

SOCIETÀ PER LE BELLE ARTI ED ESPOSIZIONE PERMANENTE

Milan, via Filippo Turati 34

GUGLIELMO SPOTORNO. L'ARTE DELLA VITA

curated by Giovanni Gazzaneo and Flavia Motolese

30 January – 9 February 2025

opening Wednesday, 29 January, 18:00

press release, 21.01.2025

The solo exhibition ***Guglielmo Spotorno: L'arte della vita*** [The Art of Life] will be hosted in the prestigious rooms of the **Società per le Belle Arti ed Esposizione Permanente** in Milan **from 30 January to 9 February 2025**, curated by **Giovanni Gazzaneo** and **Flavia Motolese**. The show celebrates the extraordinary **artistic career of Guglielmo Spotorno** through a selection of forty paintings representing his major creative cycles, in which he has successfully combined art, life and philosophical research.

The event is accompanied by an important **monograph**, which bears the exhibition title and contains essays by Prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, Stefano Zuffi, and the exhibition curators Giovanni Gazzaneo and Flavia Motolese. The extensive critical anthology includes contributions by numerous scholars, from Luciano Caprile and Elena Pontiggia to Claudio Cerritelli and Flaminio Gualdoni. The three hundred and twenty pages, with an extensive iconographic appendix, further examine Guglielmo Spotorno's creative and human journey, with photos by Max Mandel that also include previously unexhibited works. The volume is published by Crocevia.

Giovanni Gazzaneo writes: 'When does a life become art and art become life? For many artists, life and work are not synonymous. For Guglielmo Spotorno, life and art are inseparable. Fisherman, painter, poet, entrepreneur, collector, philosopher, journalist, and more. So many lives, which in his painting, in its light-filled colour, find their natural fulfilment and creative fusion. It is impossible to understand his art without knowing the man and his history.'

This third solo exhibition of Spotorno's work at the Museo della Permanente traces the artist's career, which began more than seventy years ago, when, at twelve years of age, his drawing *Incubo* won first prize at the Mostra Artistica Internazionale della Scuola owing to its completely original style. His invitation to Rome to collect his prize brought him to the attention of Federico Fellini, who wanted to meet him. **Thanks to his parents** — Franco, an entrepreneur and collector, and Enrica, a gallery owner and sculptor — **the art world has always been his world**, also due to his acquaintance with major 20th-century artists, such as Sutherland and Matta, Guerreschi and Ferroni, Jorn, Lam, Baj and Casorati.

According to **Giovanni Gazzaneo**: 'In the work of Guglielmo, life wins: the thirst for horizons, the thirst for knowledge, the desire to create, the desire to test himself, to transcend boundaries. Not challenge for the sake of challenge, but **challenge for the sake of going further**, of seeing what is deeper, truer, more interesting and more admirable. In his creative quest he has sought

to embrace everything, from Genesis to the globalised world Whether cut flowers or his Ligurian sea, **his vision of nature** is always a vision full of wonder. Guglielmo neither allows himself to be captured by detail nor does he linger on detail. **He embraces reality in the same way he has experienced life:** he dives into it. He experiences it by touching it, savouring it, smelling it, loving it. He knows no half measures: his whole being is constantly immersed in what he does, what he sees, what he thinks and what he paints. Nothing less than the totality of his existence. The image emanates from the intense exchange between the narrative that flows from his experience of reality, and the inexhaustible, boundless power of fantasy and dream, between light and darkness, knowledge and mystery.'

Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, Prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, comments: 'Many of Spotorno's works focus on symbols that evoke chaos and restlessness: turbulent waves, desolate cities, dark skies. His intention to represent the natural world and the urban context as places of conflict suggests **a spirit in perpetual struggle** with itself and with external circumstances. These elements are never merely descriptive; on the contrary, they act as **emotional mirrors** through which the artist explores tensions. For the most part, life unfolds like an insistent question, and it is through vulnerability that we seek meaning. His canvases are characterised by a vibrant use of colour, where shades of white, yellow and blue intermingle to form compositions that suggest a feeling of hope and upliftment. The struggle between light and dark recalls the theme of creation and redemption. Certain canvases are dominated by strokes of light-hued colour, white or yellow, emerging from a black background, creating a sense of struggle and hope.'

Flavia Motolese remarks: 'His **style** becomes **increasingly symbolic**: the intense colours create a play of shapes that oscillate between geometry and biomorphism, fluidly transforming, making reality lose its contours and making abstraction acquire meaning. At this intersection of Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism, Spotorno explores the complexities of human experience in and out of time. From the individual subconscious to the collective unconscious, the urgency to see inside oneself coincides with the urgency to investigate contemporary society, which in the early 2000s led to the **Città umanizzate** cycle, whose works represent perhaps his most original and powerful insight. In these provocative works, the artist shows the dramatic **contradictions of contemporary society**, letting the buildings of urban landscapes speak for their inhabitants. The paintings imagine cities from above: places where pain and everyday life seem to intertwine in the solitude of metropolitan life, becoming cages that deprive people of their humanity.'

Stefano Zuffi, art critic and historian, introduces us to *Armonia e silenzio*, the '**guiding**' work in the Permanente exhibition. 'Canvas after canvas, series after series, we enter the tonal harmony Spotorno sought and found: **Armonia e silenzio** is the title of the painting in which arcane celestial forms appear. It is the work that the artist himself considers 'my most important painting'. It is an intimate reading of a reality entrusted to suggestions, subtle strokes, harmonies of colours and signs. A tapestry in which dreamlike intimation, allusion, fantasy, impression and reality blend together. Forms emerge, bloom, fade, meet, seemingly want to merge but then separate again, as if by the biological necessity of life, of reproduction, of movement.'

'My paintings speak for me,' states **Guglielmo Spotorno**. 'They are my restless life, which has always asked too many questions of itself and of whomever it has met. They are **the eye** that **peers in many directions**. Coherence dwells in the colours I love and they converse through

their impact on the canvas. Black and white give each other energy. Even if they're not visible in the paintings, in reality black and white are there. Opposite poles of a restlessness I've had since childhood. I never stood still, I always wanted to look beyond.'

Biographical notes

Guglielmo Spotorno (Milan, 1938) is an artist, poet and entrepreneur. From an early age he showed a precocious talent for drawing, and in 1951, at the age of twelve, he won first prize at the Mostra Artistica Internazionale della Scuola, as well as the Premio Nazionale Società Motta-Alemagna. He grew up in a stimulating cultural environment, spending time at the art gallery run by his mother, Enrica, where he had the opportunity to meet artists such as Arturo Martini, Mario Sironi and Felice Casorati. After studying at the classical high school, and with two degrees from the Catholic University of Milan, one in Political Science, the other in Philosophy, he embarked on an artistic career that combined painting and philosophical reflection, producing powerful Informal style paintings. He became interested in the Cobra group — Jorn and Sutherland particularly influenced his painting — and in Italian and international avant-garde masters, such as Lam, Fontana and Baj, who accompanied him on his artistic journey.

In 1982 he won the City of Milan painting prize, promoted by Farmitalia Carlo Erba, and in the same year he received a diploma of merit at the Premio di Pittura e Grafica, where Dino Villani was head of the jury. In 1989 he won the Dino Buzzati painting prize.

In 2014 he began an intense exhibition programme with the solo exhibition '*Guglielmo Spotorno. Tra Surreale e Reale. Opere dagli anni '70*' at Fondazione Stelline in Milan, curated by Luciano Caprile and Elena Pontiggia. This was followed in 2015 by *Le città e l'altrove*, curated by Nicoletta Pallini at the Museo della Permanente in Milan. In 2017 he presented *Autoritratto*, curated by Flaminio Gualdoni at the Centro Culturale in Milan. In 2018 he exhibited at the Circolo degli Artisti in Albisola Marina with the solo show *Alla conquista del tempo*, curated by Luciano Caprile. In 2019 he was present in Berlin and Tirana, he received an honourable mention at the 3rd Genoa Biennale, and held the exhibition *Guglielmo Spotorno. Al di là dell'apparire*, curated by Ermanno Tedeschi at the church of San Domenico in Alba, in collaboration with the Famija Albèisa association. Also in 2019, the Museo della Permanente hosted *Ricordi dal futuro*, curated by Claudio Cerritelli. In 2020 he was present at ArteGenova, and that same year he donated three works from his *Christo cittadino* cycle to the Fondazione Crocevia Art Collection. The triptych hangs in the historic headquarters of the Catholic University in Milan.

In 2021 he held two solo exhibitions: at Palazzo Pretorio in Anghiari and at Castello Malaspina in Massa, linked to his role as Art Ambassador for Italy at the exhibition *Pace e Amore. Italian Selection for Expo 2021* in Abu Dhabi, the official event of Expo Dubai 2021, curated by Giammarco Puntelli and Paolo Calcari. In 2022 he held the exhibition *Prima l'idea dopo il colore* in Siena at Palazzo Chigi Zondadari and in Savona at Spazio Espositivo della Curia vescovile, where he and sculptor Roberto Scarpone exhibited their work in dialogue under the title *L'incontro*, curated by Paola Gargiulo and Flavia Motolese. In 2023 he received a Lifetime Achievement Medal to mark his fifty-year membership of the Order of Lombardy Journalists. Spotorno has devoted his recent years to the rediscovery of his roots: Celle Ligure, his father's village, has become his favourite place. Here the artist continues his life of art and business in his home-studio, surrounded by nature and by the work of artists he has known and treasured.

Event details

Exhibition title Guglielmo Spotorno. L'arte della vita

Curated by Giovanni Gazzaneo e Flavia Motolese

Venue Società per le Belle Arti ed Esposizione Permanente, via Filippo Turati, 34 - Milan

Dates 30 January – 9 February 2025

Inauguration Wednesday 29 January, 18:00

Open daily, including public holidays, 10:00 – 18:30

Free entry

Further information Tel. 02 6599803-6551445 – www.lapermanente.it

Press office

IBC Irma Bianchi Communication

Via Arena 16/1, Milan

tel. +3902 89404694 – info@irmabianchi.it

Text and image download available at www.irmabianchi.it