1940s and presented at the Biennale of 1952, would be defined by Guzzi as 'extremely synthetic evocations of eternal carnal reality; tight clashes of lights, colours and planes within the meandering of an arabesque line which would like to reduce that reality to a symbol'.¹¹ Around the same time Pirandello's old friend Corrado Cagli would likewise explore the possibility of a fruitful reconciliation between figuration and abstraction, although in a manner different to that of Pirandello – the formal rhythms of his work being based on a study of mathematics and non-Euclidean geometry.¹²

This profitable oscillation between figuration and abstraction (although in Pirandello's case it is more correct to speak of synthesis) was in fact explored by many other Italian artists during

the 1950s. Transcending the sterile, unrealistic and oversimplified distinction between the two approaches proposed by many critics both then and now, it perhaps represents the most significant Italian contribution to the vocabulary of abstraction during the 1950s. It drew Pirandello into the orbit of the critic Lionello Venturi and, although not as a member, to the 'Gruppo degli Otto' established by Birilli, Santomaso and Morlotti under the aegis of Venturi in 1952.¹³ The group's formal line of research – which was able to incorporate different artists and aesthetics, finding a common denominator in its investigation of the creative processes in relation to form, the abstract synthesis of form and colour, and the manifestation of a living and immanent reality – was traced by Venturi at the Biennale of 1954. His words on this occasion seem verbally to encapsulate the investigations that innervate Pirandello's painting of the early 1950s:

'Any work of art, of any age and place, is both abstract and concrete – abstract because it has a style, and concrete because its content depends on the artist's "concrete" way of feeling and living [...]. We attain a synthesis of the absolute and the contingent, of the eternal and the ephemeral: their ideal trembles because of today's restlessness. They are more limited than the abstractionists but perhaps more vital [...]. If there is a taste that profits from the best Italian and foreign traditions of our century, and resolves the most vital problems of painting according to the personality of each individual, it is that of the abstract-concrete'.¹⁴

Expounding this approach, which would later generate a number of disagreements and disputes, Venturi dedicated a brief article to Pirandello in 1954 in the pages of *Commentari*. It was a brief text, and not altogether enlightening in terms of assisting the reader

¹¹ V. Guzzi, *Fausto Pirandello*, cit., p. 104. In 1950 Rome's De Luca publishing house issued Guzzi's monograph on Pirandello – the first to be devoted to the artist.

¹² Cf. *Corrado Cagli e il suo magistero. Mezzo secolo di arte italiana dalla Scuola Romana all'astrattismo*, exh. cat., (Pordenone, Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea Armando Pizzinato), ed. by F. Benzi, with contributions by G. Ganzer and F. Leone, Milan 2010.

¹³ *Otto pittori italiani. 1952-1954: Afro, Birilli, Corpora, Morena, Morlotti, Santomaso, Turcato, Vedova*, exh. cat. (Milan, Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea), ed. by L. Somaini, Rome 1986. Venturi was chosen as a mentor by the group's founders in place of Marchiori on the basis of his international character and his heroic past as an exiled anti-Fascist.

¹⁴ L. Venturi, 'La XXVII Biennale', in *Commentari*, V, 1, January-March 1954, pp. 167-71 (p. 170).

to decipher the works, but was accompanied by thirteen images. The expressive charge of Pirandello's painting – anchored to a manifest love for life – and its synthesis of colour and form was not lost on Venturi:

'He has a culture superior to that of the average painter, and from his few writings one receives the clear sense that he is fiercely secular. But when he paints he is rarely cerebral; he is sensual, often to the point of exasperation, and passion overwhelms him and his images. Therefore he is a strong colourist – the least intellectual colourist – and achieves his best results when his colours create his forms'.¹⁵

Leaving aside his comments on individual works – all of which are discussed, with a certain conceptual simplification, in terms of the post-war discovery of those 'new values that a simultaneous vision of time and space can give' – Venturi managed to convey the sense of Pirandello's cosmogonic art in a very effective passage, despite the fact that his words only related to the artist's most recent still lifes. In these, he noted how 'the perception of reality is revealed as if it were born from chaos, it gives the effect of something created, parallel to natural reality, and yet distinct because it is the reality of art, full of the grace of art'.¹⁶ In terms of figure painting, Venturi justifiably maintained that the perfect abstract-concrete synthesis had been achieved in a female *Nude* of 1953 (Marzotto Collection),¹⁷ a piece stylistically similar to the work of De Kooning in which 'there is neither a dash of the brush nor a tone that is not justified by the demand of the shape created. The blacks and reds are violent, and the form is born spontaneously from these expressive accents rather than from a conventional use of chiaroscuro'.¹⁸ One could say the same of other nudes painted that year – major works

of Pirandello's new maturity that moved from figuration toward schematisation (*Sentimental Nude; Reclining Figure; Reclining Nude*).¹⁹

Accordingly, through a number of masterpieces that continued to manifest his proverbial autonomy and anarchic approach to art, this great isolated figure found himself authoritatively repositioned within an Italian art scene that had changed radically from that of the pre-war era in an extremely short period of time.

In those years there was no lack of recognition, prizes or awards for Pirandello. His painting aroused the interest of critics such as Cipriano Efisio Oppo, Leonardo Sinisgalli, Libero De Libero and Nello Ponente, in addition to the aforementioned Bellonzi, Guzzi and Venturi. His writings on art also aroused interest, reaching heights of refined critical acumen between 1956 and 1958 in essays such as 'The Figurative Klee' and 'Imponderable Orders: Burned Formulas' – in which he criticised Venturi's abstract-concrete creed – as well as 'Metamorphosis of a Cabbage'.²⁰ In April 1952 he won first prize at the VI Rome Quadriennale, while in 1955 he was awarded his first prestigious solo exhibition by Catherine Viviano in New York (the contacts of Venturi, who had lived in exile in the United States, were extensive).

And yet there were also some bitter disappointments – such as his lack of recognition at the Venice Biennale in 1956. His solemn invitation to the event, and the dedication of a room to his work, both suggested that he would be awarded first prize; instead this went to Afro, Venturi's abstract-concrete protégé, giving proof of the irreducible autonomy of Pirandello's path and its incompatibility with the systems of promotion generated by the new courses charted by modern art.

¹⁵ L. Venturi, 'Fausto Pirandello', in *Commentari*, V, 1, January-March 1954, pp. 50-54 (p. 51).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁷ C. Gian Ferrari, *Fausto Pirandello*, cit., cat. 550, p. 190.

¹⁸ L. Venturi, 'Fausto Pirandello', cit., p. 53.

¹⁹ C. Gian Ferrari, *Fausto Pirandello*, cit., cats 545-49, p. 189.

²⁰ All published in *La Fiera Letteraria*: 'Klee figurativo', XI, 41, 14 October 1956, pp. 1, 7; 'Ordini imponderabili. Formule bruciate', XII, 14, 7 April 1957, pp. 5-6; 'Metamorfosi di un cavolo', XIII, 21, 25 May 1958, p. 5.

However the controversy between Pirandello and Venturi did not irretrievably damage relations between the two men, despite the former's (thinly) veiled poetic clarifications published in the aforementioned essay 'Imponderable Orders: Burned Formulas' where the painter, embittered by his failure to win first prize in Venice, took the side of figurative art. In 1958 Venturi placed him in a group of eleven artists included in his volume *Italian Painters of Today* alongside the distantly-related Mafai, Birolli, Santomaso, Corpora, Afro, Cassinari, Turcato, Scialoja, Scordia and Vedova. For Pirandello this constituted important recognition, and for Venturi represented a critical choice that he justified in the following terms:

'Their affinity consists in their use of abstract forms. This assigns to some, such as Turcato or Vedova, the task of total or almost total expression, and to others the allusion to real images, albeit ones composed within the architecture of abstraction, as is the case with Pirandello, Mafai, Cassinari or Scordia. Precisely because of their emphasis on abstraction these eleven painters are of the moment; they respond to the pictorial tastes of today. Ever since the invention of Cubism a widespread need has been felt to entrust the expression of one's own way of feeling – or rather, of being – to lines, forms and colours that do not correspond to any physical objects'.²¹

Regarding Pirandello's most recent works of the mid-1950s, the critic noted a 'formal organisation' that had 'taken precedence over the representation of nature, as if it were painted from two points of view, with a strong architectural accent'.²² In essence, the development of the painter's style had been 'gradual, slow and tormented, but marked



The Pergola, 1955

by its inexorable detachment from the object represented with the intention of achieving complete coherence of form and colour, yet never abandoning the aim of revealing the essence of nature through abstract forms'.²³

Venturi did not fail to recognise the diverse qualities of Pirandello's painting from these years, although it was not until Giuffré's monograph of 1984 that they were fully assessed and viewed in the context of European art at that time.²⁴ During the 1950s Pirandello 'exploited' the most radical experiences of contemporary art – from those of Tobey to

²¹ L. Venturi, *Pittori italiani d'oggi*, Rome 1958, p. 11.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁴ G. Giuffré, *Fausto Pirandello: con un'appendice di scritti inediti*, Rome 1984.

Gorky, to Matta, De Kooning, Dubuffet and Fautrier – bending them to his new vision of painterly reality.

At other times (*Befana in Piazza Navona*, of c. 1951; *Breakfast and Music* of 1955; *Boxes and Bottles* of 1957 and *Still Life with Chair [Electrical Objects]* also of c. 1957)²⁵ the artist seems to grow calmer and less tormented for a few brief moments – at least in his depiction of objects, if not in his representation of the nude. At such times Pirandello returned to the more serene charm of the Parisian years, to the formal rhythms of Léger and Severini, to Braque's Cubism or to Futurism, in order to grasp the internal symmetries of objects with a vivid and 'Mediterranean' palette and cleaner backgrounds.

However, the plastic urgency of his work and the principle of representation remained in place. This was the case even during the mid-1950s when Pirandello achieved complete mastery of the new language that he was to employ for the rest of his career – where matter, in its heavy expressionist configuration and assertion of a new reality, rendered with a fragmented and dense architecture constructed from small dashes of colour-form distantly echoing those of Cézanne (rather than the Cubists) was to push the limits of angular deconstructions and formal arrangements with agitated brushwork, pictorial rarefaction, ruptured planes and elliptical forms. This was a road that would intersect (in Italy) with the abstraction of Afro, Leoncillo, Birolli and Morlotti, and (internationally) with the female nudes of De Kooning painted during the early 1950s, as well as the work of many other artists exploring the principles of French Art Informel.

What occurred in the paintings of Pirandello at this time is perfectly intelligible if one considers

his later paintings of nudes and the obsessively explored theme of bathers, whose tortured anatomies seem to explode in the spatial reality of the painting, simultaneously expanding and clashing in frenetic rhythms, strung together in dizzying views in which their flesh, outlined in black or red, is lacerated by a violent expressive urgency that increasingly suggests the gestural approach of Abstract Expressionism and the imagery of De Kooning.²⁶ Pirandello's nudes and bathers of the 1950s illustrate the artist's undeniable modernity, being works in which the principle of representation is not 'trivially' denied in the manner of the abstractionists, but overwhelmed by a process of structural disintegration through the tormented impetuosity of the gesture before being recreated in a new form. Pirandello's force / arrogance was to remain intact throughout the 1960s, up to the time of his final, religious works, which carried on an existential dialogue with an ever-closer and increasingly gloomy Absolute, as in his images of Christ on the cross lacerated by expressionist deformation.²⁷

In relation to this extraordinary phase of Pirandello's painting *Virgilio Guzzi* – who was, along with Giuffré, arguably the most insightful commentator on the artist's work – gave an interpretation of great effectiveness in his 1950 monograph:

'In these recent years you have first rediscovered colour, experiencing in your own way and very quickly a Neo-Impressionist phase; then you tried to graft Cubist geometry onto that innate expressionism of yours [...]. Your contorted nudes, marked by lines like the Cabala, are always made of poor tortured flesh; faceted or flattened and summarised with black or red lines that try to reduce them to symbols, through

²⁵ C. Gian Ferrari, *Fausto Pirandello*, cit., cats 497 (p. 179), 628 (p. 202), 675 (p. 210), 679 (pp. 210-11).

²⁶ Cf. G. Giuffré, *Fausto Pirandello*, cit., pp. 160-61.

²⁷ On this theme, see *Fausto Pirandello. Memoria della croce*, exh. cat. (Brescia, Museo d'Arte Contemporanea della Associazione Arte e Spiritualità), ed. by C. De Carli, Brescia 1993.

a rich and strange arabesque, they retain a heartbeat, the colour of mortal substance'.²⁸

It is evidently a mistake to interpret Pirandello's deconstructive process as representing a banal compromise between figuration and abstraction, or to judge as poorly resolved his proposal of a synthesis between matter and form. It was a mistake when, in 1955 at the VII Rome Quadriennale, the refined Francesco Arcangeli, educated in art by Longhi and Morandi, attacked the 'compressed, contradictory anxiety

of Fausto Pirandello, who commits the perhaps inevitable error of interweaving his original, decidedly "figurative", art with stylistic elements of an entirely different origin'.²⁹ Wrong, too, if today, in order to justify the force and the absolute modernity of Pirandello's treatment of flesh and his skewed perspectives, we have to invoke the name of the 'butcher' Lucian Freud – one of the greatest artists of the second half of twentieth century, and one who, like Pirandello, also possessed an imposing predecessor bound to the world of the imponderable.



Awakening, 1948

²⁸ V. Guzzi, *Fausto Pirandello*, Rome 1950, p. 21.

²⁹ Cited in V. Sgarbi, 'Pirandello, pittore tormentato', in *Fausto Pirandello: i nudi*, exh. cat. (Venice, Palazzo Grimani), ed. by V. Sgarbi, Cinisello Balsamo 2011, pp. 7-12 (p. 11) (no reference is provided).

Pirandello Painting Stage Writing

Flavia Matitti



Luigi and Fausto Pirandello in Anticoli Corrado during the summer of 1936

Painting and writing have much to tell each other;
they have much in common.
The novelist after all wants to make us see.

Virginia Woolf, *Walter Sickert: A Conversation*, 1934

'I began to want to paint after watching my father paint'.¹
In 1950 Fausto Pirandello (1899-1975) responded in this straightforward manner to the young journalist Benny Lai, who had asked him how his passion for painting had been born. Yet Fausto, considered one of the greatest Italian painters of the twentieth century, was the third son of Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936), a writer, poet and playwright of international renown who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1934. Among other things,

this meant that Fausto had to live with a family name routinely used by others as an adjective (*pirandelliano*) to indicate something puzzling and paradoxical. The naturalness and unexpectedness of his response therefore suggests that the artist, then in his fifties, no longer felt threatened by the ghost of his father's fame, if he had done in the past, and indeed clearly revealed the deep ties that bound Fausto to him.²

'With the monotonous tone of taciturn men' – observed Lai – 'Fausto continues to talk of his father, remembering how "He never went on holiday without his box of colours. It was something of a hobby – he used to laugh about it himself. Yet it was inevitable: as soon as he was in the countryside he settled his palette on a chair and squeezed out his colours from those half-empty tubes of his. He painted with commitment, for hours; sometimes in the sun. He almost always painted from life"'.³

Luigi Pirandello, who had studied painting as a young man in Sicily under the guidance of a local artist, was fond of saying that if he had not been a writer he could have done very well as a painter.³ However, his artworks – images painted in oil on small boards, predominantly depicting landscapes – were not publicly exhibited until 1937, following his death.⁴ Initially, these were characterised by a descriptive naturalism that subsequently became less 'flowery' and more synthetic. But how do these works relate to Luigi's literary creations? In his writings, especially his short stories, there are recurring visual references, both in terms of descriptions of actual

¹ B. Lai, 'Pirandello Pittura Palcoscenico', in *Giornale del Popolo*, 25 March 1950. Later citations are also drawn from this article.

² C. Strinati, 'Luigi e Fausto Pirandello. Forme della Verità', in *Pirandello. Opere su carta 1921-1975*, exh. cat., ed. by G. Appella, F. D'Amico, De Luca-Arnoldo Mondadori Editori, Rome-Milan 1986, pp. 25-29; G. Appella, 'Luigi e Fausto Pirandello: così è (se vi pare)', in *Fausto Pirandello 1899-1975*, exh. cat., ed. by G. Appella, G. Giuffrè, De Luca, Rome 1990, pp. 10-15; M. Quesada, 'Luigi e Fausto Pirandello: la realtà del quotidiano', in *Fausto Pirandello*, exh. cat., ed. by C. Gian Ferrari, Charta, Milan 1995, pp. 71-74; F. Matitti, 'La pittura in Casa Pirandello. Un dialogo ininterrotto tra Luigi e Fausto', in *Ariel*, II, no. 2, July-December 2012 [but March 2014], pp. 107-34.

³ A. Alessio, *Pirandello Pittore*, Edizioni del Centro Nazionale di Studi Pirandelliani, Agrigento 1984; B. Marconi, 'Luigi Pirandello pittore. "Spontaneità" e "sincerità"', in *Fausto Pirandello. 'La vita attuale e la favola eterna'. Mostra del centenario*, exh. cat., ed. by M. Fagiolo dell'Arco, C. Gian Ferrari, Charta, Milan 1999, pp. 30-37; *I Pirandello ritornano al Caos. La pittura passione artistica della famiglia*, exh. cat., ed. by A. Perniciaro, F. Capobianco, C. A. Iacono, Editore Salvatore Sciascia, Caltanissetta 2003.

⁴ E. Cecchi, 'Dipinti di Luigi Pirandello', in *VII Mostra del Sindacato fascista Belle Arti del Lazio*, exh. cat., Pinci, Rome 1937, pp. 38-40.



Luigi Pirandello, *Portrait of Fausto*, 1910 (from *La Lettura*, January 1943, p. 13)

artworks (*ekphrasis*) or, more generally, in terms of the writer's ability to think in images. It is significant that on 22 December 1924 Luigi wrote to his friend Ugo Ojetti, the influential art critic, explaining that he wanted to found his Teatro d'Arte in order to allow him the luxury 'of showing once and for all what a poor author sees when he writes'.⁵

In this context, what is important to understand are the terms in which his passion for painting, his artistic tastes and his aesthetic informed the discussions he had with

his son Fausto – who in turn experimented with writing, producing literary texts and poems that still await detailed study.⁶ From the point of view of the creative process, father and son had at least one thing in common. It is known that Luigi returned to certain themes on a cyclical basis, even after long periods of time, in a kind of continual process of self-quotation. The same was true of Fausto, who created countless variations on particular motifs, and would resume or alter his paintings, or realise faithful replicas of them, sometimes decades after producing the first version of an image.

Luigi's passion for painting occasionally led him to engage in art criticism.⁷ In his view, a work of art – whether literary or visual – had first and foremost to be sincere and spontaneous. A strong advocate of the need to adopt a comprehensible vocabulary, he was sceptical of the work of avant-garde artists. His favourite painters included Camillo Innocenti, Armando Spadini and Antonio Mancini.

When Fausto decided to devote himself to painting Luigi did not obstruct him. Again spurred on by the questions of Benny Lai, the painter recalled: 'My father was convinced that it was only possible to achieve something by doing it with passion. Besides, I could never say that my father paid much attention to us kids. Not out of malice, mind you; but first and foremost we were papa's ears: he called us in and made us sit there as he read to us what he had been writing. And finally he also asked our opinion'. It is therefore clear that Fausto grew up nourished by the work of his father, although his cultural references were of course manifold. In 1934, for example, he jokingly listed some of these in a letter to his sister Lietta: 'I have very good friends whom I often frequent: Dante, Masaccio, Piero della Francesca, Leopardi, Villon, Homer, Ariosto, Mantegna and many others I've not mentioned, true, dear, good friends'.⁸ Nor should it be forgotten that Fausto's visual culture and way of understanding art owed much to Felice Carena, his teacher during the early 1920s, as well as to his fellow students.⁹

⁵ L. Pirandello, *Carteggi inediti (con Ojetti, Albertini, Orvieto, Novaro, De Gubernatis, De Filippo)*, ed. by S. Zappulla Muscarà, 'Quaderni dell'Istituto di Studi Pirandelliani', no. 2, Bulzoni, Rome 1980, pp. 88-89.

⁶ F. Pirandello, *Riflessioni sull'arte*, ed. by C. Gian Ferrari, F. Matitti, Abscondita, Milan 2008.

⁷ I. Mitrano, 'Pirandello, pittore e critico d'arte nell'ambiente artistico romano di fine secolo', in *Intorno a Pirandello*, ed. by R. Caputo, F. Guercio, Euroma, Rome 1996, pp. 239-57; I. Mitrano, 'Studi critici su Luigi Pirandello pittore', in *L'Emozione Feconda. Luigi Pirandello e la creazione artistica*, ed. by F. Nardi, Edizioni Nuova Cultura, Rome 2008, pp. 127-33; I. Mitrano, 'Pirandello pittore e critico d'arte: indicazioni bibliografiche 1937-2007', in *Pirandelliana*, no. 2, 2008, pp. 95-99.

⁸ *Fausto Pirandello. Autoritratti e disegni degli anni Trenta*, exh. cat., ed. by F. D'Amico, Winefood Spa, Cologno Monzese 1985 (no page ref.).

⁹ *Felice Carena*, exh. cat., ed. by F. Benzi, RCS Libri, Turin 1995; F. Benzi, *Arte in Italia tra le due guerre*, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin 2013.

In another interview, granted in 1969 when Fausto was seventy years old, the artist stated that his father talked a lot about painting.¹⁰ However, when Roger Vailland had interviewed him in Paris in 1928 Fausto had been much more elusive. On that occasion he declared that among contemporary painters he considered his masters to be Picasso and Derain, and that he also admired Braque and de Chirico. Vailland then asked him what his father thought of such painting, to which Fausto replied: 'Painting does not really interest him. He is concerned only with the theatre' – a diplomatic way of concealing the extent of his father's dislike of modern art.¹¹

Yet the experience of the Teatro d'Arte had brought Luigi into close contact with a number of avant-garde artists who were called upon to create sets and costumes for its performances. Among these were Giorgio de Chirico and certain members of the Futurist movement, such as the architect Virgilio Marchi and the painter Enrico Prampolini.¹² However, Luigi's own artistic tastes are revealed in the covers of his books, entrusted to friends such as Ugo Fleres, Camillo Innocenti, Cipriano Efisio Oppo and, later, to his son.¹³ Indeed, in 1921 Luigi asked Fausto – then a completely unknown artist – to create a woodcut for the cover of his *Short Stories for a Year*, which would be published in fifteen volumes by the Florentine publisher Bemporad from 1922.¹⁴

Despite his many commitments Luigi occasionally even posed for his son's paintings. However, always dissatisfied with his work, Fausto would sometimes destroy these. In 1929 Luigi wrote exasperatedly from Berlin: 'I cannot accept that having sacrificed several days to sit in front of you like a posed puppet you despise what you have created and have thrown it away like that, as if my sacrifice meant nothing. You are the master of being dissatisfied with what you do, but you cannot be the



Fausto Pirandello, cover for *Short Stories for a Year* by Luigi Pirandello, (Bemporad, Florence, VII, 1924)

master of condemning others to be the victims of your discontent. I give you this warning not only for my own sake, but also for all of the portraits that you will have to paint in the future'.¹⁵

We do not know if the picture mentioned in the letter was a painting or a drawing. However, it is significant that only one oil portrait of Luigi by his son remains, while many exist by other artists. With the growth of his reputation Luigi resigned himself to being like the protagonist of his novel *One, None and a Hundred Thousand* for the many painters who portrayed him. The book was published in 1926, but the writing of the novel – concerning the unbridgeable gap between the vision of ourselves that we have, and that which others have of us – had occupied Luigi for over fifteen years. It is worth noting, incidentally, that only a few youthful self-portraits of Luigi exist. Later in life, he seems not to have depicted himself – except for a witty 'self-caricature' in profile of 1928 titled *Right I am... if you think so*.¹⁶ Besides, how could the author of *One, None and a Hundred Thousand* even think of positioning himself before the mirror for such a purpose?

Fausto's oil portrait of his father was painted in the summer of 1936, which Luigi spent in Anticoli Corrado, the birthplace of his son's wife. It is an enigmatic image – somewhat 'surreal' perhaps – and even (unconsciously?) irreverent in its juxtaposition of a lampshade with Luigi's serious face, as if this inanimate object wants to steal the show from the sitter like a spiteful creature approaching from the background. Except for this painting, only one other portrait of Luigi created by Fausto is known of – a drawing published in the newspaper *Il Meridiano di Roma* on 20 December 1936, which is now lost.

Hints of the discussions on aesthetic matters that took place between Luigi and Fausto can be deduced from their correspondence. Of great importance in this respect

¹⁰ F. S., 'Il personaggio. Intervista con Fausto Pirandello. Mio padre è stato il mio primo maestro', in *Il Fiorino*, I, no. 112, 17 July 1969, p. 10.

¹¹ R. Vailland, 'Le fils de Pirandello est peintre à Montparnasse', in *Paris Midi*, 8 October 1928.

¹² A. d'Amico, A. Tinterri, *Pirandello capocomico. La Compagnia del Teatro d'Arte di Roma 1925-1928*, Sellerio, Palermo 1987; F. Matitti, 'Luigi Pirandello e le arti figurative', in *Legami e corrispondenze. Immagini e parole attraverso il 900 romano*, exh. cat., ed. by F. Pirani, G. Raimondi, Palombi, Rome 2013, pp. 303-19.

¹³ *I libri in maschera. Luigi Pirandello e le Biblioteche*, exh. cat., ed. by A. Andreoli, De Luca, Rome 1996.

¹⁴ E. Providenti, 'A proposito di un'edizione delle "Novelle per un anno"', in *Belfagor*, March 2011, pp. 197-208.

¹⁵ F. Matitti, *Fausto Pirandello. Gli anni di Parigi 1928-1930*, Artemide, Rome 2009, pp. 48-49.

¹⁶ P. Conti, *La gola del merlo*, memoirs related to G. Cacho Millet, Sansoni, Florence 1983, pp. 353, 355.



Fausto Pirandello, *Portrait of Luigi Pirandello*, 1936, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome

is a letter of 10 June 1928 that Luigi wrote to his son from Pordenone, after visiting the Venice Biennale. In it, Luigi urges Fausto to break free from his 'concern with modernity', a concern which, he believed, made the works of contemporary painters devoid of sincerity and naturalness: 'Why, when you start painting, do you look through the eyes of others, you who have such good eyes yourself?'.¹⁷ But the 'critical analysis' for which Luigi reproached Fausto was nothing more than an awareness – typical of any modern artist – that to create art also involves pondering what it means to do so. In fact, on 8 July, Fausto proudly replied to his father that he belonged to a generation that had to 'start from scratch' since the bridges with the past, with tradition, had been irrevocably destroyed.¹⁸

Also of interest is the testimony of Fausto's eldest son, Pierluigi, according to whom echoes of such discussions are discernible in paintings such as *Golden Rain* (1933) and *The Staircase* (1934).¹⁹ In these works the presence of sculptural fragments recalls the drama *Diana and Tuda*, written by Luigi between 1925 and 1926. In

the play, the old sculptor Nono Giuncano destroys all his works in order to recapture a passion for life that had been sapped by art. The young artist Sirio Dossi, however, working at copying a foot in Giuncano's studio, is so disturbed by the destruction, and the contrast between the broken statues and human vulgarity, that he decides to create a single statue – a Diana – and then take his own life. In fact, his obsession will almost kill his model, Tuda, and eventually Giuncano is forced to kill him in order to defend her. The dilemma faced in *Diana and Tuda* relates to the conflict between art and life – a matter of much debate within the artistic avant-garde, but also central to the thinking of Luigi, and a question he evidently discussed with Fausto.

Naturally, the links between the literary (and theatrical) works of Luigi and the paintings of Fausto should not be understood in a philological manner, as if the painter were a simple illustrator. It is more the case that one is occasionally able to catch a glimpse of a common mood, of a similar atmosphere. In particular, the problematic aspect of reality – so important to the work of Luigi – resonates in certain works and statements made by his son. His still lifes, for example, often feature shabby and mysterious objects that can be difficult to recognise, as if the painter wanted to force viewers to fine-tune their gaze and doubt the truth of their vision. As in many of Luigi's novellas, such objects seem to have been given the task of representing a sense of existential disorientation. And if *Diana and Tuda* staged a conflict between life and form, Fausto's inanimate and 'unformed' objects seem to escape this fate and to find new life in his artworks. The correspondence with the vision of his father emerges clearly in the aforementioned interview of 1969. In it, the interviewer observes: 'There is in your most recent paintings a return to the objective reality that surrounds us', to which Fausto replies: 'Actually, I have never deviated from a reference to reality, even if – indeed, precisely because – reality is the invention that each of us creates in perceiving the world'.²⁰ With this 'Pirandellian' analysis of his relationship with reality, Fausto provides an important key to understanding his painting and its relationship with his father's work.

¹⁷ A. Alessio, 'Pirandello pittore e critico d'arte (con una lettera inedita)', in *Quaderni d'italianistica*, vol. II, no. 2, 1981, pp. 192-203.

¹⁸ S. Pirandello, *Tutto il teatro*, ed. by S. Zappulla Muscarà, E. Zappulla, Bompiani, Milan 2004, vol. I, pp. 168-69.

¹⁹ P. Pirandello, 'Il mistero del piede di gesso', in *Arte*, Milan, no. 219, June 1991, pp. 70-75, 138.

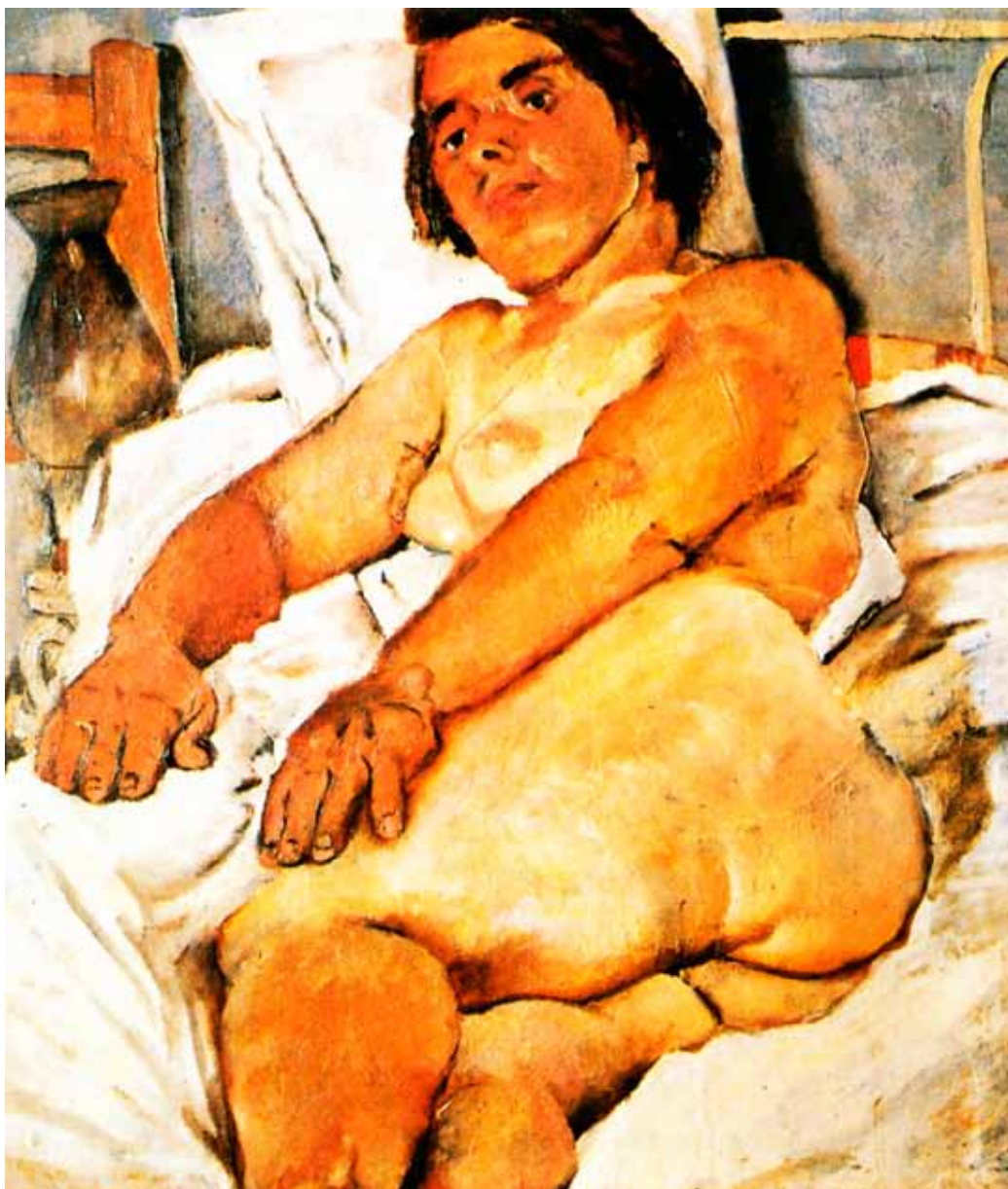
²⁰ F.S., 'Il personaggio. Intervista con Fausto Pirandello. Mio padre è stato il mio primo maestro', cit., p. 10.



Nude in Perspective, 1923
Nudo in prospettiva
Oil on canvas, 132.5 x 74.5 cm
Private collection



Composition (Sicilian Landscape), 1925-26
Composizione (Paesaggio siciliano)
Oil on canvas, 128 x 77.5 cm
Private collection



Nude against White Background, c. 1928

Nudo su fondo bianco

Oil on canvas, 73 x 61 cm

Private collection



Composition, 1928

Composizione

Oil on canvas, 106 x 100 cm

Private collection



Portrait of Stefano, 1928

Ritratto di Stefano

Oil on board, 60 x 39 cm

Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome



Still Life with Tongs, 1928

Natura morta con le molle

Oil on card, 38 x 55 cm

Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome



Women with Salamander, 1928-30

Donne con salamandra

Oil on canvas, 93 x 80 cm

Dora, Fausto and Silvio Pirandello



The Tailor, c. 1929

Il sarto

Oil on board, 65.5 x 51.7 cm

Courtesy Galleria Russo, Rome - Istanbul



Still Life, c. 1931

Natura morta

Oil on canvas, 56 x 74 cm

Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico, Rome



Interior in the Morning, 1931

Interno di mattina

Oil on canvas, 178 x 151 cm

Centre Pompidou, Paris

Musée national d'art moderne / Centre de création industrielle



View of the Cupolas of S. Spirito, 1932

Veduta delle cupole di S. Spirito

Oil on board, 48 x 64 cm

Private collection



Golden Rain, c. 1933

La pioggia d'oro

Oil on board, 100.5 x 130 cm

Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome



Gymnasium (Athletes – Athletes in a Gymnasium), c. 1934

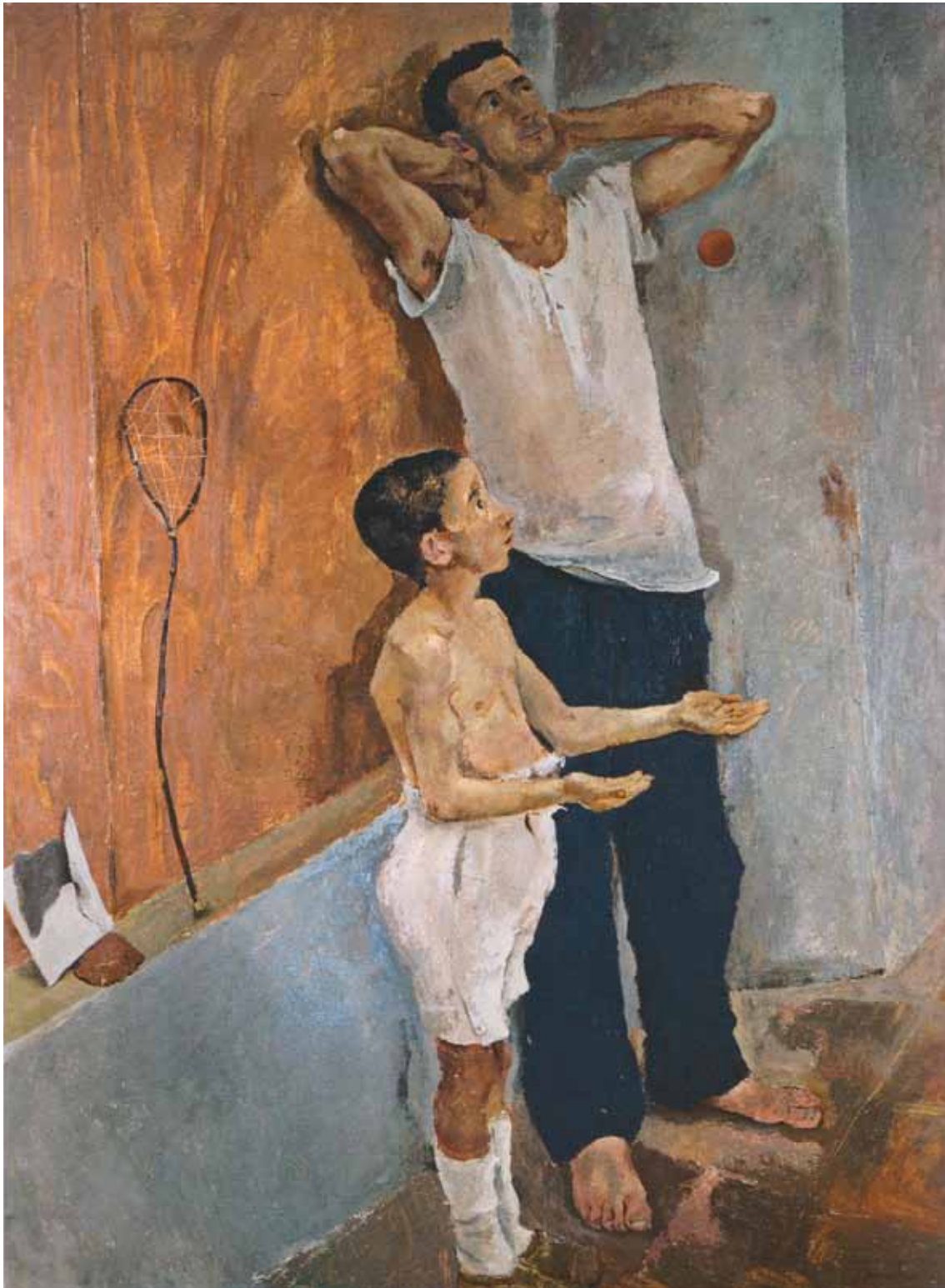
Palestra (Atleti – Atleti in palestra)

Oil on board, 163 x 113 cm

Private collection



Anatomy, c. 1934
Anatomia
Oil on board, 64.5 x 81 cm
Private collection



Father and Son (Youth), c. 1934
Padre e figlio (Gioventù)
Oil on board, 150 x 112 cm
Private collection



The Shepherds, 1934

I pastori

Oil on board, 75 x 103 cm

Courtesy Galleria Russo, Rome – Istanbul



The Staircase, 1934

La scala

Oil on board, 190 x 152 cm

Private collection, courtesy Studio Paul Nicholls, Milan



Doll's Head, c. 1935

Testa di bambola

Oil on board, 116 x 84.5 cm

Dora, Fausto and Silvio Pirandello



Nude, c. 1935

Nudo

Oil on board, 43 x 50 cm

F. B. Collection



Drought, 1936-37

Siccità

Oil on board, 154 x 154 cm

Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome



Hazelnuts, c. 1937

Nocciole (Le nocchie)

Oil on board, 53 x 70 cm

Casa Cavazzini, Museo d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Udine



Women Combing their Hair, c. 1937

Donne che si pettinano

Oil on board, 125 x 86 cm

FAI – Fondo Ambiente Italiano

Gian Ferrari Collection, Villa Necchi Campiglio, Milan



Rooftops in Rome, c. 1938

Tetti di Roma

Oil on board, 60 x 85 cm

Boemi Collection, Italy



Bathers, c. 1938
Bagnanti
Oil on board, 64 x 85 cm
F. B. Collection



Still Life with Fox, c. 1938
Natura morta con la volpe
Oil on board, 52 x 34 cm
Private collection



Still Life with Electrical Objects, c. 1939

Natura morta con oggetti elettrici

Oil on board, 32 x 39 cm

Avv. Luigi Troja Collection



Crowded Beach, c. 1939
Spiaggia affollata
Oil on board, 64 x 100 cm
Sabatino Fioravanti Collection, Rome



Beach, c. 1940

Spiaggia

Oil on board, 74 x 106 cm

Giuseppe Iannaccone Collection, Milan



The Artist's Family, c. 1942

La famiglia dell'artista

Oil on board, 100 x 67.5 cm

Giuseppe Iannaccone Collection, Milan



Children with Shuttlecock, c. 1942

Bambini con il volano

Oil on board, 99.5 x 86 cm

Casa Cavazzini, Museo d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Udine



Self Portrait with Palette, 1944

Autoritratto con tavolozza

Oil on board, 60 x 41 cm

Courtesy Galleria Russo, Rome – Istanbul

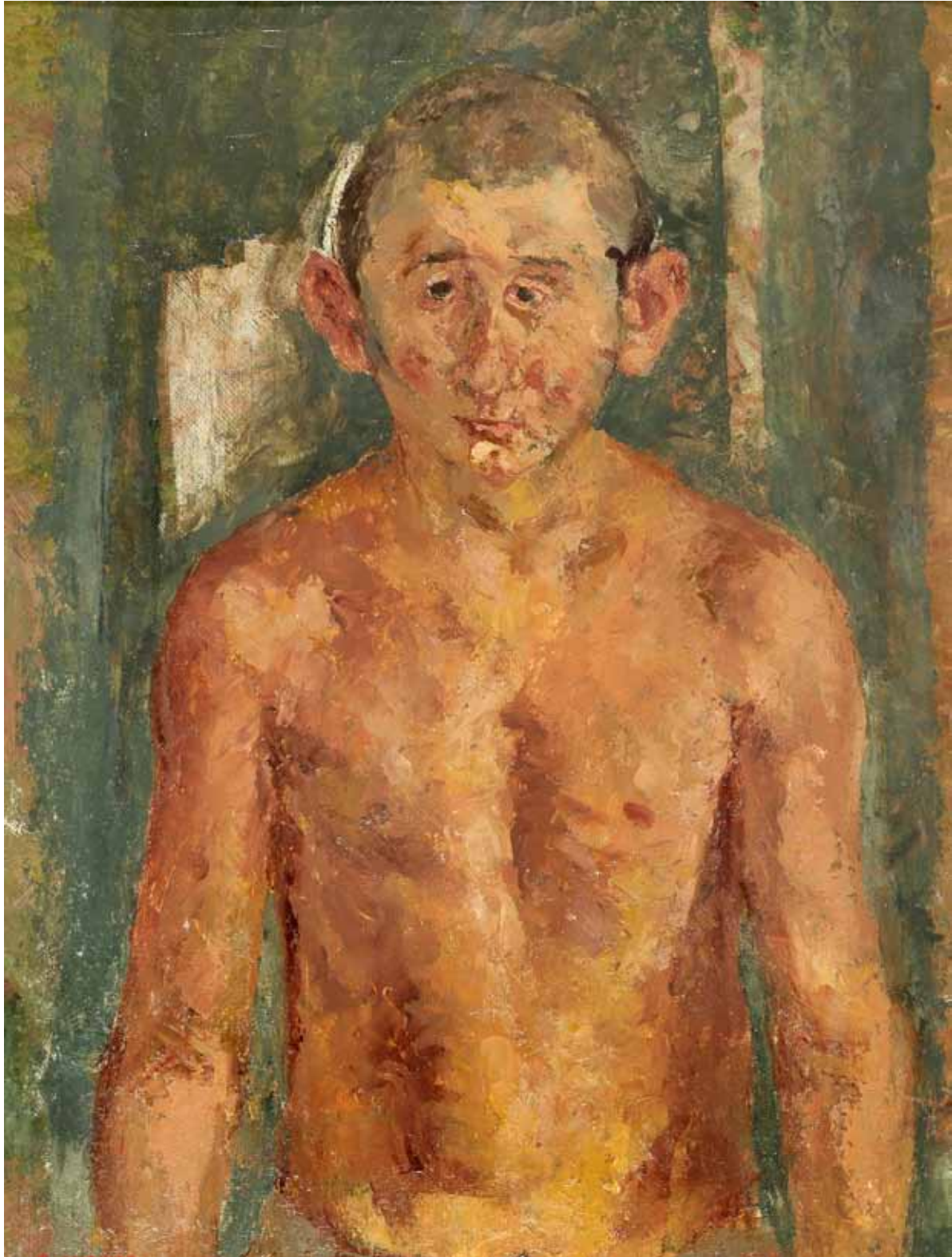


Rooftops in Rome, c. 1944

Tetti di Roma

Oil on board, 35 x 50 cm

Courtesy Galleria Russo, Rome – Istanbul



Antonio, 1944
Oil on board, 55.5 x 42.5 cm
Private collection



The Models, 1945
Le indossatrici
Oil on card, 69 x 89 cm
Private collection



Veranda (The Pergola), c. 1948
Veranda (La pergola)
Oil on board, 70 x 100 cm
Private collection



Forms by the Sea, c. 1948

Forme sul mare

Oil on card, 71 x 101 cm

Private collection



Vertical Bathers, 1948
Bagnanti verticali
Oil on card, 71.5 x 51 cm
Private collection



Woman with Blue Eyes, 1950
Donna con occhi azzurri
Oil on card, 101 x 70 cm
Private collection



Befana in Piazza Navona, c. 1951
Befana a Piazza Navona
Oil on board, 99 x 71 cm
Private collection



Reversed Figure, 1953
Figura riversa
Oil on card, 79.5 x 50.5 cm
Private collection



Through the Spectacles, 1953-54
Attraverso gli occhiali
Oil and collage on card, 70 x 100 cm
Laura Biagiotti Collection



Bathers in the Light, 1956
Bagnanti nella luce
Oil on card, 101 x 70.5 cm
Private collection



Bathers Walking Away, 1957
Bagnanti che si allontanano
Oil on card, 91 x 71 cm
Private collection



Still Life with Electrical Objects, 1960
Natura morta con oggetti elettrici
Oil on card, 50 x 70 cm
Laura Biagiotti Collection



Bathers on the Beach (Large Bathers), c. 1961
Bagnanti sulla spiaggia (Grandi bagnanti)
Oil on board, 103 x 150 cm
Private collection



Three Nudes, 1963

Tre nudi

Oil on card, 50 x 70.5 cm

Private collection

Biography

Edited by Flavia Matitti

1899-1914

Fausto Pirandello is born in Rome on 17 June 1899. He is the third child (after Stefano and Lietta) of the author and playwright Luigi Pirandello and Maria Antonietta Portolano. The name Fausto is chosen a tribute to Goethe's *Faust* and reflects his father's love for German culture. Both parents are Sicilian, having roots in Agrigento, where Fausto spends long holidays with his family. Memories of the warm colours of the countryside parched by the sun, of Greek temples, and of the dazzling southern light and shining blue sea will forever remain etched in his memory.

1915

Italy enters the First World War on 24 May, electing to fight on the side of the Entente powers (Russia, France and England). Fausto's brother Stefano volunteers for military service but is captured by the Austrians and remains a prisoner until the end of the war (November 1918). Returning to Italy, he is to make his name as an author and playwright under the pseudonym Stefano Landi.

1917

Fausto's classical studies are interrupted when he is called up for military service. However, health problems mean he avoids being sent to the front.

1918

He enters the Rome studio of the famous Sicilian sculptor Ettore Ximenes, but soon abandons sculpture and chooses to pursue painting. He claims that the clay irritates his lungs, but it is possible that he has simply recognised his talents lie elsewhere. His father – who loves to paint whenever he is not writing – does not interfere in this decision, and Fausto is always able to count on his financial and moral support.

1919

In January, Fausto's mother is admitted to a nursing home in Rome, having suffered from mental disorders for many years; she is to remain there until her death in 1959.

He begins attending the art school of the Prussian painter and engraver Sigismondo Lipinsky, a refined exponent of symbolism in the tradition of the Deutsch-Römer (German-Roman) painters.

1921

Early in the year Pirandello produces a woodcut for his father that will be used for the cover of *Novelle per un anno* (Short Stories for a Year), published from 1922 onward by the Florentine publisher Bemporad.

On 9 May the first performance of the play *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (Six Characters in Search of an Author) takes place at the Teatro Valle in Rome – a work today considered one of Luigi Pirandello's masterpieces.

1922-1924

At the beginning of 1922 Fausto enrolls in an art school opened in Rome by the Turin painter Felice Carena along with the sculptor Attilio Selva and the painter Orazio Amato. The school seeks a 'return to the great and vast traditions of Italian art'. Among his fellow students are the painters Emanuele Cavalli, Onofrio Martinelli and Giuseppe Capogrossi. That summer the school moves to Anticoli Corrado near Rome, known as 'the town of artists and models'. There he meets the model Pompilia D'Aprile (1898-1977), who will later become his wife. Under the influence of Carena Pirandello paints country scenes of an archaic flavour, but his female nudes are soon depicted with an uncompromising realism that seems to anticipate the carnality of Lucian Freud's imagery.

1925

In March Pirandello makes his debut at the Rome Biennale, exhibiting a painting titled *Bathers*. Along with still lifes, this will remain one of his favourite themes.

On 2 April the Teatro d'Arte opens in Rome; the theatre is founded by Luigi Pirandello with his son Stefano, the writer Massimo Bontempelli (a leading theoretician of 'magic realism'), Orio Vergani and others.

In December, Luigi Pirandello's novel *Uno, nessuno e centomila* (One, None and a Hundred Thousand) begins

to be serialised in the magazine *Fiera Letteraria*. The novel is published in a single volume in 1926.

1926

In April, Fausto participates in the Venice Biennale for the first time, and will continue to exhibit there between 1932 and 1942. He shows *Composition*, a work depicting a Sicilian scene.

1928

In February he leaves Italy and settles with Pompilia in Paris, remaining there for a little over two years. On 5 August his son Pierluigi is born. In the cosmopolitan French capital he enters into contact with the 'Italiens de Paris' group (especially Giorgio de Chirico and Filippo de Pisis) and encounters the works of Cézanne, Matisse, the Cubists (Picasso, Braque, Derain), the Surrealists and the painters of the École de Paris (Chagall, Soutine, Pascin), thereby completing his artistic education. In December, he exhibits with his friends Emanuele Cavalli and Francesco Di Cocco 'chez Madame Castellazzi Bovy'.

Embittered over the lack of interest shown by the Italian government toward the Teatro d'Arte, Luigi Pirandello leaves Italy and settles first in Berlin and subsequently in Paris; he will remain in this state of voluntary exile until 1933.

1929

In March the Galerie Vildrac in Paris hosts Pirandello's first solo exhibition, and that November another is organised in Vienna at the Bukum exhibition space. He now favours the use of thick impasto, which physically accentuates the plasticity of the image.

1930

He participates in a group show of modern Italian art that takes place in Basel and Bern. In March he returns to Rome with his wife Pompilia and the young Pierluigi.

1931

In May, his first solo exhibition in Italy opens at Pier Maria Bardi's Galleria di Roma.

1932-1933

He exhibits eleven works at the III Lazio Syndicate Exhibition (1932), including *Interior in the Morning*. One of the artist's masterpieces, the painting is exhibited again in 1933 in a major solo show at the Galleria Milano alongside *Golden Rain*.

1934

He presents five works at the XIX Venice Biennale, including *The Staircase*, which arouses heated debate. In

1935 the same work will be among those selected by the Biennale for a collective travelling exhibition in the United States (San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, Portland). The painting is subsequently bought by the entrepreneur Riccardo Gualino of Turin. In the catalogue text, the critic Dario Sabatello explains that the search for a total painting and primitivism are the characteristics of an identifiable 'Scuola Romana' (Roman School), represented by painters such as Pirandello, Ceracchini, Mafai, Cavalli, Capogrossi and Ziveri.

On 10 December 1934 Luigi Pirandello receives the Nobel Prize for Literature in Stockholm 'for the daring and ingenious renewal of the dramatic arts and the stage'.

1935

Pirandello's participation at the II Rome Quadriennale – where he is awarded a solo exhibition as well as third prize – increases public recognition of his work. Among other paintings, he exhibits *Father and Son*, *The Shepherds*, *The Bath* and *Golden Rain*, all representative of his complex approach to a reality that is prosaic and everyday but also pervaded by a sense of anxiety, expectation, awe and alienation in an atmosphere of metaphysical suspension.

In Paris he exhibits *Interior in the Morning* at the large exhibition of Italian art hosted by the Musée du Jeu de Paume. The French critic Waldemar George, who had coined the term 'École de Rome' in 1933 to describe the work of Corrado Cagli, Cavalli and Capogrossi, identifies him as 'one of the most interesting figures in contemporary art'. Pirandello also participates in a group show at the Wertheim Gallery in London, and at a prestigious event organised by the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, where he will be represented again over the following years.

1936-1938

Luigi Pirandello dies in Rome on 10 December 1936. Fausto's second son, Antonio, is born on 18 January 1937.

Over the course of these three years he is the subject of several solo shows and his works are included in a number of prestigious group exhibitions in Italy and abroad (Budapest, Paris, New York and Pittsburgh).

1939

In February the III Quadriennale is inaugurated in Rome, where he is once more awarded a solo exhibition and wins third prize. Among other works he exhibits *Doll's Head* and works that appear loaded with premonitions of impending disaster, such as *The Storm* and *Drought*.

In December he exhibits three paintings in Milan at the II Exhibition of 'Corrente', organised by Raffaele De Grada, which notes the emergence of a new, more dramatic, expressionist realism.

1940-1947

On 10 June 1940 Italy enters the war against France and England alongside Nazi Germany. During these difficult years, marked by conflict and reconstruction, he receives a series of important awards and exhibitions. These include first prize at the II Exhibition of Sport (1940) for the painting *Gymnasium*, solo shows at Rome's Galleria delle Terme (1941), the Galleria Gian Ferrari in Milan (1942), where he will return to exhibit frequently, and the Galleria del Secolo in Rome (1944 and 1947). In addition, he participates in the IV Rome Quadriennale (1943) and the Venice Biennale. A recurring subject in the epic and tragic works of these years is that of beaches populated by a 'primitive' humanity. In 1947 he is nominated Academician of the Roman Accademia di San Luca.

1948-1951

During these years he participates in the important exhibition *XX Century Italian Art* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1948), and continues to exhibit at the Rome Quadriennale and the Venice Biennale. In 1949 the poet Emilio Villa writes an entry on him for the *Enciclopedia Italiana* published by Treccani, and in 1950 the painter and art critic Virgilio Guzzi writes the first monograph on the artist. That same year he wins the Taranto Prize, and in 1951 his first retrospective exhibition is held at Palazzo Barberini in Rome, presented by the critic Fortunato Bellonzi. In his artist's statement Pirandello declares his intention to 'reduce painting to light, to colour'. In Italy these are years of intense debate over the question of abstraction versus figuration, of form versus content. Pirandello attempts to chart a difficult, middle course between these two extremes.

1952-1954

In 1952 he wins first prize at the VI Rome Quadriennale. In 1954 the critic Lionello Venturi devotes an important

essay to his recent work in the journal *Commentari*, where he observes: 'It is very synthetic and at the same time abandoned to nature, it is abstract and concrete, and above all grandiose'.

Several works by the artist become part of the collection of Eric and Salome Estorick, and between 1954 and 1960 are presented in a series of exhibitions of Italian art in England, Germany, Canada, Austria and the Netherlands.

1955

A solo show of Pirandello's work is held in New York at the gallery of Catherine Viviano.

1956

The lack of recognition given his work by the Venice Biennale (where the first prize is won by the painter Afro) leaves Pirandello profoundly embittered.

1957-1968

He exhibits works in numerous important solo and collective exhibitions, both in Italy and abroad, supported by the critical judgements of Virgilio Guzzi, Fortunato Bellonzi, Lionello Venturi, Nello Ponente, Raffaele Carrieri and Antonello Trombadori. He also earns a number of accolades: the Fiorino Prize (1957), a prize at the VIII Rome Quadriennale (1960) with other painters of the Scuola Romana, the Michetti Prize (1964) and the Villa Prize (1967). He also creates many works in pastel.

1969

During an interview with a journalist who notes that his later paintings show a return to objective reality, Pirandello responds: 'Actually, I have never deviated from a reference to reality, even if – indeed, precisely because – reality is the invention that each of us creates in perceiving the world'.

1975

Pirandello dies in Rome on 30 November at the age of seventy-six. The following year, Rome's Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna dedicates a major retrospective to him.



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