

A Driving Force. On the Rhetoric of Images and Power

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‘Il cappellino all’ultima moda’ The Impossible Exhibition of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Turin

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Abstract The aim of this essay is to draw attention to an almost unknown and yet very significant moment in the history of museums and exhibitions in Turin. The exhibition of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, which, in actuality, never took place is, indeed, a *sui generis* litmus test of the political debate of the Italian post-war period. To reconstruct this episode were of fundamental importance various unpublished documents preserved both in the Archivio storico dei Musei Civici di Torino and in the Archivio Storico della Città di Torino.

Keywords The Peggy Guggenheim Collection. Vittorio Viale. Palazzo Madama, Torino. Venice Biennale. Second Post War Period.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 ‘La benedetta Mostra’: Organising the Peggy Guggenheim Collection Exhibition – 3 ‘Lei lo sa che non c’è niente da fare’: an Impossible Exhibition. 4 Conclusions.



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1 Introduction

Sono oltremodo felice dell'onore che la S. V. m'ha fatto invitandomi ad esporre la mia collezione nella città di Torino.

Guggenheim, *Letter to Domenico Coggiola* 1948¹

These are the words with which Peggy Guggenheim marks the beginning of this short and mostly forgotten case in the history of exhibitions during the Second Post War Period, in Turin. First of all, it is useful to recall that the XXIV Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Biennale di Venezia had taken place from 1 May to 30 September 1948. Not only this was the first exhibition to be held after a six-year long interruption caused by the Second World War, but it was also the first one of the 'Pallucchini Era'. Among the historical and solo exhibitions that have made this edition famous, there is also that of Peggy Guggenheim's collection, set up by Carlo Scarpa in the Biennale Giardini's Greek Pavilion.²

2 'La benedetta Mostra': Organising the Peggy Guggenheim Collection Exhibition in Turin

Plausibly, among the Collection's visitors were also painter Luigi Spazzapan, sculptor Umberto Mastroianni and Angelo Stanlino, who, at the very beginning of this story, acted as mediators between the administration of Biennale and Turin's mayor, Domenico Coggiola, PCI (Partito Comunista Italiano). In fact, the first exchanges between the two are recorded by a letter written by Pallucchini to Mayor Coggiola on 13 October 1948,³ two days after a meeting with the three members of the 'Premio Torino' Committee and with Giulio Baradel, inspector of the Biennale.⁴ Another reference to this

¹ In this short letter Peggy Guggenheim calls herself "contentissima" to be able to exhibit her collection in Turin, she thanks the mayor, and she says she is waiting for his emissaries to arrange "la cosa in ogni suo particolare".

² As well known, Greece did not participate in the Biennale of 1948 because at that time the Civil War was still being fought.

³ Pallucchini, Letter to Domenico Coggiola 1948. The contents of the letter concerned some guidelines on the organisation of the exhibition, in particular on issues related to safety and insurance charges.

⁴ Giletti (?), *Handwritten communication to Vittorio Viale* 1948. Giletti was the head of the mayor's office. It should be noted that in this text the name of Pietro Bargis is mentioned alongside those of Spazzapan and Mastroianni. It is also noteworthy that Vittorio Viale, director of the Musei Civici from 1930 to 1965, had already been informed about this possibility; in fact, the Archivio storico dei Musei Civici preserves the draft of a letter, in which Viale volunteered to reach Venice to arrange all that was necessary to the exhibition's success. This letter was meant to be sent to Rodolfo Pallucchini

visit can be found in the Archivio storico dei Musei Civici di Torino: a short, hand-written communication with an illegible signature, addressed probably to Vittorio Viale. As the mayor had approved the text of the deliberation, Viale was asked to have the proposal signed by the councillor for fine arts, Elvira Pajetta. However, the most delicate task entrusted to the director was to underline "l'urgenza di assicurarsi la Collezione", before it was taken to Florence or other cities instead. For their part, the members of 'Premio Torino' had immediately spoken to Mrs. Guggenheim and to the Biennale's direction and had handed them a letter of presentation written by Coggiola himself. In the aforementioned proposal,⁵ drafted on 25 October 1948, after briefly describing the content of a collection, that, with its about 160 pieces, testified "il sorgere e lo sviluppo delle più moderne tendenze dell'arte moderna dal Cubismo, all'Astrattismo, dal Surrealismo all'Espressionismo", Mayor Coggiola claimed that "una collezione così vasta e così importante di queste particolari espressioni artistiche non esiste[va] ancora in Italia" which was the main reason for the great interest it had raised in the artistic and cultural scenes of the country.⁶ Mrs Guggenheim had already granted her

on 21 October, but in actuality, it was never sent. In fact, given the letter that Pallucchini sent to the director on 22 October we can reasonably presume that in the end Viale had decided to call him, instead. Cf. Viale, *Draft of a letter addressed to Rodolfo Pallucchini* 1948. Some of Viale's notes, preserved in the same archive, seem to confirm this: on a little piece of paper, the director wrote "Telefonata 22 ottobre" and added right after a short list of things, to ask, presumably, to Pallucchini, including: "incarico ritirare dipinti [...], volume del carico [...], la raccolta andrà altrove? [...], consegna Venezia a me o a mio incaricato". Cf. Viale, *Notes* 1948.

5 Coggiola, *Proposal for an exhibition in Turin of Peggy Guggenheim's collection* 1948.

6 The exhibition had had a certain relevance in the Turin press too, raising of course conflicting opinions. To give an example, Alberto Rossi in the columns of *La Nuova Stampa* described it as an "accostamento di atmosfere veramente bizzarro, imprevisto". Cf. Rossi, A. (1948) «Tutto il mondo è presente. Alla XXIV Biennale veneziana». However much more *tranchant* opinions could also be read, those of Paolo Monelli and Marziano Bernardi, for instance. On 22 September 1948 Monelli wrote: "La pittura è un amore infelice della gente. Vanno a vederla, spasimano di vederla, questo sì [...]. Ma quando arrivano alle sale dei cubisti, degli astrattisti, di certi surrealisti vivisezionisti alla Dalí o alla Ernst, e visitano la collezione Peggy Guggenheim che di queste tendenze ha gli esempi più audaci ed impensati, allora non osano più nemmeno parlare, par che li abbiano bastonati, vanno in giro con la faccia di chi gli è morto il più caro parente". Cf. Monelli, P. (1948). «La pittura è morta. Pensieri di un profano alla Biennale». As anticipated, Bernardi, one of the most influential voices of Turin's critique at that time, was of the same opinion. He explained that every expression "anche la più stramba e repellente" could then be legitimated in the name of contemporary art and he claimed as well that there was ample room in *connoisseurs'* minds for a "satanico dubbio" involving 'geniuses' disguised as 'idiots'. Such thoughts, he believed, were those of "tanti visitatori della Biennale, i quali, varcato il canale di Sant'Elena entrano nel padiglione dove la Signora Guggenheim ha esposto la sua collezione messa insieme in quasi dieci anni di ricerche, e che riunisce documenti dell'arte 'non-oggettiva' dal 1910 ad oggi, arte che la Signora Guggenheim incoraggiò a New York [...]". He also indulged in an unusual and quite romantically expressed comparison between 'Art of this century'

approval, as long as the Municipality of Turin took charge of the organisation. The estimated overall cost was of approximately 550,000 Italian Lire, for an insurance value of L. 90,000,000,⁷ some of which was to be offset by the tickets sold to the visitors of the exhibition that was to be held in the most prestigious venue in Turin: Palazzo Madama. On 16 November 1948, this draft, submitted by Councillor Attilio Aloisi (PCI), was approved by the Municipal Council.⁸ As mentioned, a request for approval by the Town Council was added: they asked to collect the L. 500,000 needed to set up the exhibition from the 1948 budget, Art. 126 (exhibition, etc.), whose availability was of L. 1,870,000. However, while politicians were trying to sort things out as mentioned, on 29 October, an embittered Peggy Guggenheim wrote a letter to Spazzapan, Mastroianni and Stanlino. In it, she told them that she had thought that an agreement was reached and that, since a date had already been planned, "francamente", she had no way to explain such "inesplicabile silenzio", which led her to believe that they were no longer interested in the project.⁹ The archive papers, nonetheless, testify that Viale had already begun the exhibition's planning: for instance, in a letter sent by Pallucchini to Musei

and Venice: "Arte di questo secolo mormorano quei tanti visitatori che sostano fra le 136 opere ed escono meditatondi, stupefatti poi d'un tratto al vedere ancora verdi le siepi del giardino, azzurro lo spirituale cielo di Venezia sulla gran pace della sponda silenziosa, in carne ed ossa i due remiganti che se ne vengon giù per il canale placido, sul solito barcone lagunare. E si stropicciano gli occhi, dopo averli spalancati, tanto la caduta è stata brusca dal mondo siderale della Luna a quest'umile mondo della Terra; e si toccano, si palpano 'non anch'io fossi dunque un fantasma'". He, moreover, underlined that contradictions of this sort were also clearly stated in the catalogue, where Giulio Carlo Argan explained that "la pura razionalità si confonde con la pura irrazionalità". Remarkably, not even Carlo Scarpa's staging was left unscathed, due to the use of a: "luce astrale - una luce fredda, abbacinante, che fa pensare a quella delle camere operatorie". Cf. Bernardi, M. (1948), "Con la Guggenheim nel mondo della luna. Surrealisti e astrattisti alla Biennale di Venezia".

7 This amount was obtained by adding to a general expense of 300,000 Lire: L. 150,000 for the transport from Venice to Turin and vice versa and L. 100,000 for setting up the central hall of Palazzo Madama. To manage these expenses the Municipal Council asked the Town Council to "aprire una partita di giro" of L. 600,000, to both withdraw for the expenses and pay the incomes. A copy of the draft was sent to Musei Civici director on 3 November. Cf. *Schema di Deliberazione che si restituisce al Servizio Museo Civico* 1948. In the end, the proposal compiled on 8 November, "alle condizioni minime possibili", by the insurance company amounted to L. 322,000. Cf. *Proposta assicurazione incendio [...] 1948*.

8 *Deliberazione della Giunta Municipale in data 16 novembre 1948. N. 64 Mostra a Torino della raccolta Peggy Guggenheim 1948*.

9 Guggenheim, *Letter to Luigi Spazzapan, Umberto Mastroianni and Angelo Stanlino* 1948. It should also be pointed out that in this letter Mrs. Guggenheim reminded them of the ongoing negotiations to bring her collections to other cities and named Milan, the latest to reach out to her for such a reason. She also remarked on the special treatment accorded to Turin, considering that they had postponed "almeno tre volte gli impegni assunti con C. L. Ragghianti di Firenze e con le Ambasciate Americane Francesi [sic] a Roma, senza contare l'estero e le [loro] faccende private".

Civici director on 22 October, he apologises for having missed a call from Turin who was answered by Umbro Apollonio instead. Following this call the Biennale personnel began to pack the collection in 13 different crates.¹⁰ A few days later Viale wrote a telegram to Mrs Guggenheim to reassure her, saying that the, the Municipal Council had finally approved the deliberation.¹¹ He then wrote her explaining the reasons behind such delay: the final decision had had to be made by a public institution, but from that moment onwards, he would be the one in charge of every aspect. Lastly, he informed her that the venue would be Palazzo Madama and that the opening could reasonably be expected to take place in the middle of December.¹² Now, it was Viale's turn to be worried about Venice's silence, and since he was not getting any answers to his inquiries, he decided to write to Pallucchini: "Questo mi preoccupa un po', prima perché non vorrei fossero sorte delle difficoltà, quindi perché una mostra siffatta comporta e vuole tempo e accurata preparazione".¹³ A letter sent by Vittorio Carrain to the director on 26 November dispels any doubt: in it Peggy Guggenheim's collaborator thanked Viale for his reassurance concerning what he calls "benedetta Mostra a Torino", and agreed to an opening on 15 December. He also reminded him that Mrs. Guggenheim è "[avrebbe desiderato] curare personalmente l'ordinamento della sua collezione come [aveva] fatto a Venezia e come usa[va] fare".¹⁴ In the following week, communications between Turin and Venice were interrupted due to some delays and errors of the postal system.¹⁵ Eventually, on 6 December Viale managed to let Pallucchini know via express mail that he would arrive in

10 In the aforementioned call Viale must have told Apollonio that Palazzo Madama was going to be unavailable for some time due to the previous programming, because Pallucchini assured him that the Biennale could have stored the crates until the shipment. Cf. Pallucchini, *Letter to Vittorio Viale* 1948. Proof of this can be found in the previously mentioned notes, taken by Viale: "Data mostra – primi di dicembre – per indisponibilità locali". Cf. Viale, *Notes* 1948. In fact, during those months Palazzo Madama was hosting the exhibition *Mostra dell'Arazzo e del Tappeto*.

11 Viale, *Telegram to Peggy Guggenheim* 1948.

12 Viale, *Letter to Peggy Guggenheim* 1948.

13 Viale, *Letter to Rodolfo Pallucchini* 1948.

14 Carrain, *Letter to Vittorio Viale* 1948. In this letter Carrain asked how long the exhibition was going to last, so that he could be "finalmente preciso alla città di Firenze". Peggy Guggenheim's collaborator also demanded information on the director's decisions regarding the catalogue, as this was also an occasion for him to remind Viale that "il materiale in [loro] possesso sia fotografico che bio-bibliografico [era] abbondante e di buona qualità tale da assicurare la degnissima pubblicazione di un buon catalogo in questi casi oltremodo utile e gradito per [loro] esperienza ai visitatori".

15 On 27 November Viale sent a letter to Peggy Guggenheim to explain to her that he had not received her last letter and to ask her for a copy. Moreover, despite his busy schedule, he volunteered once again to go to Venice and meet her in person to set everything up. Cf. Viale, *Letter to Peggy Guggenheim* 1948. Meanwhile on 4 December

Venice on 9 December.¹⁶ The day after the director's visit to Venice, Carrain wrote him again to thank him and to underline once more the Mrs. Guggenheim's intention of organising her collection according to her own criteria. He also added that in the meantime two additional works had been bought and included in the collection, and that these were to be part of the exhibition in Turin as well.¹⁷

3 'Lei lo sa che non c'è niente da fare': an Impossible Exhibition

After overcoming various bureaucratic obstacles and several other impediments related to communication everything was finally set in order for this important exhibition to be held in Palazzo Madama. However, it must now be said that, despite the fact that its organisation was almost completed this exhibition never saw the light. In fact, exactly a month after being approved by the Municipal Council, the aforementioned deliberation concerning the exhibition was discussed by the Town Council during an extraordinary session called on 16 December¹⁸. After the reading of the text, a heated discussion broke out among those presents. The first to take the floor was Giuseppe Grosso, DC (Democrazia Cristiana), who began by saying that he didn't want to stand against Turin hosting a cultural event as such, since – he said – “la popolazione torinese ha sete di manifestazioni culturali in modo da riversarsi su di esse con quello slancio un po' provinciale”. However, he also had to admit that in his opinion the Peggy Guggenheim's collection 'exceeded' in being 'provincial', “in quanto

Carrain wrote to Viale asking him to make the necessary decisions to end such a “laboriosa gestazione”. Cf. Carrain, *Letter to Vittorio Viale* 1948.

16 Viale, *Letter to Rodolfo Pallucchini* 1948. In that same folder another express mail from Viale to Peggy Guggenheim, bearing the same message, is also preserved. Cf. Viale, *Letter to Peggy Guggenheim* 1948.

17 Carrain, *Letter to Vittorio Viale* 1948. In this letter important information on the catalogue can be found as well, in fact, Guggenheim's collaborator wrote: “Abbiamo pensato [...] che il catalogo sarebbe più attendibile se lasciata la cruda elencazione per ordine alfabetico si ordinasse con criteri di raggruppamenti rispetto alla affinità e alle tendenze degli artisti rappresentati”. This sentence suggests that the Turin catalogue was originally thought of as an alphabetical list, probably due to the lack of experience in handling and valuing such expressions of modern art. For his part, Viale agreed to abandon the idea of the catalogue as a mere list and confirmed that the museum workers could come to Venice the following week to pick up the crates with the truck that would return the works lent by the venetian museums to the previously mentioned *Mostra dell'Arazzo e del Tappeto*. In addition, he reassured him by saying that: “per quello che riguarda l'ordinamento Le confermo che sarà senz'altro ben preziosa la personale opera Sua, per la disposizione dei quadri”. Cf. Viale, *Letter to Peggy Guggenheim* 1948.

18 *Sessione straordinaria, Terza seduta - giovedì 16 dicembre 1948. Sommario* 1948, which collects all the councillors' interventions that will be mentioned in this article.

la presentazione che se ne è fatta, come l'espressione delle 'più moderne tendenze dell'arte moderna' ha il tono della signora provinciale che vuole il cappellino all'ultima moda".¹⁹ Far from being a purely artistic consideration, Grosso's speech is more reminiscent of a political attack. In fact, the councillor also complained that such a decision, that involved public spending, instead of being taken by a committee of experts appointed by the Town Council, had been taken by the town councillor themselves. In his opinion, moreover, if "staccato" from the particular context of the Biennale and brought to Turin, "questa roba" would have not helped the visitors to figure modern art out, on the contrary it would have been slightly "disorientante"; solo exhibitions of Braque, Chagall,²⁰ Rouault or Picasso would have been much more appropriate to pursue such a noble purpose. Moving on, Grosso pointed out that Palazzo Madama was not a suitable venue for this kind of collection, and, ironically, proposed to have the exhibition take place in Castello del Valentino instead, where the *Mostra della Meccanica* had recently been held, so that "si sarebbe potuto vedere una certa affinità negli elementi che formano il substrato e l'espressione della crisi del tempo attuale". Then, to conclude, he declared that such an expense was completely "ingiustificata", since it would be very difficult to have all the money invested back "in quanto si è fatto troppo affidamento su un pubblico che vi andrebbe solo per ridere". Mario Chiarloni, FR.UQ (Fronte dell'Uomo Qualunque), was of the same opinion and despite stating at the beginning of his intervention that he respected "in fatto d'arte [...] le opinioni di tutti", however, he ironically proceeded to immediately say that the need of organising an exhibition of Mrs. Guggenheim's collection could be confused with the lack of good art in Italy. He also opposed the proposal to set it up in Palazzo Madama: something that according to

19 While admitting that in 1948 the Biennale had shown "un vasto panorama istruttivo ed interessante dell'arte contemporanea con molte personali che permettevano al pubblico di orientarsi su quello che è la personalità dei diversi artisti", thus "quando si arrivava alla collezione Guggenheim si aveva l'impressione di giungere ad un limite, per cui se vi erano espressioni singole di tendenze artistiche che hanno rappresentato una pagina di storia, vi erano anche molte cose che andavano al di là e significavano posizioni puramente polemiche come, per esempio, i numerosi aggetti che non si potevano intendere che come incubi sessuali, esasperazioni di tali interpretazioni freudiane". Giuseppe Grosso reiterated his point of view in a press article preserved in the Archivio storico dei Musei Civici as a clipping without a news source, nor a date. Here, he explains that his choice to reject the proposal was not "il frutto dell'invidia delle altre provinciali battute e superate" it was instead "una coerente e soppesata valutazione di ciò che può essere iniziativa culturale del comune". Cf. Grosso, «Perché mi sono opposto alla mostra Guggenheim» 1948.

20 It is interesting to remember that a few months earlier Viale had bought at the Venice Biennale *Dans mon Pays* by Marc Chagall for the GAM (Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea Torino) for Fr. 200,000. Cf. Bazzoni, *Letter to Vittorio Viale* 1948. Later, a Chagall solo exhibition was held in Palazzo Madama in 1953.

him could be easily considered “una mancanza di rispetto al patrimonio artistico torinese, ai sentimenti artistici della popolazione”. Therefore, while he did not want to oppose the deliberation itself, he strongly suggested to have the collection showcased in one of the pavilions in Parco del Valentino or in the underground gallery in Via Roma.²¹ The intervention of Roberto Cravero, PLI (Partito Liberale Italiano), is a special case: the councillor, in fact, to avoid criticising the collection itself decided to read some excerpts taken from an unspecified text by Salvador Dalì, in which he explained that his father had wanted to kill him after he had discovered his “bizzarrie”. Cravero also brought to the councillors’ attention some journals so that they could make an informed decision regarding the ‘appropriateness’ of the exhibition. Through such peculiar behaviour he believed to have expressed “meglio che col proprio pensiero un giudizio sull’opportunità della mostra, lasciando arbitro il Consiglio”. In one of the shortest interventions of the session Assessor Luigi Bruzzone, PSI (Partito Socialista Italiano), asked rhetorically if such an exhibition could really be beneficial to the people, since, as he understood, “queste manifestazioni non [parlavano] né al cuore, né al cervello”. He also thought that, due to its “carattere enimmistico”, recovering the expenses would be very difficult. After four strongly critical interventions it was PCI Assessor Danilo Giorsetti’s turn. He tried to explain that Guggenheim’s collection was to be judged not upon aesthetic criteria, but as a “documentario storico”. He also added that “rifiutare, con giudizi aprioristici, di esporre al pubblico la collezione, rifiutare di far conoscere determinate correnti artistiche, è indice di quella stessa mentalità che 70 anni or sono, ha fatto sì che si rifiutassero le esposizioni degli Impressionisti nei Salons parigini”. Bringing this collection to Turin would not endanger the morality of young people and above all it could set Turin free from “quel carattere provinciale da tanti deprecato”.²² Right after Giorsetti’s intervention, Andrea Guglielminetti (DC) took the floor to dispute Chiarloni’s claim that this exhibition was an “espressione di estrema sinistra”.²³ It is the Former PCI Mayor Celeste Negarville, to answer to Guglielminetti’s political insinuation, explaining that “la questione non impegn[ava] i gruppi alla disciplina di partito”. However, he generally

21 He also asked Attilio Aloisi and Danilo Giorsetti to give a conference about the collection, in order to help all the councillors to finally understand its supposed importance.

22 In his intervention Assessor Giorsetti also pointed out that recovering from the expenses, finding 5,500 visitors, would not be difficult, and as a proof of that he mentioned the interest concerning the exhibition that had risen in both the Municipal and Town Council. It is useful to mention that the Ente Provinciale del Turismo had agreed to allocate L. 150,000 to co-organise the exhibition. Cf. *Letter to Vittorio Viale* 1948.

23 No proof of such a statement in Chiarloni’s intervention has been found in the documents preserved in the Archivio Storico della Città di Torino.

agreed that it was not right to have such an exhibition, where “la stragrande maggioranza delle 160 opere soffoca quel poco che vi è di buono”, organised by the municipal institutions.²⁴ The last and conclusive intervention was that of Assessor Attilio Aloisi who firstly admitted to not having the necessary expertise but added that he was willing to learn and not simply “stroncare immediatamente”. Afterward, he sarcastically complimented his colleagues who were able to investigate the collection in order to discuss about it with full knowledge of the facts. In his opinion a lot of citizens would like to visit such works “per interpretarl[i] con spirito serio, sereno e non polemico”, contrary to what happened in that occasion, when “da tante parti si sono levate voci così severe contro questa mostra”, that nonetheless would have had a more than national interest. However, before his conclusion, he once again tried to explain that he wanted to have an exhibition of Peggy Guggenheim’s collection taking place in Turin, so as to not let the city fall in its usual ‘provincialism’ considering that such topics were being discussed all over the world. That was the reason why he would have liked to debate again concerning this matter, but with very different feelings, since an exhibition cannot be offensive, but severe judgements definitively could. Therefore, the extraordinary session ended with Aloisi withdrawing his proposal and finally obtaining the approval of all the councillors.²⁵

On 19 December, Viale wrote to Peggy Guggenheim “con molto dispiacere e con viva mortificazione” to tell her that for the moment

²⁴ He also said that the collection would have given “un contributo negativo” and he agreed with Bruzzone about considering it an incomprehensible form of art, “il linguaggio di una setta di iniziati”.

²⁵ The next day, such news was of course reported in the newspapers. For example, in *La Nuova Stampa* a journalist summarised the entire debate, highlighting that in the previous days the Municipal Council was already going through a crisis due to the supposed resignation of a socialist assessor. He amusingly described what he called “un piacevole intermezzo di carattere artistico”. He mentioned Cravero showcasing the painting belonging to Peggy Guggenheim *Nascita dei piaceri liquidi* by Dali, to whose sight two councillors “sarebbero arrossite pudicamente” while among those presents “si diffonde[va] una risata irrefrenabile”. The reporter also specified that when Aloisi decided to withdraw the proposal “i consiglieri si applau[di]rono a vicenda con grande calore”. Cf. «Ai nostri consiglieri comunali non piace la pittura moderna. Tornato il sindaco si parlerà della crisi in seno alla Giunta», 1948. This episode is also mentioned in «Voci di Crisi nella Giunta Comunale. Parere contrario per la mostra a Torino della raccolta d'arte moderna Guggenheim», 1948. Marziano Bernardi returned on this topic on 30 December in an article in which he presented a little exhibition of “briose fantasie pittoriche” made by Aloisi, who “con la sua proposta di portare a Torino la collezione Guggenheim scatenò recentemente al consiglio comunale quel putiferio che i bravi consiglieri avrebbero fatto meglio a contenere nei limiti d'una discussione amministrativa, anziché entrare in questioni d'estetica e di cultura artistica nelle quali evidentemente sono meno edotti”. Cf. Bernardi M. (1948), «Mostre d'Arte. Una 'Via crucis' - Maschere - Al Circolo degli Artisti - Antichità». Aloisi's experience as a painter was also mentioned by Aloisi himself in his intervention, when he declared not to be an “estremista”, nor a “cubista”, but an “espressionista”.

the exhibition had to be suspended. He explained that the deliberation, which was "ispirata ad alte considerazioni di indole artistica e culturale, che tenevano conto unicamente dell'importanza e della significazione della Sua raccolta", had been rejected by the councillors. He did not mince words to explain that the decision was taken according to a merely political, "illogico criterio", following "una condanna dell'arte astratta che sarebbe stata emanata di recente".²⁶ The political reason behind this rejection is also clearly mentioned by Viale in a Letter to Romolo Bazzoni, managing director of the Biennale: "Riservatissimamente Le posso dire che determinante è stato l'intervento contrario di uno degli autorevoli membri dell'Amministrazione comunista,²⁷ che aveva forse presente una recente condanna dell'arte astratta. - E quando c'entrano dei motivi politici Lei lo sa che non c'è niente da fare".²⁸ Three days later, when the echo of such news finally reached the lagoon, Carrain wrote to Viale to thank him once again for his commitment to the project and to end "malinconicamente" any communications concerning "questa raccolta tanto avversata".²⁹

26 Viale, *Letter to Peggy Guggenheim* 1948. However, he ended his letter presenting the option of organising the exhibition in the future and in a different venue. Ironically, not knowing the outcome of the debate and not having received yet Viale's last letter, on 20 December Guggenheim wrote to Viale a short letter in which she gave him the latest instructions concerning how to unpack the works, to give an example: "Vorrei raccomandarle a scanso di errate interpretazioni, come successo a Venezia, che nel disimballare la scultura mobile in ferro di 'Calder' qualche addetto all'operazione non la scambi per rottami di ferro od oggetti d'imbballaggio". Cf. Guggenheim, *Letter to Vittorio Viale* 1948.

27 This information is only partially true: please note once again that Attilio Aloisi, the main promoter of the deliberation, was a member of the PCI, such as Danilo Giorsetti, its main defender, while Giuseppe Grosso the first councillor to oppose it was a member of DC.

28 Viale, *Letter to Romolo Bazzoni* 1948

29 Carrain, *Letter to Vittorio Viale* 1948. In the post-scriptum Carrain asked Viale to explain to them in more detail what happened during the debate, since - he says -: "dopo le irrefrenabili risate dei Sigg. consiglieri vorremmo a nostra volta divertirvi un po' alle uscite di una giunta di tanto senno e di tanta cultura estetica". Viale tried to mitigate these impressions on 3 January writing to Carrain to explain how the reporters had misrepresented the interventions and that what was being discussed wasn't art, nor aesthetics, but only "ragioni politiche [...] e contrasti interni e locali, per i quali possiamo essere dolenti noi torinesi; ma che debbono invece far sorridere Mrs. Guggenheim e ogni intenditore". Cf. Viale, *Letter to Vittorio Carrain* 1949. In this letter the director also asked that they accept the new proposal which a different unspecified institution in Turin would soon make: in fact, having received such a promotion the exhibition would certainly be a great success. As can be read in the letter that Carrain sent to Turin 7 January, the collection would not have been showcased in a different venue of Turin, but in La Strozzi, Florence. Cf. Carrain, *Letter to Vittorio Viale*, 1949. The exhibition was held precisely in order to inaugurate the new exhibition space. Cf. Savonuzzi, *Letter to Vittorio Viale* 1949.

Turin had to wait until 1975 to host the collection of Peggy Guggenheim: the exhibition was held in the GAM from 3 December 1975 to 29 February 1976³⁰. In the catalogue, at the end of her introduction, Peggy Guggenheim recalls this episode:

Anni addietro mi chiesero di prestare i quadri della mia collezione per una mostra da allestire a Torino. Ma questo progetto non si realizzò e ora, nel momento in cui la mostra si apre, io sono davvero molto felice che la città di Torino abbia deciso di ospitare la mia collezione. (Guggenheim 1975)

4 Conclusions

There is not much more to say in order to comment further on this episode, an event that is certainly of secondary importance in the national cultural panorama. However, it nonetheless exemplifies how politics - powers - can have a voice in matters of art. It is necessary to consider that at the time Italy was trying, in different ways, to make up for the time lost during the Ventennio and World War II, and that as we have seen, artists are always ahead of their time when compared to their contemporary institutions. What emerges clearly in this story is that it shows once again how often to deny something is more significant than to simply accept it. This brings us to reflect upon an issue as old as time: behind who does the real power hide, censorship or the censored?

30 Turin's Mayor Diego Novelli, Assessor for Culture Giorgio Balmas, Ezio Gribaudo and, of course, Peggy Guggenheim made up the Organising Committee.

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