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TABLE OF CONTENTS

GEOGRAPHIES OF SURREALISM: INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Alessandro NIGRO and Ilaria SCHIAFFINI 7

PART ONE: ASPECTS OF THE AMERICAN RECEPTION OF SURREALISM IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

FROM DADAISM TO SURREALISM AND BACK: HANS RICHTER'S EXPERIMENTAL FILMS BETWEEN BERLIN (1926) AND NEW YORK (1947)

Carlotta CASTELLANI 11

'MR. BARR DROPPED BY: HE BOUGHT F2000 WORTH OF PAINTINGS. FANTASTIC'. THE BRETON/ÉLUARD/BARR/MATISSE AFFAIR OF THE SUMMER OF 1935

Alice ENSABELLA 25

THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF SURREALISM IN THE ANGLO-AMERICAN LITTLE MAGAZINES IN EUROPE: AMONG ELECTIVE AFFINITIES, CULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND ART MARKET ISSUES

Serena TRINCHERO 37

SURREALIST ARTISTS AT MONROE WHEELER'S MOMA '20TH CENTURY PORTRAITS' EXHIBITION (1942-1943)

Valeria ROMANO 51

CLEMENT GREENBERG AND THE SURREALIST QUESTION: POLITICS, ECCENTRICITIES, AND MISCONCEPTIONS

Camilla FROIO 61

NEW YORK IN THE FORTIES:

MILTON GENDEL AMONG THE SURREALISTS IN EXILE

Barbara DRUDI 75

**PART TWO: ASPECTS OF THE ITALIAN RECEPTION OF SURREALISM AND
FANTASTIC ART AFTER 1945**

**SURREALISM IN VENICE AND MILAN. THE CAVALLINO AND NAVIGLIO
GALLERIES**

IN THE 1940s AND 50s: EXHIBITIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

Caterina CAPUTO 87

ENRICO DONATI IN 1950: THREE ITALIAN EXHIBITIONS

Claudio ZAMBIANCHI 101

**NEO-ROMANTICISM, FANTASTIC ART AND SURREALISM BETWEEN
THE UNITED STATES AND ITALY: PAVEL TCHELITCHEW IN ROME**

Giulia TULINO 111

**EGGHEADS: CARLYLE BROWN, PAVEL TCHELITCHEW
AND MUTATIONS OF SURREALISM IN POSTWAR ROME**

Peter Benson MILLER 123

**FROM NEW YORK TO ROME: EUGÈNE BERMAN'S
'JOURNEY TO ITALY' BETWEEN REALITY AND IMAGINATION**

Ilaria SCHIAFFINI 141

**COLLECTING LEONOR FINI IN 1950s AND 1960s ITALY:
NOTES FOR A PORTRAIT OF RENATO WILD**

Alessandro NIGRO 153

**A FEW NOTES ON JOSEPH CORNELL'S EXHIBITION
IN FLORENCE AND HIS CRITICAL RECEPTION IN ITALY**

Eva FRANCIOLI 186

AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHIES

. 197

SURREALISM IN VENICE AND MILAN: THE CAVALLINO AND NAVIGLIO GALLERIES IN THE 1940S AND 50S: EXHIBITIONS AND PUBLICATIONS¹

Caterina CAPUTO

The 1940s: the Precursors

Rereading the first Surrealist Manifesto after twenty years does not so much mean commencing a posthumous evaluation, which is perhaps still as difficult a task as tracing the origins of the movement, to understand those of its ideas and rationales which have borne fruit, overcoming even its programmatic bottlenecks. [...] And although Surrealism has found a shelf in the immense ideal archives of our century, its loftiest and truest concepts, those proper to the substance of art, remain topical and always open to study and useful reflection even as times and aesthetics change.²

It was with this warning that translator Beniamino Dal Fabbro introduced the *Primo Manifesto del Surrealismo* (First Surrealist Manifesto) (fig.1), published in 1945 by the Edizioni del Cavallino publishing house – founded in Venice in 1935 by Carlo Cardazzo (Venice 1908 – Pavia 1963)³ – in its *Letteratura straniera* (Foreign-language literature) collection.

The decision to publish the manifesto in Italy for the first time was anomalous in a cultural context which had always been hostile to this avant-garde; unlike in other countries

¹ All translations into English unless otherwise specified are the author's. My heartfelt thanks go to the staff of the archives who made their materials available to me, in particular the Giorgio Cini Foundation in Venice. Additionally, I would like to thank Fariba Bogzaran, Fabrice Flahutez, Anne Foucault, Alisée Matta, Federica Matta, Luca Pietro Nicoletti, and Claudio Zambianchi.

² 'Rileggere dopo vent'anni il primo manifesto del Surrealismo significa non tanto avviarne una postuma valutazione, forse ancora difficile quanto risalire alle origini stesse del movimento, per comprendervi idee e motivi che hanno dato frutto, anche fuori dalle strettoie programmatiche. [...] E se anche il Surrealismo ha trovato posto negli immensi archivi ideali del nostro secolo, i suoi concetti più alti e veri, ovvero quelli propri alla sostanza stessa dell'arte, rimangono tuttavia attuali, sempre suscettibili di studio e d'utile riflessione nel trascorrere degli anni e delle estetiche.' Breton, André. *Il Primo Manifesto del Surrealismo*, Venice: Edizioni Il Cavallino, 1945, s.p. For an overview of André Breton's writings translated in Italian see Collani, Tania. 'André Breton en Italien: le surréalisme au service de l'art et de la politique', *Synergies Pologne* 10 (2013): pp. 27-39.

³ Carlo Cardazzo was an editor, collector and gallerist; he became a central figure of the Italian and international artistic scene of the twentieth century. On Cardazzo, see Fantoni, Antonella. *Il gioco del paradiso: la collezione Cardazzo e gli inizi della Galleria del Cavallino*, Venice: Edizioni del Cavallino, 1996; Bianchi, Giovanni. 'Carlo Cardazzo, profilo di un collezionista, editore e gallerista', in *Donazione Eugenio Da Venezia*, (eds.) Giuseppina Dal Canton and Babet Trevisan, Venice: La Biennale, 2006, pp. 67-79; Cardazzo, Angelica (ed.), *Caro Cardazzo...Lettere di artisti, scrittori e critici a Carlo Cardazzo dal 1933 al 1952*, Venice: Edizioni del Cavallino, 2008; Barbero, Luca Massimo (ed.), *Carlo Cardazzo: una nuova visione dell'arte* [exhibition catalogue], Milan: Electa, 2008. On the Cavallino publishing house, see Bianchi, Giovanni. *Un cavallino come logo*, Venice: Edizioni del Cavallino, 2006.

tied to France by proximity and cultural tradition, Surrealism had never taken root in Italy.⁴ The reasons for such ostracism were multiple: the prevailing political ideology, criticism of a Crocean and formalist matrix disinterested in the poetics of the irrational and the unconscious, the mistrust of the left-wing towards a movement perceived mostly as bourgeois,⁵ and not least, Italy's entrenched Catholic culture.⁶



Fig. 1 – André Breton, *Primo Manifesto del Surrealismo*, (Venice: Edizioni del Cavallino, 1945). Cover.

The decision to publish an Italian translation of Surrealism's first programmatic text was taken immediately following WWII and ultimately arose from a personal quirk of Cardazzo which dated back to the 1930s. At times flying in the face of Fascist censorship, he purchased numerous volumes for his eclectic library directly from France, contents which

⁴ For more in-depth information on Surrealism and post-WWII Italy, see Casamassima, Mirella. *Il surrealismo e l'arte italiana*, Bari: Edizioni dal Sud, 1984; Sanna, Angela. 'Enrico Baj et le surréalisme: de l'exposition Éros à la querelle de l'anti-procès', *Studiolo* 3 (2005): pp. 247-268; Décina Lombardi, Paola. *Surrealismo, 1919-1969: ribellione e immaginazione*, Milan: Mondadori, 2007, pp. IX-XV, 299-305; Tomasella, Giuliana. 'La mostra del Surrealismo alla Biennale del 1954 attraverso la stampa periodica', in *La consistenza dell'effimero. Riviste d'arte tra Ottocento e Novecento*, (eds.) Nadia Barella and Rosanna Cioffi, Naples: Luciano Editore, 2013, pp. 383-400; *Ead.*, 'La mostra del Surrealismo alla Biennale del 1954: problemi organizzativi e riflessioni critiche' in *Crocevia Biennale*, (eds.) Francesca Castellani and Eleonora Charans, Milan: Scalpendi, 2017, pp. 171-180; Tulino, Giulia. *La Galleria L'Obelisco. Surrealismo e arte fantastica (1943-1954)*, Rome: De Luca Editori D'Arte, 2020; Drost, Julia. "'Trop dangereux, trop inquiétant, trop incertain'. Le surréalisme à la XXVIIe Biennale de Venise en 1954', in *Le surréalisme et l'argent*, (eds.) Julia Drost, Fabrice Flahutez and Martin Schieder, Paris-Heidelberg: DFK Paris-Universität de Heidelberg 2021, pp. 357-381; Nigro, Alessandro. 'Le Muse inquietanti. Maestri del surrealismo' à Turin en 1967. Histoire d'une exposition surréaliste mémorable', *Ibid.*, pp. 382-401.

⁵ See Tomasella, 'La mostra del Surrealismo alla Biennale del 1954 attraverso la stampa periodica', pp. 383-400; *Ead.* 'La mostra del Surrealismo alla Biennale del 1954: problemi organizzativi e riflessioni critiche', pp. 171-180.

⁶ Alberto Savinio wrote in 1940: 'You cannot say 'Italian' without thinking 'Catholic'. To understand Surrealism, one must distance oneself from Catholic teachings, just as to sail one must leave the shore.' ('Chi dice italiano sottintende cattolico. Per capire il surrealism bisogna sciogliersi dalla disciplina Cattolica, come per navigare bisogna staccarsi dalla riva.') Savinio, Alberto. 'Della pittura surrealista', *Prospettive* 13 (January 1940): p. 24.

ranged from the ‘earliest Christians to the latest modern Surrealists.’⁷ Cardazzo’s own literary preferences inevitably influenced his selection of works for publication by the publishing house he managed, as in the case of the *Letteratura straniera* (Foreign-language literature) series which delivered almost exclusively French texts to readers on what amounted to an ‘initiatory’ path that set out from Mallarmé’s *Lettre à Verlaine* and went on to *Cors de Chasse* and *Poète assassiné* by Guillaume Apollinaire, *Les Chants de Maldoror* by Isidore Duchasse Comte de Lautréamont, Valéry’s *Monsieur Teste* and *Propos sur la poésie*, Jean Cocteau’s *Plain-Chant*, until arriving at the already-mentioned *Manifeste du surréalisme*.⁸

Cardazzo wrote, ‘I am as proud of having been the first in Italy to have published works by Apollinaire, Proust, Gide, Éluard and so many others as I am of my best exhibitions.’⁹ The young editor’s passion for literature was matched by his interest in art, which he cultivated as an amateur and collector since the Twenties. His vocation strengthened in 1942, when he decided to undertake a new and ambitious project to open the Galleria del Cavallino on Riva Degli Schiavoni in Venice; two further galleries soon followed: the Galleria Il Naviglio in Milan (1946) and the Galleria Selecta in Rome (1955).¹⁰ The publisher’s new entrepreneurial venture as a gallerist marked his official entry into the art market system. It wasn’t long before the activities of the publishing house began to be strictly correlated with Cardazzo’s exhibition work which, from the very start, targeted not only promotion of well-established names on the Italian art panorama – such as Carlo Carrà, Giorgio de Chirico, Filippo de Pisis or Giorgio Morandi – but also little-known painters and sculptors.¹¹

One emblematic example of this union of exhibition and publishing was the dust jacket of *Canti di Maldoror*, which reproduced a lithograph by Mario Deluigi (fig. 2), a painter from Treviso whose works Cardazzo had exhibited at the Galleria del Cavallino in 1944, a

⁷ Cantatore, Dino. ‘Pittura d’oggi: un suo collezionista’, *Domus* 121 (1938): p. 30. The books purchased by Cardazzo in France in the Thirties included volumes of poetry by Jean Cocteau, Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine. See Cardazzo’s letter to Giuseppe Santomaso, 26 April 1939, cited in Bianchi, *Un cavallino come logo*, p. 5.

⁸ Edizioni del Cavallino inaugurated its *Letteratura straniera* series in 1943. Publication was suspended in 1945, perhaps for financial reasons; the upshot was that several titles originally intended for publication were not printed; these included: Pierre Réverdy, *I fantini mascherati*; Louis Aragon, *Aniceto o il panorama*; Stéphane Mallarmé, *Le tre ariette*; Blaise Cendrars, *L’Eubage*. The series returned a decade later, in 1956, with Peggy Guggenheim’s *Una collezionista ricorda*, (Venice: Edizioni del Cavallino, 1956). For the complete list of the Edizioni del Cavallino publications, see Bianchi, *Un cavallino come logo*, pp. 135-178.

⁹ ‘L’aver pubblicato per primo in Italia opere di Apollinaire, Proust, Gide, Éluard e di tanti altri è una cosa di cui sono orgoglioso quanto delle mie migliori mostre.’ Le Noci. ‘I mercanti d’arte’, *Domus* 395 (October 1962): p. 29.

¹⁰ For more in-depth information on the Galleria del Cavallino, see Bianchi, Giovanni. *Galleria d’arte a Venezia 1938-1948. Un decennio di fermenti innovativi*, Venice: Cicero, 2010, pp. 45-51; Fantoni, *Il gioco del paradiso*; Bianchi. ‘Carlo Cardazzo, profilo di un collezionista’, pp. 67-79; *Id.*, *Galleria d’arte a Venezia 1938-1948*, pp. 45-78; *Id.*, ‘Il Cavallino, ‘vibrante centro veneziano di arte moderna’’ in *Carlo Cardazzo: una nuova visione dell’arte*, pp. 119-164. On the Galleria del Naviglio, see Barbero, Luca Massimo and Pola, Francesca. ‘Una ‘centrale creativa’ a Milano. La Galleria del Naviglio di Carlo Cardazzo 1946-1963’, *Ibid.*, pp. 165-185.

¹¹ Cardazzo wrote: ‘In addition to established artists, above all the Cavallino gallery showed young, even unknown artists, for some of whom a rosy future should be expected. Also held were conferences, cultural gatherings, poetry readings, presentations of artists and writers’ (‘Oltre ad artisti già affermati la galleria del Cavallino ha esposto soprattutto giovani anche se sconosciuti per alcuno dei quali è da attendersi un sicuro avvenire. Inoltre hanno avuto luogo conferenze, incontri culturali, lettura di versi, presentazione di artisti e letterati.’) In *Le Noci*, ‘I mercanti d’arte’ p. 29.

short time before the book's publication the same year.¹² Deluigi's biomorphic, 'organic' painting was certainly seen by the gallerist as a stylistically-suitable introduction to the text which had 'guided' and 'inspired'¹³ Breton's Surrealist movement. However, this 'promotional' choice collided with the interpretation of Deluigi's vitalist canvases presented by Carlo Betocchi in the catalogue of the Cavallino exhibition, which saw the painter well distanced from any Surrealist odour and in particular from Surrealist automatism.¹⁴

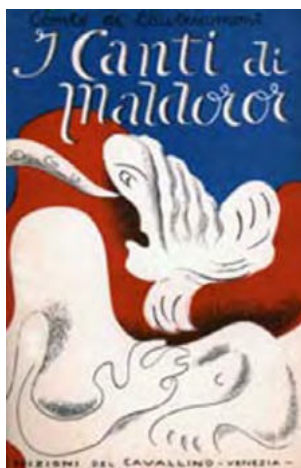


Fig. 2 - Isidore Ducasse Comte de Lautréamont, *I Canti di Maldoror*, (Venice: Edizioni del Cavallino, 1944). Cover.

In Deluigi's plastic modulation of volumes and forms (fig. 3-4), Betocchi saw in the 'identity of space and non-time' a 16th century model,¹⁵ glossing over the evident formal debt instead owed by the Venetian painter and his corpus of vitalist paintings to international abstract-concrete experimentation and in particular to Jean Arp and Kurt Seligmann:¹⁶ in the Thirties, their works appeared on more than one occasion in exhibitions at Milan's Il Milione gallery¹⁷ (fig. 5) – where Deluigi had also exhibited in 1933.¹⁸

¹² See *Opere di Mario Deluigi* [exhibition catalogue], Venice: Edizioni del Cavallino, 1944. The show at the Galleria del Cavallino was the first solo exhibition dedicated to Deluigi in Italy. The artist remained faithful to Cardazzo throughout his career; in the early Fifties he joined the Spatialist movement founded by Lucio Fontana and promoted by Cardazzo.

¹³ Comte de Lautréamont, Isidore Ducasse. *I Canti di Maldoror*, Venice: Edizioni del Cavallino, 1944. Dust jacket flap.

¹⁴ Betocchi, Carlo. 'Dell'uomo e dell'arte. A proposito della mostra del pittore Mario Deluigi', in *Opere di Mario Deluigi*, s.p. Carlo Betocchi was an Italian poet and writer with leanings toward literary Hermeticism. For more on Betocchi, see Macrì, Oreste. *La vita della parola. Da Betocchi a Tentori*, Rome: Bulzoni, 2002.

¹⁵ Betocchi. 'Dell'uomo e dell'arte', s.p.

¹⁶ Jean Arp and Kurt Seligmann had gravitated toward Paris' Abstraction-Création group and later, in the second half of the Thirties, adhered to the Surrealist movement.

¹⁷ See 'Seligmann, Furigà', Milan, Galleria Il Milione, April 1934; 'Seligmann', Milan, Galleria Il Milione, January-February 1935; 'Arp, Domela, Kandinsky, Magnelli, Seligmann, Taeuber-Arp, Vézelay', Milan, Galleria Il Milione, March 1938. Seligmann's introduction to the Galleria Il Milione came about through Gualtieri di San Lazzaro, who had published the artist's etchings in *Les Chroniques du Jour* magazine in Paris in 1934: see the *Bollettino della Galleria del Milione* 24 (1934). For more information on Gualtieri di San Lazzaro, see Nicoletti, Pietro Luca. *Gualtieri di San Lazzaro. Scritti e incontri di un editore d'arte a Parigi*, Macerata: Quodlibet, 2014. Cardazzo also frequented the Galleria Il Milione in the Thirties; see letter from Peppino Ghiringhelli (Il Milione gallery owner) to Carlo Cardazzo, 6 March 1935 (Archivio Cardazzo, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice).

¹⁸ See 'Pinto, Chyurlia, Mario De Luigi [sic], Bruno Ferrario', Milan, Galleria Il Milione, January 1933.

The evident antinomy which came to be created between Deluigi's plastic works and Betocchi's critical text only confirmed how in the aporetic context of post-WWII Italy, art was split between the artists' leanings toward avant-garde plastic research and the stance taken by idealist and apologetic criticism, ever tenaciously anchored to national tradition.

However, the Deluigi exhibition was a significant event for the Galleria del Cavallino, in that it inaugurated an exhibition program that was designed to launch young Italian artists interested in experimenting with a new figuration,¹⁹ which shortly thereafter gave rise to the Spatialist group, as well as to Italian art informel.²⁰ In this programmatic perspective of renewal of Italian art on the one hand, and creation of a new market supporting that art on the other,²¹ Surrealism – which already had a firm network of international dealers and galleries in support – showed up in Cardazzo's galleries in the Fifties, so much so that the Cavallino and Naviglio galleries became significant centres for the spread, in Italy, of artists who gravitated in the Surrealist movement.



Fig. 3 – Mario Deluigi, *Donna Innamorata*, monotype, 1943-44 © Deluigi Estate.

¹⁹ Carlo Cardazzo was looking for new artists to present to the art market as early as 1943; this is made clear in a letter from Vittorio Emanuele Barbaroux, owner of the gallery of that name in Milan, who wrote: 'I will be happy to see you [...] not least to be able to look into the launch program for our 'new recruit' [Cesare Zavattini]. We must begin with a slim volume [...] and then we could get the press talking. But together, we'll work out what it will be useful to do' ('Sono lieto di vederla [...] anche per poter studiare il programma di lancio della nostra 'recluta' [Cesare Zavattini]. Bisogna cominciare con un volumetto [...] e poi se ne potrebbe far parlare molto la stampa. Insomma studieremo assieme quello che sarà utile fare.'). Letter from Vittorio Emanuele Barbaroux to Carlo Cardazzo, 29 June 1943 (Archivio Cardazzo, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice).

²⁰ On Cardazzo and the Spatialists, see Barbero, Luca Massimo (ed.), *Lucio Fontana e gli Spaziali. Fonti e documenti per le gallerie Cardazzo*, Venice: Marsilio, 2020. On Cardazzo and art informel, see Bertolino, Giorgina. 'Il territorio indefinito dell'Informale: le mostre e le edizioni di Carlo Cardazzo negli anni Cinquanta', in *Carlo Cardazzo: una nuova visione dell'arte*, pp. 299-310.

²¹ On the Italian and Venetian art scenes in the Fifties, see Messina, Maria Grazia. 'Venezia anni Cinquanta: il turbamento della pittura', in *Venezia 1950-59. Il rinnovamento della pittura in Italia* [exhibition catalogue], (ed.) Maria Grazia Messina, Ferrara: Ferrara Arte, 1999, pp. 17-32. On the Milanese context see Pola, Francesca. 'Gli anni Cinquanta a Milano', in *Pittura degli anni Cinquanta in Italia* [exhibition catalogue], (ed.) Pier Giovanni Castagnoli, Turin: GAM, 2003, pp. 51-64.



Fig. 4 – Mario Deluigi, *Uomo sdraiato*, monotype, 1943-44 © Deluigi Estate.



Fig. 5 – *Bollettino della Galleria del Milione*, no. 36 (1935). Cover.

The 1950s: Surrealism and Spatialism

In the Fifties the Carlo Cardazzo galleries opened with a rich exhibition program that promoted the Spatialist movement on the one hand, and the new abstract forms of Italian and international *art informel* on the other, both gestural and textured. In the space between these two main lines, Cardazzo wove together a series of shows that presented to the Italian public several artists from the Surrealist fringes: Victor Brauner, Enrico Donati, Leonor Fini, Wifredo Lam, Roberto Matta Echaurren, and Yves Tanguy, all of whom were active members of Breton's movement until at least the end of the 1940s.²²

The arrival of the surrealist artists in Italy coincided with the end of the war and the return to Europe of several members of the group from their U.S. exile, including of course André Breton, who validated the group's new programmatic lines²³ as well as most recent affiliations with a great exhibition organised at Paris' Galerie Maeght: 'Le surréalisme en 1947'.²⁴ That same year, new ferments in art were rising up in Milan, at the Galleria Il Naviglio, where a group of artists – Lucio Fontana, Beniamino Joppolo, Giorgio Kaiserlian and Milena Milani – signed the first *Manifesto dello Spazialismo* and elected Cardazzo's gallery their official group headquarters.²⁵ The Spatialists' artistic research called for art that would go beyond the static plastic form and embody an active spatial concept such as to determine the compositional space itself, in which a peculiar role was played by light and movement: 'We conceive of art as a sum of physical elements, colour, sound, movement, time, space, conceiving a physical-psychic unity, colour the element of space, sound the element of time, and movement something that develops in time and in space. These are the fundamental forms of Spatial art'.²⁶ His reflections on the possibility of a new spatial dimension in the name of a simultaneity of the artistic process (during both production and reception) attracted Fontana to the art of Enrico Donati and Roberto Matta, so much so that he included artworks by the two artists in the Spatialist movement's collective exhibitions. In this regard, Donati wrote: 'Another fellow that I am very fond of is Lucio Fontana, who is an imaginative artist. I was very close to him at the beginning of spatzarismo [*sic*]. And he added my name to the list of his friends at the moment in which he started to launch the idea of spatzarismo [*sic*] in Italy'.²⁷

Milanese by birth but a New York resident, in 1950 Donati was invited to participate in the Italian section at the XXV Venice Biennale, at which he presented his recent paintings: *Sangue di Lucrezia* (1948), *Lambicco Ermetico* (1948), *Le vene del ragno*

²² Roberto Matta and Victor Brauner were both expelled from the Surrealist group in 1948, the former 'pour disqualification intellectuelle et ignominie morale', the second 'pour travail fractionnel'; see Surrealist group members' communication, November 1948 (Donati Papers, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles; henceforth GRI).

²³ See Breton, André. 'Prolégomènes à une troisième manifeste du surréalisme ou non', *VVV* 1 (June 1942): pp. 18-26.

²⁴ Victor Brauner, Enrico Donati, Roberto Matta Echaurren and Yves Tanguy took all part in 'Le surréalisme en 1947' exhibition in Paris. See Breton, André (ed.), *Le surréalisme en 1947* [exhibition catalogue], Paris: Pierre à feu-Maeght, 1947.

²⁵ See 'Primo Manifesto Spaziale (1947)', reprinted in *Lucio Fontana e gli Spaziali*, p. 34.

²⁶ 'Concepriamo l'arte come una somma di elementi fisici, colore, suono, movimento, tempo, spazio, concependo un'unità fisico-psichica, colore l'elemento dello spazio, suono l'elemento del tempo, e il movimento che si sviluppa nel tempo e nello spazio. Sono le forme fondamentali dell'arte spaziale.' Talk by Lucio Fontana at the conference organised on occasion of the 1951 Milan Triennale, in Sanna, Angela (ed.), *Lucio Fontana, Manifesti Scritti, Interviste*, Milan: Abscondita, 2015, p. 47.

²⁷ Oral history interview with Enrico Donati, 9 September 1968. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

(1949).²⁸ While awaiting the June opening of the authoritative Venetian event, the artist was the protagonist of at least two solo exhibitions in Italy, between Milan and Rome: at the Galleria Il Milione,²⁹ and at the Galleria L'Obelisco.³⁰ At that time, he already relied on reference galleries that promoted his production abroad, such as the Galerie Maeght in Paris,³¹ and New York's Durand-Ruel Gallery.³² In Italy, instead, after Donati's participation in the XXV Biennale, and his solo exhibition in 1951 at the Galleria Amici della Francia in Corso Vittorio Emanuele in Milan,³³ Cardazzo took part in launching the artist on the national exhibition and collecting circuits. Thus, beginning in 1952, the painter became a significant presence at the Galleria del Cavallino, where he was welcomed with two personal shows – the first one in 1952, the second in 1954 (fig. 6) – and inclusion of his works in several collective exhibitions of Spatialist art.³⁴

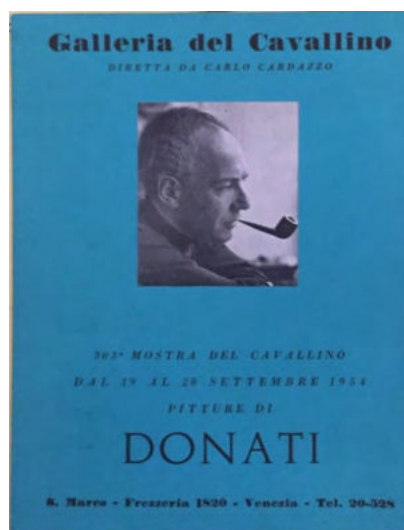


Fig. 6 – *Pitture di Donati*, exhibition catalogue (Venice, Galleria del Cavallino, 19-28 September 1954), Venice: Edizioni del Cavallino, 1954. Cover.

²⁸ See *XXV Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'arte di Venezia* [exhibition catalogue], Venice: Alfieri, 1950, p. 199. For further information on Enrico Donati, see the essay by Zambianchi, Claudio. 'Enrico Donati in 1950: Three Italian Exhibitions', in this same issue of *Mélusine*.

²⁹ M.N. 'Enrico Donati al Milione', *Domus* 246 (May 1950): p. 34. The exhibition was organised by the Italian editor Daria Guarnieri.

³⁰ The show in Rome at the Galleria L'Obelisco ran from 1 through 10 November 1950; for the complete list of the works on show, see Caratozzolo, Vittoria Caterina, Schiaffini, Ilaria and Zambianchi, Claudio (eds.), *Irene Brin, Gaspero del Corso e la Galleria L'Obelisco*, Rome: Drago, 2018, p. 275; and Zambianchi, 'Enrico Donati in 1950: Three Italian Exhibitions.'

³¹ 'Je vous précise encore mon désir de défendre votre œuvre en France avec tout le sérieux qu'elle mérite.' Letter from the Galerie Maeght to Enrico Donati, 3 February 1947 (Donati Papers, GRI).

³² Donati had several solo shows at the New York's Durand-Ruel Gallery between 1947 and 1950.

³³ What remains of the show is a photograph immortalising Enrico Donati, Roberto Matta, Lucio Fontana, Roberto Crippa and Cesare Peverelli at the gallery in Corso Vittorio Emanuele during the event. See F. Wolff, Theodore. *Enrico Donati. Surrealism and Beyond*, New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1996, p. 145. I would like to thank Claudio Zambianchi for providing me with the Amici della Francia exhibition catalogue.

³⁴ See 'Enrico Donati' (Venice, Galleria del Cavallino, October 1952); 'Pitture di Donati' (Venice, Galleria del Cavallino, 19-28 September 1954); 'Arte Spaziale: Guidi, Bacci, Morandi, Crippa, Dova, Donati, Deluigi, Capogrossi, Tancredi, Vinicio' (Venice, Galleria del Cavallino, March 1953); 'Artisti Spaziali' (Vicenza, Galleria del Calibano, June 1953). It is significant that in 1952 Donati signed Fontana's *Manifesto del movimento spaziale per la televisione*; see Lucio Fontana, *Manifesti Scritti*, pp. 33-34.

The primordial forms and the ‘organic’ references, incorporated in Donati’s canvases at the end of the 1940s and exhibited in Milan in 1950, were not really appreciated by critics: the press even accused the artist of aestheticism and decorativism.³⁵ Nonetheless, Donati’s paintings were favourably received by the public at the 1954 show at the Cavallino gallery: Cardazzo telegraphed to Donati, ‘Crowd of artists and cultural personalities attending. Show inaugurated. Great success.’³⁶ The introduction to the exhibition catalogue was penned by publisher and art critic Giampiero Giani, who gave his text the emblematic title *Spazio-Materia-Luce* (Space-Matter-Light). Giani presented a reading of Donati’s works that while glossing over his Surrealist automatism side,³⁷ exalted the textured and gestural aspect of his canvases instead: their union of the ‘chromatic vibration of painting’ on the one hand, with the ‘ungentle action of modelling’ on the other.³⁸ The exhibition catalogue indicates that the *corpus* showed at Cardazzo’s gallery focused on Donati’s newer experimentations, the *Moonscape* series, such as the painting *Noir et blanc* (1953) (fig. 7), based on the tactile possibilities of matter and light in painting.³⁹ Although Giani did not consider at all the surrealist side of Donati’s ‘lunarian deserts’, Nicolas Calas, on the other hand, emblematically wrote with regards to Donati’s new *corpus* of paintings: ‘[Donati’s *lunarian deserts*] are the temptation set on the path of abstractions, a compensation for severe bituminous, molybdenous, glacial or volcanic fragments. [...] These paintings are poetry for they create the illusion that assuages our thirst for the not there. Never before has abstract painting been so surrealist.’⁴⁰ The directions explored by Fontana’s Spazialist group – in which Donati took part starting from 1952⁴¹ – also appear in the 1954 solo-show at the Cavallino gallery which aimed to highlight the textured side of Donati’s paintings, along with the plastic use of light and colours: ‘through his own ‘spatialist’ method – wrote Giani – Donati suggested ‘the spiritual order’.⁴²

A path through the Cardazzo galleries analogous to Donati’s was the one followed by Roberto Matta, who in 1949, following his New York exile and excommunication from the surrealist movement, decided to move to Italy, where he remained until 1954. He immediately made contact with the local art scene in Rome, where he lived, and a few months after his arrival inaugurated his first personal shows there, at the L’Obelisco

³⁵ See L.B. ‘Mostre d’arte’, *Corriere della Sera* (9 May 1950): p. 3.

³⁶ Telegram from Carlo Cardazzo to Enrico Donati, 21 September 1954 (Donati Papers, GRI). Donati’s success in the artistic entourage that orbited around Cardazzo’s galleries was reconfirmed later in that same year, when Fontana decided to invite the artist to take part in the Milan Triennale event he was organising.

³⁷ In the 1950s, Donati was still in direct contact with André Breton, often sharing with him his new research in painting. See transcriptions of letters from André Breton to Enrico Donati, in Breton, André. ‘Lettres à Enrico Donati’, *Pleine Marge* 7 (1988): pp. 9-26.

³⁸ Giani, Giampiero. ‘Spazio-Materia-Luce’, in *Pitture di Donati* [exhibition catalogue], Venice: Galleria del Cavallino, 1954, s.p.

³⁹ See *Donati*, Venice: Ed. del Cavallino, 1954, s.p. The painting *Noir et blanc* was reproduced in the exhibition flayer published by Cardazzo.

⁴⁰ Nicolas Calas’ text dated 25 September 1953 (Donati Papers, GRI).

⁴¹ See note 34.

⁴² Giani, *Spazio-Materia-Luce*, s.p.

gallery.⁴³ In the same period, Matta also travelled for the first time to Milan and Venice.⁴⁴ Once in Italy, the artist was searching for an exhibition network that could represent him⁴⁵ and, like Donati, was picked up by Cardazzo and the Spatialists, who included his works in the numerous collective showings of Spatialist art he organised in those years, including ‘Sei Artisti Spaziali’ at the Galleria del Cavallino (September 1952),⁴⁶ and the great collective show of the works of Spatialist artists presented at the Sala degli Specchi of Palazzo Giustiniani in Venice in 1953.⁴⁷

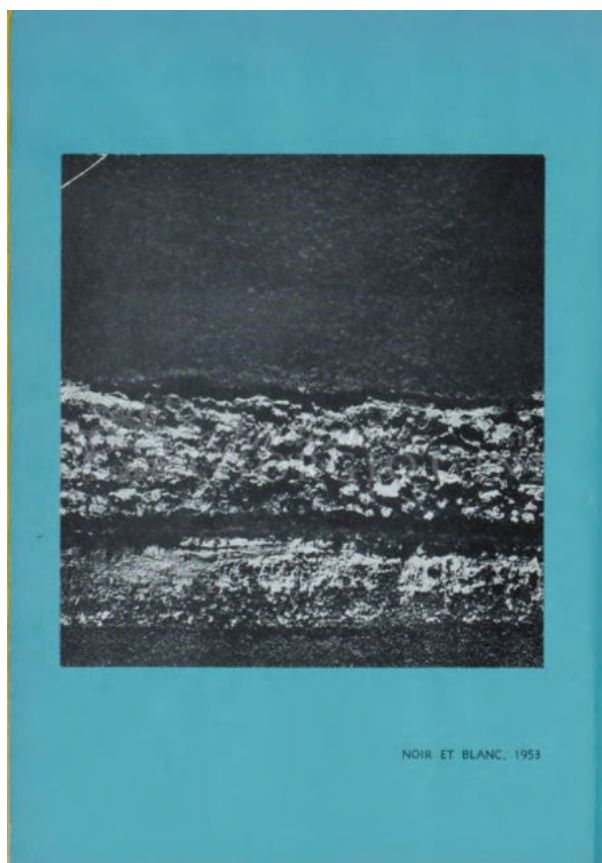


Fig. 7 – *Pitture di Donati*, exhibition catalogue (Venice, Galleria del Cavallino, 19-28 September 1954), Venice: Edizioni del Cavallino, 1954, s.p.

⁴³ Matta held his first solo exhibition in Italy in January 1950 at the Galleria L’Obelisco; it was followed, in March of the same year, by a show at the Galleria del Secolo in Rome. On the Galleria L’Obelisco exhibition, see Tulino, *La Galleria L’Obelisco*, pp. 85-89. On Roberto Matta and Cardazzo, see De Sabbata, Massimo. ‘Carlo Cardazzo e Sebastian Matta’, in *Carlo Cardazzo: una nuova visione dell’arte*, pp. 325-332. On Matta and Italy, instead, see Salari, Claudia (ed.), *Matta: un surrealista a Roma* [exhibition catalogue], Florence: Giunti, 2012, pp. 9-33.

⁴⁴ See *Ibid.*, p. 16. It is unclear on what occasion Matta met Fontana for the first time; nevertheless, it is known that by 1950 the two artists frequented one another (see note 33).

⁴⁵ In New York, Matta was supported by the Pierre Matisse Gallery in the 1940s and, in the following decade, by Alexander Iolas’ galleries: ‘Iolas is giving me 150 a month on 19 pictures he wants to show’, Matta wrote in a undated letter to Angela Faranda, in *Matta: un surrealista a Roma*, p. 33.

⁴⁶ See *Sei artisti spaziali: Capogrossi, Crippa, Dova, Joppolo, Matta, Peverelli* [exhibition catalogue], Venice: Galleria del Cavallino, 1952.

⁴⁷ The great exhibition brought together Edmondo Bacci, Giuseppe Capogrossi, Roberto Crippa, Mario Deluigi, Bruno De Toffoli, Enrico Donati, Gianni Dova, Lucio Fontana, Virgilio Guidi, Roberto Matta, Gino Morandi, Tancredi Parmeggiani, Cesare Peverelli, Iaroslav Serpan, and Vinicio Vianello.

Matta was an ongoing presence at the Cavallino and Il Naviglio galleries thanks to a contract signed by the artist with Cardazzo in late 1952.⁴⁸ Shortly thereafter, the gallerist organised a retrospective, in the rooms of the *Sala Napoleonica* of Venice's Museo Correr,⁴⁹ which presented more than forty of Matta's artworks to the Italian public, including the canvas *Le De-Nommeur Re-Nomme*, then acquired by Peggy Guggenheim.⁵⁰ This early success was followed by that obtained by the show held at the Galleria del Cavallino in 1954, perhaps the most significant of the artist's exhibitions, the one at which much experimentation launched many years earlier came to concrete fruition. With the aim of enhancing the arbitrary nature of the artistic language and its changes in response the 'observer's stance',⁵¹ at Cardazzo's Venice gallery Matta – who also wrote the introduction to the catalogue – staged an environmental work, a de facto radicalisation of research for a project published in 1938 in the French magazine *Minotaure* (fig. 8): a visionary architectural space in which the walls were conceived 'comme des draps mouillés qui se déforment et épousent nos peurs psychologiques'.⁵²

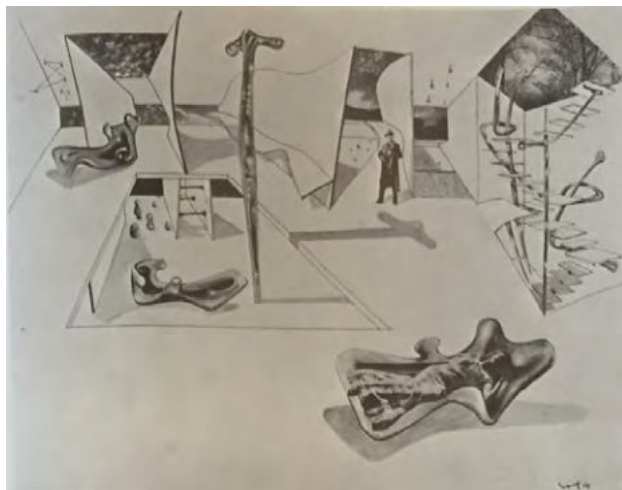


Fig. 8 – Roberto Matta Echaurren, *Mathématique sensible – Architecture du temps*, 1937, pencil and pen on paper © Roberto Sebastian Matta-Echaurren, by Siae 2021.

⁴⁸ 'Je suis sous contrat avec Cardazzo. Il s'occupe de mes tableaux. Je suis assez content', Matta wrote in a letter to Alain Jouffroy, dated 15 December 1952, transcribed in Demare, Christian (ed.), *Roberto Matta, Alain Jouffroy: correspondance 1952-1960*, Paris: Arteos-Galerie Diane de Polignac, 2018, pp. 109-110. The author has been unable to date to find documents concerning the duration of the contract.

⁴⁹ See *Matta* [exhibition catalogue], Venice: Edizioni del Cavallino, 1953, s.p. The exhibition was organised with the collaboration of the Allan Frumkin (Chicago), Sydney Janis (New York), and Hugo-Iolas (New York) galleries. The City of Venice granted use of the Napoleonic Wing in the Museo Correr to Cardazzo for staging large-scale events, most often in the 'stasis years' between one Biennale and the next. Among the exhibitions inaugurated prior to the 1953 showing of Matta's works were one dedicated to painter Eugene Berman in September 1950; the show by Surrealist painter Leonor Fini in September 1951; and finally, the exhibition of Picasso's ceramics.

⁵⁰ See De Sabbata, Massimo. 'Carlo Cardazzo e Sebastian Matta', in *Carlo Cardazzo: una nuova visione dell'arte*, pp. 327-328.

⁵¹ Matta, Roberto. 'Presentazione', in *Pitture di Matta* [exhibition catalogue], Venice: Galleria del Cavallino, 1954, s.p.

⁵² *Id.* 'Mathématique sensible – Architecture du temps', *Minotaure* 11 (Spring 1938): p. 43. Of the same project exists another version in pastel and pencil on paper dated 1937, see Ferrari, Germana (ed.), *Matta: Entretien Morphologique. Notebook n. 1, 1936-1944*, London: Sistan, 1987, p. 28.

In Venice, the signifying space projected in the Thirties was ramped up to the level of actual build: four panels erected in the room created ‘une coupe pratiquée dans le réel. Ils [the panels] montrent qu’il suffit d’un instant de grande émotion pour nous changer et bouleverser la vision de l’espace où nous vivons.’⁵³ Unlike what happened in Donati’s case, even at Matta’s very first show in 1953 the press immediately grasped the ‘physicality of nature and man’⁵⁴ synthesised by the artist’s well-structured ‘architecture of volumes,’⁵⁵ it was also clear to critics how Matta’s ‘explorations in space’ were, in truth, ‘relationships between man and man, between man and nature, between today and tomorrow.’⁵⁶ And it was most certainly, and exactly, this ‘spatiality’, understood as ‘simultaneity of the process of articulation of man in nature and vice versa’,⁵⁷ that attracted the artist to the Spatialist group – although his results always maintained a certain autonomy.

In Italy, Matta found fertile terrain for his research projects, ‘My new pictures are synthesis [*sic*] of the very first’, he wrote in 1950 to his close friend Gordon Onslow Ford;⁵⁸ additionally he sent an enthusiastic note to Victor Brauner, at that time living in Paris: ‘1950 l’année que nous unirà par la fluorescence de l’ordre émotionnel original. L’attention creative [*sic*], mon cher Victor, j’ai veçu [*sic*] à Rome comme un terre que se selvage [*sic*], tout porisse [*sic*] en moi, comme à l’origine. [...] L’age arrive en pulverisant [*sic*] l’Arc de Triomphe [*sic*].’⁵⁹

In September 1953, right on the heels of Matta’s show, Brauner also held a solo exhibition at the Galleria del Cavallino,⁶⁰ staged by Cardazzo in collaboration with New York’s Alexander Iolas Gallery (fig. 9), which at that time had the artist under contract;⁶¹ among the works shown: *Acqua fuoco dell’amore*; *Il grande ritratto*; *Quadro pessimista*; *Il poeta assassino*.⁶² Brauner’s ‘graffito painting technique, [...] geometrised, arabesqued, [...] a synthesis of all the ancient civilisations’,⁶³ heavy with ‘restlessness pushed to paroxysm’,⁶⁴ was attributed to the existentialist milieu by a local press unmindful of every and any reference to the alternative creative processes of surrealist origin that the painter

⁵³ *Pitture di Matta*, s.p.

⁵⁴ G.S. ‘La mostra di Matta in Sala Napoleonica’, *Minosse* 5 (1953): s.p.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Cast. [Castellani], F. ‘Il pomo di Adamo ritorna nelle tele di R.E. Matta’, *Il Gazzettino* (27 August 1953): s.p.

⁵⁷ Letter from Roberto Matta to Gordon Onslow Ford, 19 September 1942 (Inverness, Lucid Art Foundation).

⁵⁸ Letter from Roberto Matta to Gordon Onslow Ford, 4 September 1950 (Inverness, Lucid Art Foundation).

⁵⁹ Letter from Roberto Matta to Victor Brauner, undated but attributable to 1950 (Centre Pompidou/MNAM-CCI/Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Fonds Victor Brauner).

⁶⁰ ‘Victor Brauner’, Venice, Galleria del Cavallino, 29 September- 8 October 1953.

⁶¹ The contract between Victor Brauner and the Hugo Gallery was renewed several times between 1952 and 1955, the year in which the gallery shuttered its doors. Meanwhile, in November 1951, Iolas had opened a second gallery in New York at 46 East Fifty-Seventh Street. From 1963 onward, he opened other exhibition venues in Paris, Geneva and Milan and collaborated with galleries in Rome (Iolas-Galatea), Athens (Iolas-Zoumboulakis) and Madrid (Iolas-Velasco). On Alexander Iolas, see Fotiadi, Eva. ‘Alexander Iolas, the Collectors John and Dominique de Menil, and the Promotion of Surrealism in the United States’, in *Networking Surrealism in the USA. Agents, Artists, and the Market*, (eds.) Julia Drost, Fabrice Flahutez, Anne Helmreich et alii, Paris-Heidelberg: DFK-Universität Heidelberg, 2019, pp. 119-134.

⁶² Cast [Castellani], F. ‘Il rumeno Victor Brauner pittore dell’esistenzialismo’, *Il Gazzettino* (2 October 1953): p. 3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

might have exploited.⁶⁵ This first exhibition was followed in 1958 by a second, monographic show,⁶⁶ proposed to Cardazzo by Brauner himself, as by that time, the artist was no longer bound by contract to Iolas' New York gallery.⁶⁷ The ensuing agreements between Brauner and Cardazzo called for the gallerist to purchase of a block of works and for a second lot of paintings to be shipped and left in storage at the Galleria Il Naviglio.⁶⁸ The exhibition was initially planned for the month of August at the Galleria del Cavallino – concurrently, that is, with the Biennale – but logistics delays forced the show to be rescheduled for the Milan venue alone⁶⁹. The event was so successful with the public and criticism that Cardazzo decided to immediately restage it at the Galleria Selecta in Rome,⁷⁰ and even to schedule a date at the Galleria Galatea in Turin.



Fig. 9 – *Victor Brauner*, exhibition catalogue (Venice, Galleria del Cavallino, 4-20 October 1958), Venice: Edizioni del Cavallino, 1958. Invitation Card.

A Few Conclusions

Thus, by 1958, Surrealism had established an exhibition network in Italy as well as abroad. The Surrealist movement had travelled to Milan and Venice via Cardazzo's venues early in the decade, initially thanks to contacts established by him with several international galleries which at that time supported the group in other countries: these included the Galerie Maeght in Paris,⁷¹ and the Durand-Ruel's and Alexander Iolas' galleries in New York; the latter were

⁶⁵ For more information on Brauner's activity as an artist, refer to the catalogue of *Victor Brauner: Je suis le rêve - Je suis l'inspiration* [exhibition catalogue], Paris: Musées Editions, 2020.

⁶⁶ See *Victor Brauner* [exhibition catalogue], Venice: Edizioni del Cavallino, 1958.

⁶⁷ Letter from Carlo Cardazzo to Victor Brauner, 9 January 1957 (Centre Pompidou/MNAM-CCI/Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Fonds Victor Brauner).

⁶⁸ The works acquired en bloc by Cardazzo for a total of 1,999 francs were *Bruit de la Mer* (1956); *Labyrinthe* (1956); *Les Hommes* (1950); *Le Monde* (1950); *Transmutation* (1950); *Perdu dans les hautes herbes* (1956).

⁶⁹ The Brauner show at the Naviglio Gallery was followed by an exhibition dedicated to Matta, see *Matta* [exhibition catalogue], Venice: Edizioni del Cavallino, 1958.

⁷⁰ See *Brauner* [exhibition catalogue], Rome: s.n., 1958.

⁷¹ In 1951, at the Galleria del Cavallino, Cardazzo organised a show devoted to the graphic works of Joan Miró with the collaboration of the Galerie Maeght. In 1953, Matta wrote in a letter to Alain Jouffroy dated March 1953, 'Il [Cardazzo] pense être en rapports d'affaires avec Maeght, etc.' In *Roberto Matta, Alain Jouffroy*, p. 120.

in contact not only with the Milan milieu,⁷² but also and foremost with Rome, in particular with L'Obelisco Gallery.⁷³

In search for international (and national⁷⁴) recognition, as well as in line with the *modus operandi* of the most modern of the galleries showing the avant-gardes in Paris and New York, Cardazzo strove to become the exclusive representative in Italy of the Surrealist artists who most closely adapted to the line of action that distinguished his galleries,⁷⁵ which he had moulded around the researches of Spatial Art and the *art informel* movements, experimenting with the notions of time, matter and gesture. The Surrealists, on their part, at a moment when Italy was experiencing lively cultural ferment ('La péninsule glisse peu à peu au centre des préoccupations artistiques', Iaroslav Serpan wrote to Donati in 1954⁷⁶) strove to create a network of contacts which could amplify their exhibition circuit on the peninsula and – as they had already done in Paris and in New York – to identify a merchant-gallerist who could act as a point of reference at a moment, in Italy, when the galleries not only shaped the market and the world of collecting, but also actively contributed to delineating the directions taken by new experimentations in art.

⁷² Brauner wrote that he met with Iolas on the fly in Milan on the occasion of his exhibition at the Galleria Il Naviglio. See letter from Victor Brauner to Patrick O'Higgins, undated (Centre Pompidou/MNAM-CCI/Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Fonds Victor Brauner).

⁷³ See Schiaffini, Ilaria. 'La Galleria L'Obelisco e il mercato americano dal dopoguerra alla fine degli anni Cinquanta', in Irene Brin, *Gasparo del Corso e la Galleria L'Obelisco*, pp. 125-144.

⁷⁴ Cardazzo, from the beginning of his activity as a gallerist, collaborated with many Italian galleries of modern art, among them: the Barbaroux, Il Milione, L'Obelisco, and Selecta galleries, soon later Galatea and La Tartaruga galleries, with the latter in 1958 he organized the Cy Twombly's exhibition, both in Milan and Venice.

⁷⁵ Matta wrote to Jouffroy in March 1953, '[Cardazzo] m'a fait voir ce que [*sic*] doit être lui-même qui doit s'occuper de me trouver une galerie à Paris'. In *Roberto Matta, Alain Jouffroy*, p. 120.

⁷⁶ Letter from Iaroslav Serpan to Enrico Donati, 7 January 1954 (Donati Papers, GRI).

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