

PRESS RELEASE

CORRADO CAGLI **1910-1976**

1 place du Louvre
75001 Paris

23rd of January – 22nd of February 2024

With spaces in London, Monaco, and Paris, the MORETTI FINE ART gallery specializes in Italian painting. It is honored to collaborate with GIAN ENZO SPERONE, gallerist and specialist in modern and contemporary art, to present their new exhibition, *Corrado Cagli, 1910 - 1976*, which will take place in its Parisian space from January 23 to February 22, 2024.

Biography of the artist:

Corrado Cagli is born in Ancona on January 23rd, 1910. His family moves to Rome five years later, where he studies painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome. He is a precocious talent, carrying out his first major decorative projects in 1927.

It's from 1930 that Cagli begins to establish itself on the Roman artistic scene, with an exhibition at the *Galleria di Roma* in April 1932, the decoration of the vestibule of the *Milan Triennale*, and the founding of the New Roman School of painting with Giuseppe Capogrossi (1900 – 1972) and Emanuele Cavalli (1904-1981). This movement has its origins in Cagli's manifesto, *Muri ai pittori*, published in *Quadrante* in 1933, where he proclaimed the necessity of the communion of the arts through the collaboration between painters, sculptors and architects, as well as a return to a figurative purity inspired by 15th century painters, such as Paolo Uccello (1397 – 1475), and Piero della Francesca (1412 – 1492).¹

During this time Cagli participates in many large-scale public decorative projects in Italy. We can cite in particular the polychrome decoration made of Venetian glass of the zodiac fountain of Terni, the set of wall panels representing the sanitation of the Pontine marshes for the *Quadrennial of national art* in Rome, and the two mural paintings for what is today the National Dance Academy.

The event which will mark this period of intense work, however, will be the monographic exhibition of drawings by the artist at the gallery *La Cometa*. Founded by Mimì Pecci-Blunt (1885 – 1971) and under the direction of Libero de Libero, (1903 – 1981) the gallery is very well established as an exhibition center and publishing house with no less than thirty-six exhibitions in Rome during its three years of activity from 1935 to 1938, also settling in New York in 1937. The gallery played an important role in the cultural diffusion of the *Novecento* movement, which

¹ A. Cagli, 'Muri ai pittori', *Quadrante*, 1, 1, May 1933, cited in V. Prestini, 'Corrado Cagli. A Biography', *Cagli, 1947-1949*, exhibition catalogue, Rome, Antichità Alberto di Castro, 20 March 2023 – 5 May 2023, p. 20.

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advocated for the purity of form, the harmony of composition and a return to the antique, through the exhibition of painters such as Giorgio de Chirico (1888 – 1978), Gino Severini (1883 – 1966), and Felice Casorati (1883 – 1963).

Despite his participation in numerous large-scale decorative projects sanctioned and praised by the party of Benito Mussolini (1883 – 1945) dating as far back as 1927, his desire for a more poetic lyricism disagrees with fascist ideals, and his expressive freedom unbound by rhetoric leads him to finally be attacked by the censors.² Following the proclamation of the racial laws of 1938, Cagli leaves Italy. He moves to Paris then New York, where he begins exhibiting with the Julien Levy gallery. Between 1939 and 1943, the artist is the subject of several important American monographic exhibitions, notably at the Civic Center Museum in San Francisco, at the Shaeffer Gallery in Los Angeles, and at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford.

He joins the American army in 1943, participating in D-Day and the liberation of the Buchenwald concentration camp, an event which would have a marked effect on his work and would inspire a series of poignant drawings recounting his experiences.



Fig. 1: Corrado Cagli, *Diogene*, 1949, oil on paper laid on canvas, 132 x 86 cm.

Upon his return to Italy in 1948, Cagli pushes his research in many new directions simultaneously, developing an artistic practice built around experimentation in areas such as neo-metaphysics and cubism, through which he develops a lyrical abstraction uniting calligraphy and materiality, linking his work to the trend of *Art informel* that dominates post-war Europe.

However, he does not stop his activity as a scenographer and costume designer, an important facet of his work which dates back to his American period, during which he collaborates with Lincoln Kirstein (1907 – 1996) and George Balanchine (1904 – 1983) to create The Ballet Society, now the New York City Ballet. Amongst many others, he participates in the production of *Tancredi* by Gioacchino Rossini (1792 – 1868) in 1952, the production of *Estri* by Goffredo Petrassi (1904 – 2003) in 1968 and in 1970 in the interpretation of *Perséphone* by Igor Stravinsky (1882 – 1971).

Corrado Cagli dies on March 28, 1976, leaving behind a rich and varied body of work, where we see the evolution of a sensitive artistic spirit that responded in a deeply personal way to the great historical, scientific, and artistic events of his time.

² G. Marchiori, 'Magi di Cagli', *La civiltà delle macchine*, 1963, pp. 37 – 46, cited in V. Prestini, 'Corrado Cagli. A Biography', *Cagli, 1947-1949*, exhibition catalogue, Rome, Antichità Alberto di Castro, 20 mars 2023 – 5 mai 2023, p. 21.

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Description of the exhibition:

The Moretti gallery is honored to present a unique body of work by the artist dating between 1949 and 1959, a key period in the artist's production where he developed a non-figurative practice built around pictorial experimentation centered around the themes of metaphysics and mathematics.

The year 1949 is significant because it marks the beginning of the artist's formal research in the field of the fourth dimension through geometry and mathematics. It was during that year that the artist produced his series of 'four-dimensional' works, which were then exhibited at the *Galleria del Secolo*.³ His interest in mathematics dates back to the 1940s however, thanks to his brother-in-law, the mathematician Oscar Zariski (1899 – 1986), who deeply influenced him in his research on non-Euclidean geometry. *Diogene* (fig. 1), which is part of the group exhibited at the *Galleria del Secolo* and inspired by the research of the mathematician Paul Samuel Donchian (1895 – 1967), opens the exhibition at the Moretti gallery and alludes to the card of the hermit of the *Jeu de Marseille*, created by Max Ernst (1891 – 1976) and Herold Blumer (1910 – 1987) between 1940 and 1941.⁴



Fig. 2: Corrado Cagli, *Adamoli's Bay*, 1950, oil on canvas, 60 x 90 cm.

Another key element in the artist's practice during this period is his work on the repeated motif acting as an automatic trace. This takes shape through the printing of objects on paper, as well as the use of airbrushing with wire mesh, embroidery, and rattan as stencils. This practice, born from Surrealist automatism, allows for chance, as well as the unconscious, in the creative process. We can see in these works, such as *Adamoli's Bay*, 1950, (fig. 2), the traces left by physical and tangible objects, which despite being difficult to identify, become an obstacle through their physical presence on the paper, thus allowing negative spaces to be superimposed without blurring or mixing.

The exhibition ends with late works from this period; his *Carte* cycle exhibited at the *Galleria il Segno* in Rome, on which Cagli worked between 1958 and 1959. Through his use of the airbrush, and as we can see in *I Crociati*, 1959, (fig. 3) Cagli pushes and redefines the limit between material and pictorial surface, thus blurring the distinction between figuration and abstraction, and in doing so reacting to the *Art informel* movement, such as the tachism of the New School of Paris, and its strong emphasis on the materiality of the surface.

³ Y. Tagliacozzo, 'In the Wake of the Great Names', *Cagli, 1947-1949*, Exhibition catalogue, Rome, Antichità Alberto di Castro, 20 mars 2023 – 5 mai 2023, p. 15.

⁴ V. Prestini, 'Corrado Cagli. A Biography', *Cagli, 1947-1949*, catalogue de l'exposition, Rome, Antichità Alberto di Castro, 20 mars 2023 – 5 mai 2023, p. 28.

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Fig. 3: Corrado Cagli, *I Crociati*, 1959, mixed media, 101,6 x 69,9 cm.

Thus, the body of work presented at the Moretti gallery from January 23rd up until February 22nd presents an incredibly balanced summary of Cagli's artistic research from 1949 to 1959, where the spectator is invited to discover this artist who sums up masterfully, and in a deeply intimate manner, the Italian artistic concerns of the 20th century, and who was, for too long, forgotten by history.

Opening times:

From the 23rd of January until the 22 February 2024,
10:00 – 18:00

Exceptionally open Saturday 27th of January,
Saturday 3rd of February, Saturday 10th of February,
and Saturday 17th of February, 10:00 – 18:00

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