

CMC CENTRO CULTURALE IN MILAN

Largo Corsia dei Servi, 4

Esodo Pratelli. Dal Futurismo al “Novecento” e oltre

[Esodo Pratelli: From Futurism to the Italian Novecento and Beyond]

curated by Elena Pontiggia

from 17 April to 13 May 2025

Opening Wednesday 16 April at 18:00

press release, 25.02.2025

A major retrospective dedicated to the artist, titled *Esodo Pratelli. Dal Futurismo al “Novecento” e oltre* [Esodo Pratelli: From Futurism to the Italian Novecento and Beyond] curated by **Elena Pontiggia**, is on show from **17 April to 13 May** at the **CMC Centro Culturale in Milan**, with a selection of over forty works that trace the intense career of a leading figure in Italian painting during the first half of the 20th century.

The exhibition charts in chronological order the artistic phases that characterised the work of **Esodo Pratelli** from his initial expressive style linked to realism, and more markedly Symbolism, in the form of **paintings** and **ceramics**, to his affiliation in the first decade of the 20th century with the Futurist movement, and, in the 1920s, his participation in the *Novecento* Italian art movement.

His extremely intense life was infused with a vibrant culture rooted in his family context, cultivated through travel and periods spent in Paris and Rome, as well as through his association with important exponents of that era, among them Boccioni, Carrà, Severini, Marinetti, Gris, Delaunay and Sironi.

Pratelli participated both artistically and politically in the initiatives of his day, namely through his collaboration in the creation of the *Corporazione delle Arti Plastiche* [Three-Dimensional Arts Guild] (1923); his work in Milan as director and teacher at the *Scuola d'Arte Applicata* [School of Applied Arts] at Castello Sforzesco (c. 1924–1934); the proposal he co-signed with Sironi, Sarfatti, Funi and Carrà to establish a Council for Modern Art (1925); and his appointment as secretary of the *Sindacato Fascista Belle Arti* [Fascist Union of Fine Arts] in Milan (1927) and in Lombardy (1928). During these dynamic decades, Pratelli also created **designs** for stage sets and costumes for **operas**, and from 1935 to 1950 he set his painting aside in order to focus his energies as a scriptwriter and director in Rome's **film industry**.

A distinctive aspect of Pratelli's painting is the constant presence of **nature**, though interpreted differently in each artistic phase. Even in canvases where landscape is not the central subject, the natural element is a predominant feature that captures attention and is charged with meaning. At times these elements are atmospheric agents that humans are unable to control and which appear even more catalytic within the works.

Pratelli's attention to sign and linearity, together with the elegant refinement of his brushstroke and his soft, light tones, are further particularities of his work in evidence throughout his career. Significant too are the artists who inspired him and to whom he referred during his career, from Klimt to Beardsley in his youth, and from Carrà to Sironi in later years.

In her comprehensive essay in the catalogue, **curator Elena Pontiggia** writes with regard to Pratelli's painting: *‘He deserves to be known for the intensity of so much of his work, but also for the esprit de finesse that runs through it. His delicate colours, refined compositions of figures and intimate themes; his urban landscapes and stark natural landscapes; in short, his entire stylistic*

trajectory from Symbolism to Futurism to the “Novecento”, not forgetting his final decades, which were no less dynamic, are too valuable to be relegated to The Box of Forgotten Things, the title of a painting from 1967, which is also a transparent metaphor for his artistic production.’

Among the early works in the exhibition is the polychrome majolica *Estate nella notte* [Summer at Night] (1911), described in his letters to his cousin Balilla Pratella, with whom he cultivated a penetrating written correspondence throughout his life. In the letter Pratelli not only declares himself a ceramist but also describes his intentions at the time, revealing his interest in symbols and natural elements.

From the **Futurist period**, when his interest in movement inspired lines that tend towards verticality and the use of brighter colours, are the canvases *Frammento della primavera* [Fragment of Spring] (1913), characterised by swirling, largely circular segments, and sketches for the sets and costumes of his cousin Balilla's opera *L'aviatore Dro* (1913), his first officially Futurist set design. Executed for the first time in 1920, both the sets and costumes convey a predilection for synthesis, an undulating linearity of line and a tensivity towards the infinite.

After joining the **Italian Novecento movement**, Pratelli turned to images that reveal a search for a modern classicism, where three-dimensionality, volumes, clarity of form and the supremacy of drawing over colour take centre stage. This can be seen in *Maternità* [Maternity] (1922) and in *Lilia*, a portrait of his daughter (1925). In both these works the subjects dominate the scene with a solid volumetry and a sharp, precise form. During these years he frequented Mario Sironi, to whom he dedicated *Ritratto di Sironi* [Portrait of Sironi] (1928). With Sironi he shared an interest in solid, monumental painting and was influenced in the choice of subjects such as construction sites, factories and suburbs, an example of which is *Ciminiere* [Smokestack] (1924).

Also on display are works that evidence his later move away from the Italian Novecento movement replaced by a **greater interest in landscapes** and a domestic **everyday dimension** that held a more serene and chromatically brighter vision, in which the grandeur of nature predominates. *Estate* [Summer] (1930) and *La favola del bosco* [The Tale of the Woods] (1931), with their almost fairy tale-like settings linked to everyday life and tender intimate scenes, clearly represent this reversal of direction and a shift towards **magical realism**.

Even in works from the 1950s, among them *Gatto sulla stufa* [Cat on the Stove] (1957), made after his temporary withdrawal from the world of painting, the themes remain familiar until the 1960s, when figuration became linked to details, albeit still representative of everyday life, but more intimate and almost hidden, as in the emblematic work *La scatola delle cose dimenticate* [The Box of Forgotten Things] (1967).

Accompanying the exhibition is a major detailed monograph, written by **Elena Pontiggia** and published by **Silvana Editoriale**. As the most comprehensive volume on the artist to date, it renders an exhaustive portrait of Esodo Pratelli and his work. Alongside more than 100 colour plates are examples of unpublished correspondence between the artist and personalities close to him during his life and artistic career.

Biographical notes. Esodo Pratelli was born in Lugo di Romagna in 1892. He studied art at the Accademia di Via Ripetta in Rome, and after an initial adherence to Symbolism, between 1913 and 1914 he turned to Futurism and was in contact with the movement's leading exponents during his stay in Paris. He worked in painting and ceramics while also creating set designs and costumes in fully Futurist style for *L'Aviatore Dro*, a work by his cousin Balilla Pratella. In 1915 he was enlisted for military service and was discharged after the war in 1919, when he settled in Milan. From the 1920s onwards he was actively involved in the Fascist regime's cultural policy, and undertook important roles, including secretary of the Fascist Fine Arts Union in Milan and later in Lombardy. He married Elsa Martina and they had two children: Lilia, born in 1922, and Giuliano, born in 1928. Pratelli was affiliated to the Italian Novecento and Margherita Sarfatti included him among the movement's 'nursery of young talents'. In 1926 he took part in the first exhibition of the Italian Novecento at the Permanente in Milan, and in all its subsequent exhibitions in Italy and abroad. The years 1927 and 1928 were important for his presence at the Brera Biennale with the

paintings *Giulia e Laura* and *Paese toscano*, and his first appearance at the 16th Venice Biennale, where he returned in 1930, 1932 and 1934.

In 1931 he was among the artists at the first Quadriennale, and in the same year he was also at the Exhibition of Contemporary Italian Painting, organised by the Quadriennale in Rome at the Baltimore Museum.

On 28 October 1932, the tenth anniversary of the march on Rome, the Fascist Revolution Exhibition opened at Palazzo delle Esposizioni, where Pratelli was responsible for the artistic aspects of three rooms.

In 1935, he left Milan to return to Rome, where he concentrated on set design and film directing, discontinuing both teaching and exhibitions. In the second half of the 1950s, he resumed his painting, which he continued until the final years of his life. He died in Rome in 1983.

Major works by the artist are currently held in national and international museums, galleries, and public and private collections.

Exhibition details

Title Esodo Pratelli. Dal futurismo al “Novecento” e oltre

Curated by Elena Pontiggia

Venue Largo Corsia dei Servi, 4 - Milan

Dates 17 April to 13 May 2025

Inauguration Wednesday, 16 April at 18:00

Opening hours Mon. to Fri. 10:00–13:00 / 14:30–18:00; Sat. and Sun. 15:00–18:00

Closed Easter Sunday, 20 April

Special opening Easter Monday, 21 April 15:00–18:00

Free entrance

Further information www.centroculturaledimilano.it

Monograph details

Title Esodo Pratelli. Dal futurismo al “Novecento” e oltre

Edited by Elena Pontiggia

Published by Silvana Editoriale

Language Italian

Pages 128

Illustrations 100

Format 23 x 28 cm

Soft cover binding

ISBN 978-88-366-5898-5

Price € 26

Press office

IBC Irma Bianchi Communication

Via Arena 16/1 – Milan

tel. +39 02 8940 4694 – info@irmabianchi.it

Texts and images downloadable at

www.irmabianchi.it