

FROM LEONARDO TO PICASSO (1939–1953):

The masters who marked war and peace in Milan

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Abstract

This paper intends to highlight the role the arts and the exhibition system had during WWII period in Milan—a strategic centre in the fields of politics, culture and economics.

At that time we can notice two main occurrences: the Leonardo exhibition at Palazzo dell'Arte in 1939, and the Picasso solo show at Palazzo Reale in 1953.

In the beginning of 1939 the war was more than a threat but, despite that, the fascist regime decided to organize a temporary exhibition dedicated to Leonardo with clear propaganda purposes.

After WWII and the defeat of the regime, the public administration of the city was able to arrange a Picasso exhibition and, during a moment of peace-building, the choice of the Spanish master was not accidental.

It is clear that exhibition-making here was conceived as a tool for cultural interventions, marking war and peace situations and tracing a political “manifesto”.

Keywords

art history, museum studies, exhibition system, Italian history, WWII

About the Author

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INTRODUCTION

An image (an artwork, a picture, etc.), together with the space where it is located, always has a significant role. In the Italian city of Milan, between the 1930s and the 1950s, it became a vehicle for different meanings, primarily as strategic support for the propaganda leading to the Second World War, and later for the process of peace-building following the conflict.

The aim of this study is to underline the strong connection between art and politics in a city where, during the mentioned span of time, the cultural and historical situation was quite delicate and subject to several changes. It is interesting to note that the identity of the city and of the entire nation is somehow shaped by political and ideological values hidden behind a prominent figure from the past and more specifically, the Italian exhibition system.

In order to demonstrate this claim, the topics will be considered following a chronological path and keeping this disposition: in the first part, we will discuss the Leonardo exhibition, organized by the fascist party between 1936 and 1939, hosted inside the Milanese Palazzo dell'Arte, one of the architectural masterpieces of the city as promoted by the building policy of the thirties. To be more precise, we will consider not only the architectural context and the organisational aspects of this exhibition, but also the political and ideological features that link Leonardo to the “Italian genius”, generating a *superuomo* that can impose his superiority on the others. In that sense, the icon of Leonardo, disposed in a specific architectural place, can be instrumentalized in order to persuade people to embrace the idea of a fair war, necessary to impose the strong presence of the Italian nation in Europe and the world.

The second part will consider the Milanese exhibition dedicated to Picasso (1953) and located in the recently restored rooms of Palazzo Reale. Differently from the previous case, this solo show became a vehicle for a peace-building process and at the same time, was strictly connected to the ideas of the left wing party, which had become more and more important in post-war Italian politics. A huge change was confirmed by the Picasso artworks exhibited—for the first time after the war, *Guernica* (1937) was moved from the U.S. to Europe—and by the location, Palazzo Reale, which was bombed by the allies during the 1940s and was only reopened to the public after the restoration.

Finally, in the last part, we will try to examine the legacy left by these masters in the city of Milan, considering how Picasso and *Guernica* become political and cultural points of reference during the end of the 1960s and the “years of lead”. Secondly, we will examine this legacy by looking at the transformation of the

idea of Leonardo, in the aftermath an authentic “icon” for the city of Milan, as demonstrated by his strong presence on the occasion of the events of Expo 2015.

To accomplish this study, which is characterised by a cross-cultural perspective that embraces disciplines such as art history, architecture, museum studies, and social studies, different kinds of materials were useful: the first part, extracted by the doctoral dissertation of the author (Colombo)¹, is based on an historical and archival research, where published sources such as journals, magazines, books, catalogues, but also unpublished sources, official documents, pictures, and letters, were equally important. The second part is exclusively based on published materials, both recent and historical.

THE MAKING OF THE “LEONARDESCA”: THE LONG PATH TOWARDS THE LEONARDO EXHIBITION ORGANIZED IN 1939 AT PALAZZO DELL’ARTE, MILAN.

The idea of a temporary exhibition focused on Leonardo arose in 1936, “obeying the disposition the Duce gave to the Lombard cultural institutions on 31st October 1936-XV, saying ‘go towards the people, extensively and deeply’”² (Nicodemi 473). The city of Milan, at that time, seemed the natural place to host the event, considering the historical phase of Leonardo at the court of Ludovico il Moro and the project for a Leonardo room that would have opened in 1938 inside the Ambrosiana Gallery. Not to mention that this idea of choosing Milan as the perfect place for a Leonardo exhibition is also reconfirmed by a provisional program (*Proposta di una mostra di Leonardo da Vinci a Milano*) written by Carlo Emilio Ferri and Giorgio Nicodemi and published that year, where we read that even Mussolini gave his favourable opinion.

In other words, it seems that the main purpose of the government was to employ a cultural topic to gain a massive consensus: that is why the organizers decided to put together the “Leonardesca” (the nickname used for the “Leonardo exhibition”) with an exhibition dedicated to the Italian inventions (Castaldi), connecting the past Italian ingenuity to the current one and, at the same time, reinforcing a national(istic) tradition.

In such a delicate moment of the national history—the gradual affinity with Nazi Germany, that led up to the Pact of Steel (22nd May 1939)—the Fascist regime aimed to promote the economic and technical development of the nation through a name globally known and esteemed.

For example, the first list of the artworks requested for loan—attached to the exhibition proposal—demonstrates the intentions of the National Fascist Party (henceforward referred to as NFP) displaying the most eminent paintings of the master. Here, we can also suppose the intention of maintaining diplomatic relations with other states. According to these dynamics we can state that, for example, Germany was massively involved in this loan process while, on the contrary, France never agreed upon the loan of the *Gioconda* (Cara 36).

The fact that the NFP chose the new Palazzo dell'Arte as the location for the temporary exhibition is quite significant. Such a location connects this event to a masterpiece of the architecture, which is able to represent some of the cultural ideas of the regime, such as modernity and magnificence. Designed by the architect Giovanni Muzio during the early 1930s, Palazzo dell'Arte, located in Parco Sempione, a green area not far from the center of the city, became the symbol of the building policy of the party and one of the fascist monuments of Milan. Ready to receive the legacy of the Biennale di Monza, it was intended to be the perfect place to host the new Triennale di Milano³ and other temporary exhibitions, considering its positive features, “safety, dimensions, and dignity.”⁴

The conception of the temporary exhibition as an itinerary starting from the Palazzo dell'Arte which leads to a tour around the city, reveals the purpose of giving the visitor the opportunity to better understand the work of Leonardo in Milan,⁵ connecting him to a city that, contextually, exhibits not only the historical, but also the economic and productive values promoted by the regime (e.g. the autarkism and the simultaneous exhibition of the Italian inventions).⁶

To get a better sense of the political exploitation of the Leonardo exhibition, it would be interesting to consider an article in which the curator Carlo Emilio Ferri considered the Italian master a magnificent personality of the past, but also an example of “our, Mussolinian and Fascist” (Ferri) modernity and, again “not only a genius, but most of all a symbol” (Ferri). According to what Umberto Silva affirmed in a book written during the 1970s with an evident antifascist component, the fascist mythology recalled a glorious past, not from a nostalgic point of view but as a positive comparison to the present, leading to something new, understandable by the masses (64).

The populist nature of the exhibition, similar to the one of the “Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista” (held in Rome between 1932 and 1934) is confirmed by the simple language used for the promotional material and further reiterated by the circulation of visual tools like celebratory stamps or illustrations published in the main newspapers (*Guerin Meschino*) throughout the long planning process of the exhibition. In fact, due to technical and timing reasons the “Leonardesca”

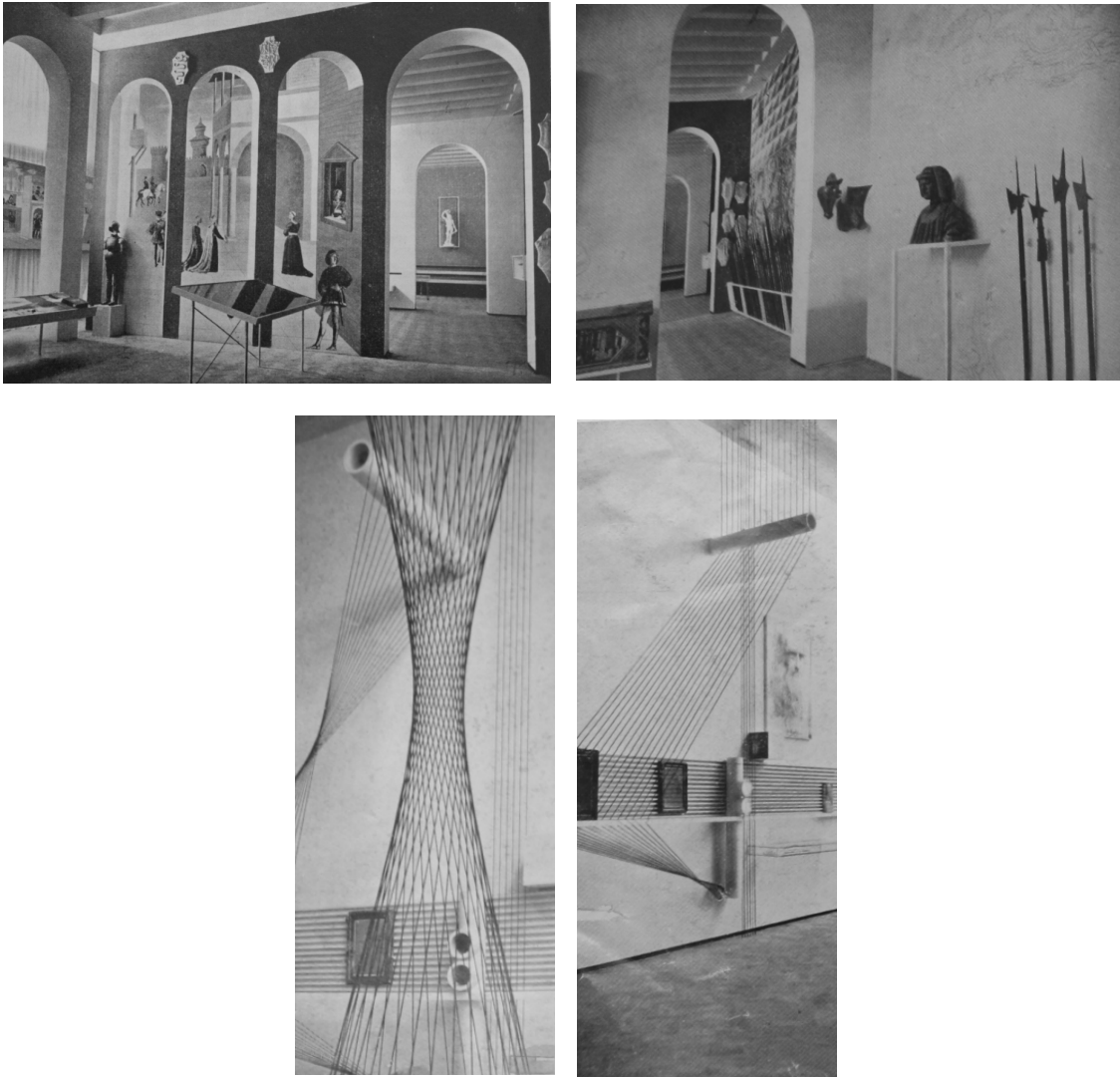
was initially re-programmed for September-October 1938 and, finally, scheduled for spring 1939. At the same time, only five weeks before the opening (“La mostra di Leonardo”), Giuseppe Pagano filled the position of architect supervisor of a heterogeneous team working on the exhibition design.



1-2. Bruno Angoletta, in “Guerin Meschino”, 6 June 1938 - courtesy Milan, Ente Raccolta Vincianaa

We still don't know what exactly happened in the meantime, but this role, initially attributed to the architect Gio Ponti (once recognized as “project creator”), was then vacated almost until the end. Pagano was probably called to give coherence to an exhibition itinerary that was otherwise sketchy, as it was conceived according to heterogeneous tastes. The architects at work at Palazzo dell'Arte for the “Leonardesca” were actually representative of different generations and, most of all, various ideas about how to design a display environment for a temporary exhibition. If some of them tried to create a series of “period rooms”, dominated by an “evocative articulation” (“La mostra di Leonardo” 6; e.g. “Firenze Medicea Room,” designed by the architect Aldo Putelli; “Milano Sforzesca Room,” designed by the architect Guido Frette), the others express the *Zeitgeist*, anticipating a way of design typical of the post-war period (e.g. “Anatomy Room,” by Giuseppe Pagano; “Vinciana Iconography Room,” by Angelo Bianchetti and Cesare Pea). Pagano himself, for example, inside the “Anatomy Room”, used modern tools such as photographic reproductions and installations like the glass-structure in

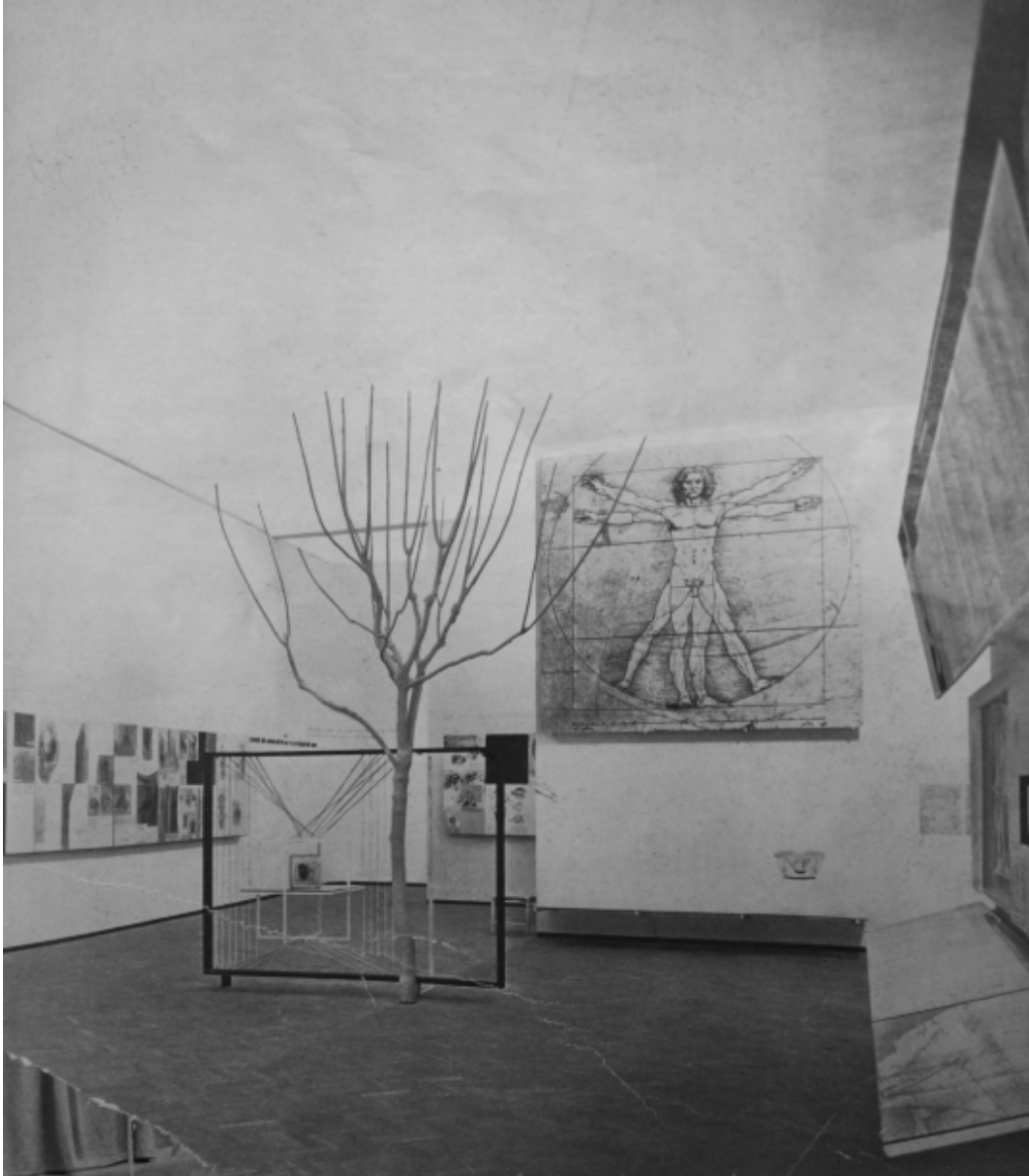
the centre of the room, placed next to a small pink-painted tree. Finally, Pagano was able to contain the traditionalist part of the exhibition, placing these rooms in correspondence to the “minor” parts of the path, but he couldn’t solve the problem—not completely (Cara 62).



3. Guido Frette, project designer of the “Sala della Milano Sforzesca”, in *Mostra di Leonardo da Vinci. Guida ufficiale*, Milan 1939

4. Aldo Putelli, project designer of the “Sala della Firenze Medicea”, in *Mostra di Leonardo da Vinci. Guida ufficiale*, Milan 1939

5-6. Angelo Bianchetti and Cesare Pea, project designers of the “Sala dell’Iconografia Vinciana”, in Giuseppe Pagano, *La mostra di Leonardo a Milano nel Palazzo dell’Arte*, in “*Casabella Costruzioni*”, XI, n. 141, September 1939



7. Giuseppe Pagano, project designer of the “Sala dell’Anatomia”, in Giuseppe Pagano, *La mostra di Leonardo a Milano nel Palazzo dell’Arte*, in “Casabella Costruzioni”, XI, n. 141, September 1939

Perhaps this is why the exhibition received several criticisms (Gadda 470–479; Rovella 523–535) about its non-homogeneous arrangement—old and new, past and present, were side by side, without any coherence—and some carelessness detected

in the captions and the informational materials. Nevertheless, these criticisms were mixed with a general approval, as demonstrated by the great number of visitors: almost 400,000 between the May 9 and the October 22, 1939.

In retrospect, the architect tried to justify the weaknesses of the exhibition, reading the event as a partial anticipation of the following political, historical, and even social circumstances. According to him, the “Leonardesca” showed the first symptoms of a more general exhaustion and “once again the art told us—before and better of any other field—what was going to happen. This time was about the war: it exploded in the middle of Europe—but not yet in Italy—before the Leonardesca could close” (“1925–1940” 78).

But this is not enough. More than a “systematic project”, the “Leonardo exhibition” was an extremely important didactic occasion where the artistic and historical languages went together to craft a political message. Far from a global event like the “Mostra della Rivoluzione Fascista” in several aspects, the solo exhibition dedicated to Leonardo put explicit Fascist symbols in the background, but was able to highlight some modern aspects in the exhibition system. For example, it gave photography a significant, didactic role, trying to involve the visitors inside the rooms of Palazzo dell’Arte, showing them several enlarged reproductions of the missing artworks (e.g. *Vitruvian man*, about 1490), and creating suggestive spaces.

Furthermore, the government tried to promote a self-sufficient politics (“autarchia”) by taking the visitor by the hand and guiding him through the modern Italian geniality, originated during the Renaissance period. In other words, this Italian geniality attempted to affirm its position even in a difficult moment like that which precedes the Second World War.

The duality expressed by this event—the didactic part of one side and the politics of the other—is well underlined by the final sentence of the catalogue introduction, where Leonardo is put side by side with the Duce: “[Leonardo] pioneer and symbol, mother Italy celebrates him; while the Fascism Duce, who armed the nation for war and for peace, guides it through all the prolific matters” (*Leonardo da Vinci*).

In the end, even if this event was not literally instrumental in the beginning of the Second World War, which started when the Leonardo exhibition was still open, it helped the NFP in its efforts to contribute in the creation of a specific national identity, consecrated in autarchism and devoted to the war as a supreme act of affirmation to the other States.

Moreover, far from being an explicit “fascist manifesto”, this solo show on one hand contributed to the fields of the art criticism and art history, allowing a deeper

understanding of Leonardo and his work, not to mention the contribution it gave to the exhibition system. On the other hand however, the political power given to the image was unique—it is exactly from here that Leonardo became a symbol of a mass culture. According to what Laura Malvano wrote (33–34), the image, during the 30's, became a privileged support for a popular culture, understandable by the masses.⁷

FROM WAR TO PEACE: PICASSO AS A SYMBOL OF RECONCILIATION. SOME WORDS ABOUT THE PICASSO EXHIBITION IN MILAN (1953)

After World War II and during the Reconstruction, Milan was at the center of a huge process of cultural renaissance. Many of the museums (i.e. Pinacoteca di Brera, Sforza Castle, Poldi Pezzoli Museum) hit by the bombings in 1943 were rebuilt by the municipality and the local Superintendence and were by, then, ready to reopen with their modern displaying systems. With the end of the conflict in 1945, the perception of living in a new era came with the idea of the museum as a place for a “potential rehabilitation” and the representation of a “recovered identity” (Mazzi 26). The Reconstruction gave everyone the possibility to re-start after a long and necessarily silent reflection, putting in practice a lot of changes, some of which were already introduced in the early 1930s.

This new identity—which in many cases came explicitly with an erasure of the recent past—was shaped in all the construction sites, where many professionals had the opportunity to reflect on the past and the present history of a building.

In this scenario, Palazzo Reale, an ancient seat of government⁸ situated in the heart of the city and newly recovered from the destruction, was converted into an exhibition center, and was immediately able to catalyse the attention of a vast public. Just to mention a few examples, in 1951 the art historian Roberto Longhi curated the temporary exhibition dedicated to “Caravaggio e i caravaggeschi.” In the following year, Lionello Venturi dealt with the solo show entitled after the master Vincent Van Gogh, which is most remarkable for its modern arrangement.

Events like these had an important meaning for the city on different levels: if they were able to continue the idea of the popular culture—Caravaggio, Van Gogh, and Picasso became the symbols of the transformation of the exhibition system, devoted to the masses—started with the Leonardo exhibition (1939), on the other side they represented a clean break with the past. In choosing curators like Venturi or Longhi, antifascist critics, or picking “subversive” artists like the three just mentioned above, the civic administration raised its voice against the regime, against the past and towards peace returning as norm.

In April 1953, the Superintendent Fernanda Wittgens, who played a significant role in protecting the national cultural heritage during the war, successfully convinced Pablo Picasso to move the exhibit held at Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome to Milan (Mattiolo 154–178).

Since the “Roman episode”,⁹ supervised by Eugenio Reale, a representative of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and a very close friend of the art historian Lionello Venturi—also well-known for his antifascist ideas—it was quite clear that the event was conceived with an evident political component—an idea even more supported by the subjects of some Picasso artworks like the Spanish Civil War, the war in Korea, and the artist’s own subscription to the French Communist Party (1944). On the other hand, this political mood was balanced by the moderate wing of the Italian government represented by Giulio Andreotti, who recommended banning the painting *Massacre in Korea* (1951) from the exhibition, it being a sensitive topic for Americans.

Thus, if the Roman exhibition was an interesting occasion to partially know the modern production of the Spanish master (all the early artworks and some masterpieces, like *Guernica*, were missing), who furthermore never visited it, the following Milanese “Mostra di Picasso” was the first, most complete exhibit dedicated to the artist, also provided with a complex network of subtexts.

From the point of view of the organisation, the only connection between the two “phases” was Eugenio Reale, who worked closely with the curator, Franco Russoli and with the Ente Manifestazioni Milanesi, while Lionello Venturi became a referee and a collaborator rather than a proper promoter. Moreover, the painter Attilio Rossi¹⁰, a friend of Picasso, had a significant role, pleading with the artist to loan *Guernica*, which was at the time temporarily entrusted to the Museum of Modern Art in New York.¹¹

The recent history of the location, chosen by Fernanda Wittgens because “an art exhibition in Milan interests classes and types that in Rome stay unresponsive” (Mattiolo),¹² together with the possibility of displaying *Guernica* inside the Cariatidi Room which was hit by bombs before it reopened with the visible wounds of the war, definitively convinced him not only to provide the masterpiece, but also to extend the project by ordering several artworks from other international museums (*Picasso. Opere dei musei*), and to be directly involved with the arrangement of the show.

In this manner, the “Mostra di Picasso”, accessible to the public from the September 23 to the December 31, 1953, became the first Picasso solo exhibition to display all of the master’s production: paintings, sculpture, and installations, from

the beginning of his career to the present. Consequently, it acquired a more explicit relevance from the point of view of political affairs.

During the election of June 1953, even if the left wing was unable to join the majority (accorded to D.C., Christian Democracy party), the parties linked to this orientation were anyway reinforced. This had an unequivocal repercussion on the society. The main consequence concerning the exhibit was its strong, political character, concentrated most of all in the Cariatidi Room, where Picasso wanted to display some interesting artworks. *Guernica* (1937) voluntarily exiled in the U.S. since the Exposition Universelle held in Paris in 1937, was put in the middle of the room, situated side by side with the more recent diptych representing *The War* and *The Peace* (1952), dedicated to the events happening in Korea.

As demonstrated by a picture taken by René Burri—a picture which then became an iconic symbol of that exhibition—framing four women sitting in front of the large canvas,¹³ *Guernica* was the real protagonist of the whole project due to its subject and to its deep significance. In the introduction of the catalogue addition, the curator gave an appropriate portrait of that connection, linking the artwork to the place and to the public:

In an ancient European Palace, hurt by the bombings, nearby the Picasso paintings poetically proving the most recent sufferings of the humanity [...] ‘Guernica’ is the most significant proof of the deep honesty and truth of the realistic inspiration of Picasso and its pictorial genius (*Picasso. Opere dei musei*).

Representing the consequences of the war in a new manner and with shocking language, this composition became a universal hymn against every conflict, “the flag against the fascism” (Mantura 16), easily shared by a nation that had just passed a period dominated by a totalitarian regime.

Paradoxically, the depiction of the suffering turned into a fight in the name of freedom, supported by the other paintings in the Cariatidi Room which all together, retrace fifteen years of painful history, from the destruction of the Spanish village of Guernica, caused by the aerial attack of the Nazis sustaining the regime of Franco, to the Cold War. Lucio Villari described this as a period articulated by the dichotomy fascism-anti-fascism, a moment characterised by “the solemn antinomy between War and Peace” (Villari 33).

Although the success was confirmed via the durability of that symbol in the city of Milan and by the huge number of visitors (almost 200,000 in two months). Reading the articles issued in the Italian newspapers just after the opening of the exhibition, with titles like “The Comments of the Public Visiting the Milanese

Exhibition of Picasso” (Todisco 3) or “Visit to the Lord of the Monsters” (Porretti 3),¹⁴ or examining the ironic illustrations which came with these titles, it was easy to be aware of the fact that the message was not entirely understood.

Despite the clearly marked¹⁵ process of politicisation encountered by these paintings, most of all by *Guernica*, in this specific occasion, the perception towards the paintings by Picasso was able to modify itself throughout the years, staying connected to the political field.

THE LEGACY LEFT BY LEONARDO (1939) AND PICASSO (1953) EXHIBITIONS IN MILAN: THE AFTERMATH

Both Leonardo and Picasso having passed through Milan, left an important mark on the collective memory of the city insomuch as remembering them means giving them a specific sense, different from one time to another.

Although the memory of Leonardo shows a component which is more understandable and “marketable” because his name is strictly connected to the idea of the artist as a universal genius, while the sense related to Picasso constantly keeps alive the political consciousness of the public. There was a time, during the 1950s when they were compared, being outstanding personalities of the past and of the present, but the entire article served the purpose of the politics, launching Picasso as a regular Leonardo, “right in the head” as we read in the article (*Picasso è un Leonardo...*).¹⁶

It is no coincidence that nowadays, the name of Leonardo is used as a sort of “city branding” for Milan, especially in view of the past Expo 2015. Besides the masterpieces that one can visit in the city (i.e. the Sala delle Asse inside the Sforza Castle and the painting entitled *Portrait of a Musician* (1485–1490) at the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana) and the institutions named after him like the Science and Technology Museum or some public schools, there is a recent tradition which started in his name.

The first step is represented by the astonishment generated by the latest restoration of *The Last Supper* (1977–1999), a mural artwork located inside the refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie cloister, curated by the restorer Pinin Brambilla Barcilon with the supervision of the Superintendent (Artioli). After the long process of work, the restitution of the masterpiece to the city (Marani) gave the public a perfect occasion to rediscover the personality of Leonardo as painter—a myth further increased by the novel *Da Vinci Code*, written by Dan Brown (printed in Italian in 2004).

Not to mention that, by the end of May 2014, Pio XI square has been hosting a Leonardo tribute the Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana commissioned to the architect Daniel Libeskind (Libeskind). The monument, situated in front of the Ambrosiana and above the ancient Milan, where the streets *cardo* and *decumano* meet and cross, was conceived as an homage to the master but, most of all, as a distinctive sign, marking the presence of the museum in the city. Moreover, the meaningful title chosen for this monument, *Leonardo Icon*, etymologically related to the visual field, clearly seeks to underline the most impacting and “superficial” component of the Master’s production.

Last year, Leonardo was again the main protagonist of a great exhibition hosted inside the Milanese Palazzo Reale, opened to the public in parallel with the Universal Exposition—Expo 2015 (Fiorio). The temporary event, even if somehow related to the exhibition organized in 1939 mostly because of its foreseeable, huge impact on Milan and on the public, collecting the “popular culture legacy” related to Leonardo, is quite distant from the previous solo show. In fact, the exhibition was not only an updated and systematic study on the Tuscan master, but also an avenue for the icon of Leonardo to be released from previous political involvement, and to acquire other, different meanings.

On the other hand, since the beginning the “Milanese re-readings” associated with *Guernica* have been partially different. In the 1970s, when the Italian period of political turmoil was called “years of lead”, the masterpiece became a source of inspiration for the artist Enrico Baj, who was the author of the installation *The Funerals of the Anarchist Pinelli* (1972).

The historical circumstances (partially still unsolved) hidden behind this artwork are related to the Piazza Fontana Bombing, a terrorist attack which happened in Milan during December 1969, when 17 people died because of a bomb explosion at the headquarters of a bank in the center of the city. After the slaughter, initially and unjustly ascribed to the anarchists, many arrests were made and a few days later, one of the suspects, the railwayman Giuseppe Pinelli, uncannily fell from the fourth floor window of the central police station and died.

This incident, immediately perceived as an injustice at the expense of the anarchist and left wing movements, highlighted the attempt, on the part of the State, to use innocent people as scapegoats, as demonstrated by the following investigations.

Enrico Baj, who at that time was going to rethink the artwork *The Funerals of the Anarchist Galli* by Carlo Carrà (1911), suddenly decided to change subject, passing from the art to the reality (Baj 45).¹⁷ *The Funerals of the Anarchist Pinelli*

was completed in 1972 as a huge composition (around 3 metres high and 12 metres long) which can be dismantled in minor panels, showing the victim at the center of the scene, represented upside down, while falling from on high, almost taken by eleven “threatening hands”. He is depicted side by side with two groups of people: on the right the public officials, portrayed like atrocious monsters, and on the left, a number of anarchist friends, definitely humanised. In the forefront, three female characters, one woman and two children, depicting the most deep despair, and embodying the daughters (left) and the wife (right) of Giuseppe Pinelli. Overall, the connections with *Guernica* by Picasso are evident:

“It is not a case that Baj, just a few years before (1969), remade the masterpiece using different techniques and materials, with an ironic purpose, but also as an homage to the great Spanish artist. Both the artworks are born from the urgent need of showing to the future generation the emotion, the disdain, the sharing of the pain in front of unusually violent facts. Anyone who has lived in Milan during the days of the Piazza Fontana Bombing surely remembers the dismay of the entire city” (Cerini Baj 25).

It is clear that the relationship between the work of Picasso and the one signed by Baj, apart from a stylistic point of view, hides other, deeper affinities connected to the socio-political context of their respective nations, Spain and Italy, as they were caught in two different historical periods. Picasso publicly exposed the painful malaise of the Spanish society during the 1930s, brought to its knees by the fascist regime, while Baj harshly condemned the Italian political class—especially in a moment so delicate like the one lived during the years of lead—that couldn’t manage a risky and violent situation.

In 1972, Milan was apparently ready to reveal *The Funerals of the Anarchist Pinelli* to its citizens with an exhibition scheduled for May 17. In the end, it never opened due to “technical reasons.” That day, Luigi Calabresi, the police commissioner in charge of the investigation about the “Piazza Fontana Bombing,” who was also considered responsible for the death of Pinelli, was murdered by a group adhering to the far-left movement Lotta Continua.

Probably considering the sensitivity of the subject, the municipality cancelled the entire project and the masterpiece was exhibited for the first time only in the year 2000 inside the Fondazione Marconi.¹⁸ Finally, in 2012, after being almost obliterated for fifty years, it came back to the Cariatidi Room of the Palazzo Reale, just like *Guernica* did in the past and just before the temporary exhibition “Pablo Picasso. Capolavori dal Musée Picasso di Parigi” held between 2012 and 2013 (Baldessari).

Again, the demonstration that *Guernica* is perceived as a symbol of peace and also as a politically active subject is reconfirmed by another Milanese episode which happened more or less in the same period as the failure to exhibit *The Funerals of the Anarchist Pinelli*. The day when Picasso died (April 8, 1973), leaving a massive emptiness in the cultural scene and in the prolific mood animating the universities during those decades—the occupations, the student movements—was perceived as an occasion to think about a permanent tribute to the Spanish master.

A group of students of the Brera Art Academy called by the Politecnico di Milano depicted *Homage to Picasso*, a mural copy of *Guernica*, on an empty wall of the university. “The painting, the symbol of pacifism during the 1950s, is chosen for the purpose of leaving a sign of civilization directly inside the faculty (Origoni 75).”¹⁹ Today, the mural still stares at us inside the university Library, entrusting new generations of students with its multiform message.

CONCLUSIONS

It is quite clear that every image, thanks to its replicability, accomplishes an iconological path in the span of its life: it is multiplied but, from time to time, is loaded with different messages and meanings that deal with its present.

Even if the two events of 1939 and 1953 marked significant moments of Milanese history in a contradictory way, in the end, the two have something in common: on the one hand, the Leonardo exhibition is associated with WWII and on the other, the Picasso solo show can be considered a peace-enabling symbol, after the sufferings caused by the war, but they both contributed to change the language used in the Italian exhibition system.

By bringing the artwork—and its artist—to the public, these exhibitions become popular events, capable of renewing the inner workings hidden behind an exhibit. In this way, they can be considered milestones, because after their respective exhibitions, both Leonardo and Picasso became public figures; their artworks started to be diffused and scattered, as Walter Benjamin said, into entire societies as iconic symbols which morph according to the occasion.

Finally, we can establish that while the icon of Leonardo is frequently related, in a mass media context, to a certain kind of propaganda—political, cultural and touristic as well—Picasso and the aura surrounding *Guernica* are always linked to the affirmation of positive and social values such as the peace-building processes which followed WWII, or the political and class struggle of the 1960s and 1970s.

Notes

1. For this work, I would like to thank Professor Pietro C. Marani, the supervisor of my PhD thesis, Professor Serena Pesenti, tutor, and the PhD coordinator, Professor Carolina Di Biase. I am also thankful to the staff of every archive and library I visited.
2. The Roman numerals were used by the fascist regime to indicate the year of the “Fascist Era”, conventionally considered to have started in the “Marcia su Roma”, a military demonstration organized by the regime in 1922.
3. Born as Biennale di Monza, an exhibition of applied arts organized during the 20’s, was then moved to Milan, where it became Triennale di Milano, a triennial instead of a biennial exhibition of architecture and arts hosted at Palazzo dell’Arte from 1933 to 1968. Palazzo dell’Arte was chosen as the perfect location for the Leonardo exhibition only a year before the opening; the organizer committee initially chose the Sforza Castle but, due to spatial reasons, changed their mind and preferred the Palazzo dell’Arte.
4. Memorandum of the committee responsible for the Leonardo exhibition, Rome, 19 April 1938, 2. Università degli Studi di Milano, Centro APICE– Archivi della Parola, dell’Immagine e della Comunicazione Editoriale, Fondo Calvi, secondo lotto, busta 94 (19).
5. The itinerary intended to include different places where Leonardo worked or where his artworks are exhibited; for example: the refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie, with *The Last Supper*, the Ambrosiana, the Sforza Castle, the Naviglio, and Duomo.
6. The propaganda was also interested in promoting the theory of autarchism, potentially able to make Italy independent from the other States under an economic point of view. Autarchism (“autarchia” in Italian) is a specific economic orientation adopted by the fascist regime, based on the idea that a nation can reach self-sufficiency by producing all by itself, becoming and independent from the production of the other States.
7. A rich bibliography is related to the topic of the fascist propaganda; e.g. see: Andreotti; Belardelli; Bossaglia; Braun (2000 and 2003); Brunetti; Cioli, Rifkind; Ciucci; Gentile; Ghirardo; Masi; McLaren; Melograni; Nelis; Nicoloso; Rumi; Russo; Salvagnini; Schnapp (1992 87–97 and 2003).
8. It was a Medieval seat of government; then, during the centuries, it went through a series of renaming, going by Ducal and Royal Palace, National Palace under Napoleon, and Royal again, until the 20s of the 20th century, when the Royal family gave it to the city.
9. The organization started only two months and two days before the opening.
10. Attilio Rossi was also responsible for the design of the posters.
11. At the time, the Superintendent Fernanda Wittgens also wrote to the director of the MoMA, Alfred H. Barr, trying to convince him to lend *Guernica*, but he answered that to finalize the loan it occurred the previous agreement of Picasso. For further information see: Mantura 1998.

12. This affirmation comes with the idea that Milan, at that time, had a more dynamic society, more interested in the cultural and intellectual processes, being the economic heart of the entire nation.
13. René Burri, ITALY. Milan. Palazzo Reale. 1953. PICASSO exhibition – © René Burri/Magnum Photos. See: <https://www.magnumphotos.com>.
14. This title is a wordplay between the word “mostra” (exhibition) and “mostro” (monster).
15. On *L'Italia del lunedì* (see: R.P. 1953), a caricature of a Picasso portrait is associated with the title “[Picasso] is appreciated by the P.C.I. [Italian Communist Party]”. Again, see: “‘Quel Pablo’ dissero le signore ‘ci farà diventare di sinistra’” 1953.
16. The author of the article literally wrote “Picasso is a Leonardo with Over Head Valves” which is an Italian wordplay meaning “having all in the right place, right in the head.”
17. He said “the reality and the life and death of Pino in my head replaced the memories linked to the books I’ve already read, to the heroes of the past, to the Futurism, Dadaism—that I love—demanding, instead of an amused and ironic-literary remake, the celebration of a familiar and political tragedy that had to be represented”.
18. Giorgio Marconi is the current owner of the artwork.
19. For further information see: <http://www.gizmoweb.org>.

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