

# **“La Cava. International Outdoor Show of Plastic Arts” Exhibiting Art and Architecture in Monterinaldi, 1955\***

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*Synthesis of the Arts, Exhibitions, André Bloc, Display Device, Sculpture and Architecture*

## **/Abstract**

“La Cava. International outdoor show of plastic arts” was an exhibition hosted at Leonardo Ricci’s studio-house in Monterinaldi in 1955 by the gallerist Fiamma Vigo and Ricci himself. According to the organizers, this event advocates for the search of a communion between the arts with architecture by presenting itself as an isolated experience within the Italian art scene. The aim of this in-depth study is to consider how this initiative was one of a kind by framing it within a larger context in order to understand the specific declination of the concept of the “synthesis of the arts” given by the organizers, the role of the studio-house architecture as a specific display device as well as the role of certain sculptures in relation to their placement within the villa.

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August 29, 1955

Dear Fiamma Vigo, Dear Leonardo Ricci,

I have full faith in you and in your initiative. The unity of painting, sculpture and architecture is the most imperative need in the world of art today, which must be promoted not only in one but several ways. I am very pleased that you are the ones who settled the problem in your own way.

Best wishes for a certainly successful show.

As soon as I finish setting up the congress of art history I will come to visit you.

With love, yours,

Lionello Venturi<sup>1</sup>

The initiative mentioned by the art historian Lionello Venturi is the international outdoor plastic-arts show named “La Cava” held at Leonardo Ricci’s studio-house in Monterinaldi in the hills just above Florence in the fall of 1955. We cannot know for sure if Venturi, who had a frantically busy schedule, actually visited the exhibition for which he shows deep recognition in his letter. Indeed, this event presents itself as an isolated experience within the Italian art scene that insistently advocates for the search for a communion between the arts. The aim of this in-depth study is to consider how this initiative was one of a kind by framing it within a larger context in order to understand the specific declination of the concept of the “synthesis of the arts” given by the organizers, the role of architecture as a specific display device as well as the role of certain sculptures in relation to their placement within the villa.<sup>2</sup>

## Being a Painter to Direct Spaces

Despite his continuous, repeated and long stays in France since 1948, Leonardo Ricci firmly rejected the idea of moving to Paris and opted for staying based in Florence where he had a solid career as an architect. The French capital had enraptured him thanks to its artistic vibrancy but above all it had welcomed, and recognized him as a painter. This was an achievement he cherished since in Italy he was sharing this instinctive passion with a demanding professional activity that in those years received international acclaim as a result of the project of the Flower Market in Pescia he had brought into being with his (architect-painter) colleague, Leonardo Savioli. By contrast, in Paris he had inverted roles and was

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\* Thanks to: Sophie Kottmayer; Gerd Ingrid Olsson Ricci; Clementina Ricci; Ilaria Cattabriga; Annalisa Viatì Navone; Giovanna Uzzani; Dario Borruto; Nadia Verga and Ilaria Sgaravatto (Fondazione Arnaldo Pomodoro, Milano); Giovanni Cappello (Archivio Carmelo Cappello, Milano); Daniela Fattori (Archivio di Stato di Firenze); Elvia Redaelli (Triennale di Milano – Archivi); Henry Moore Foundation.  
If not already in English, the original documents are translated by the author.

1 Letter by Lionello Venturi published in the *La Cava* exhibition catalog, special issue of *Numero*, 1955.

2 Giovanna Uzzani recently addressed this topic as well: Giovanna Uzzani, “Leonardo Ricci, gli artisti e la città. La mostra La Cava nel villaggio di Monterinaldi: un nuovo modello espositivo”, in Mirella Branca, Mauro Cozzi, eds., *Architettura, arti applicate e industrial design negli anni della Ricostruzione postbellica toscana (1944-1966)*, *Quaderni del Cedacot* no. 6 (Pisa: edizioni ETS, 2022): 93-106.

thus a painter first and an architect second. He participated in the “Salon de Mai” in 1950 and 1951, not to mention in a group show of Italian paintings at the Galerie la Boétie. In the French capital he encountered the art of Giacometti, Matisse, Picasso and met Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. As a consequence, his painting embraced the influences of abstract art through a particular declination that soon converted, also thanks to the interceptions just mentioned, into an archetypal and primordial figurativism where the subconscious wins over reason.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, in the spring of 1950, he held a solo show at Galerie Pierre, the legendary studio on rue Bonaparte founded and directed by Pierre Loeb since 1924, who was a supporter of surrealism and its developments with abstract contaminations on an international level.<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Ricci’s exhibition was followed by a focus on the Cobra group (Appel, Balle, Corneille, Jacobsen, Jorn) and two solo shows on Maria Helena Vieira de Silva and Leonora Carrington among others. Ricci’s exhibition was not accompanied by a catalog, but during the vernissage, the painter-architect gave a lecture that was later published in the translated version in the Italian magazine “Architetti” with the title “Confession”.<sup>5</sup> The talk was a cry of hope for the possibilities of painting as an instrument of knowledge and self-analysis: the “rectangle” of the canvas is a filter of the inner world within which one must condense the “acts” of life, the “truths” of the flesh and reality in all its forms. In Paris, the painter Leonardo Ricci gained first-rate positions, so much so that he is mentioned among modern Italian artists in an important monographic issue on Italian art, namely the magazine “Cahiers d’art” by Christian Zervos.<sup>6</sup> Ricci appears alongside Burri, Cagli, Capogrossi, Consagra, Santomaso, Vedova, Prampolini and others, with a work of an ancestral character entitled “the couple” that was published in 1948 and accompanied by a brief biographical note specifying that he began painting at the age of 12. [Fig. 1]

Despite these premises and his skill in handling brushes, Ricci never abandoned architecture. He believed in the possibilities of painting as well as in the mission of architecture. Being forced to choose which art to devote himself to, was therefore an agonizing process he had to go through. Whoever was in two minds about which path to choose in those years could not but have Le Corbusier as mentor. Le Corbusier was a protagonist who better than anyone else had managed to juggle different arts (painting, sculpture and architecture) and who Ricci was lucky enough to meet in Paris. In his book, written “as an architect” in 1962 he recalls:

When I first met him [Le Corbusier] in his studio in Paris, I really believed and hoped that he was right. [...] In those years, the Unité d’habitation in Marseille was coming into being. In front of the drawings and maquettes illustrated in an enthusiastic and at the same time calm style, I was wait-

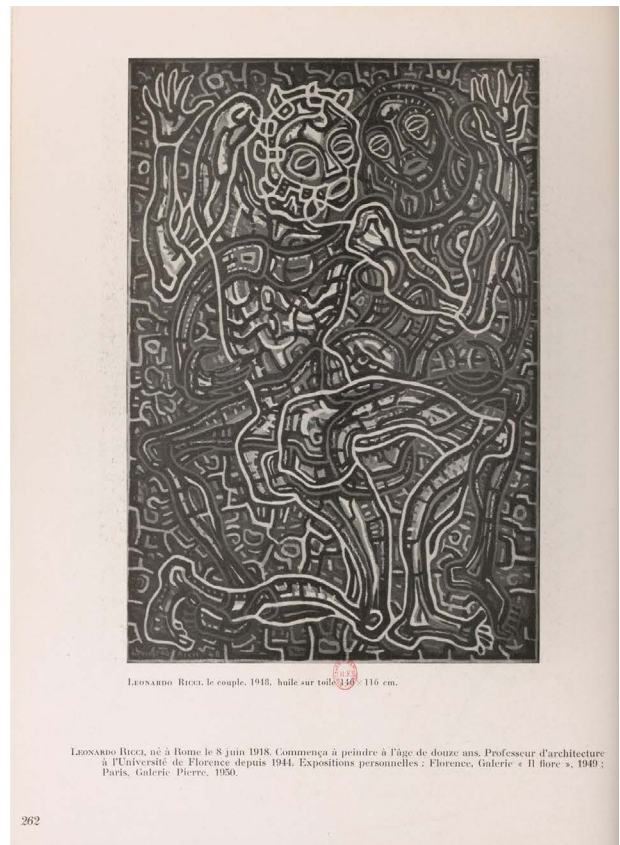
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3 On Leonardo Ricci painter: Giovanna Uzzani, “Leonardo Ricci pittore” / “Leonardo Ricci painter”, in Maria Clara Ghia, Clementina Ricci, Ugo Dattilo, eds., *Leonardo Ricci 100. Scrittura, pittura e architettura. 100 note a margine dell’Anonimo del XX secolo* (Firenze: Didapress, 2019), 128-139/266-271.

4 Ricci’s exhibition took place from April 28 to June 12, 1950.

5 Leonardo Ricci, “Confessione”, *Architetti*, no. 3 (August 1950): 29-31.

6 *Cahiers d’Art*, no. 1 (1950).



1

ing in that house-neighborhood for a positive response of our existence. Everything was included in that building. Nothing neglected. The city was alive. The structure was alive. The material was alive. So were the problems of integration between architecture, sculpture, painting.<sup>7</sup>

According to Ricci (as it had been partially also in Le Corbusier's opinion), painting is a necessary tool for studying human beings and their living space: "then yes, it would be worthwhile to be architects and in this case 'painters,'" Ricci continues after deprecating the tragic working-class neighborhoods of Italian "neorealism" of the 1950s.<sup>8</sup>

However, Le Corbusier produced divergent effects: whereas the Roman painter Piero Dorazio, who was equally struggling to decide which path to take in that same period, decided to become a painter after meeting Le Corbusier, Leonardo Ricci decided to continue being an architect<sup>9</sup>. He later wrote: "After two or three years I was caught in a dilemma. If I had stayed in Paris, I would have had to give up architecture, and because it seemed to me that architecture had stronger social implications than painting, I went back to Florence. I started again with my house on the hill

7 Leonardo Ricci, *Anonymous (20th Century)* (New York: George Braziller, 1962), ed. it., *Anonimo del XX secolo* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1965), 89.

8 Ricci, *Anonimo del XX secolo*, 130.

9 When mentioning Piero Dorazio's "crisis", I refer to: Stefano Setti, *Cemento vs. colore. Il percorso di Piero Dorazio dall'architettura alla sintesi delle arti*, in Francesco Tedeschi, ed., *Piero Dorazio. Fantasia, colore, progetto* (Milano: Electa, 2021), 174-189.

Fig. 1  
Cahiers d'Art, no. 1, Paris 1950.





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project”.<sup>10</sup> In 1948, when he began his trips to the French capital, he bought a piece of land just outside Florence, where the following year he began to design his home studio with a living room space-atelier where he could paint for the following years to come. [Fig. 2] Between 1950 and 1953 he exhibited his works in Florence, held a solo show in Milan at the Bompiani Gallery (at the time directed by Guido Le Noci, a great supporter of international abstraction as well as future director of the Apollinaire Gallery) and at the Landau Gallery in Los Angeles.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the need to unite these two disciplines persisted in Ricci’s thoughts. It can be identified as a common pursuit that reflects a recurring topic of the 1950s. Indeed, the new international geopolitical arrangements had made it possible to rethink the figure of the artist and his social role regardless of specializations. It proved to be a relief for Ricci, who chose to remain an architect in the disguise of a painter.

### The Theatre of the City: Art and Architecture in Florence

In 1942, Leonardo Ricci graduated in architecture under Giovanni Michelucci as his mentor, submitting a thesis entitled “Closed Theater and Open-Air

<sup>10</sup> Ricci’s quotation in Antonio Nardi, ed., *Leonardo Ricci: testi, opere, sette progetti recenti di Leonardo Ricci* (Pistoia: Edizioni del Comune di Pistoia, Italia Grafiche, 1984), 31.

<sup>11</sup> The various reviews of his activity as a painter are collected in the “Giornali di Bordo”, Casa Studio Ricci. The so-called “Giornali di bordo”, as Ricci called them, are albums-logbooks in which Leonardo Ricci’s first wife Angela Poggi collected articles, photographs and documents about her husband’s activities.

Fig. 2

Ricci’s atelier in his Studio-house in Monterinaldi.

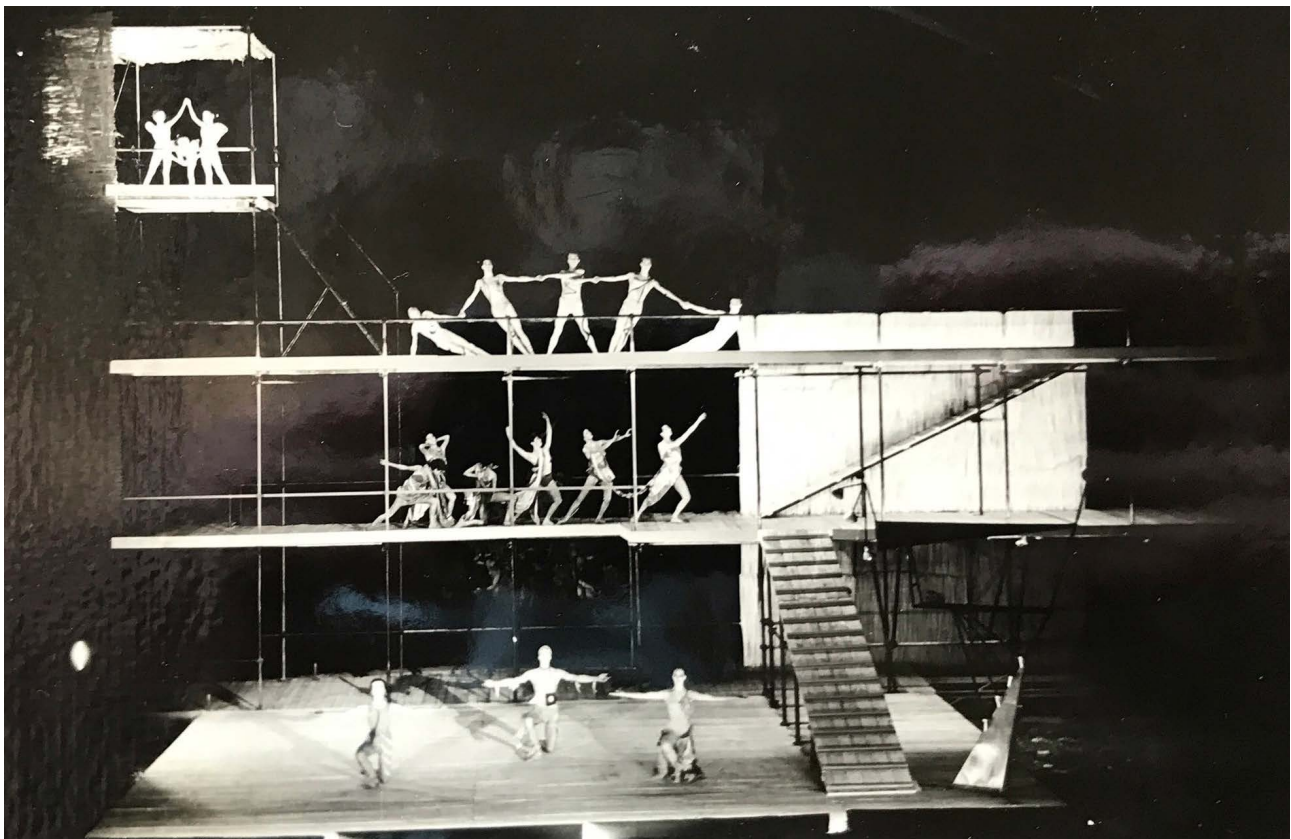


Fig. 3  
Set design and costumes by Ricci for the ballet "Il filo errante", Giardini di Boboli, Firenze 1953. Casa Studio Ricci.

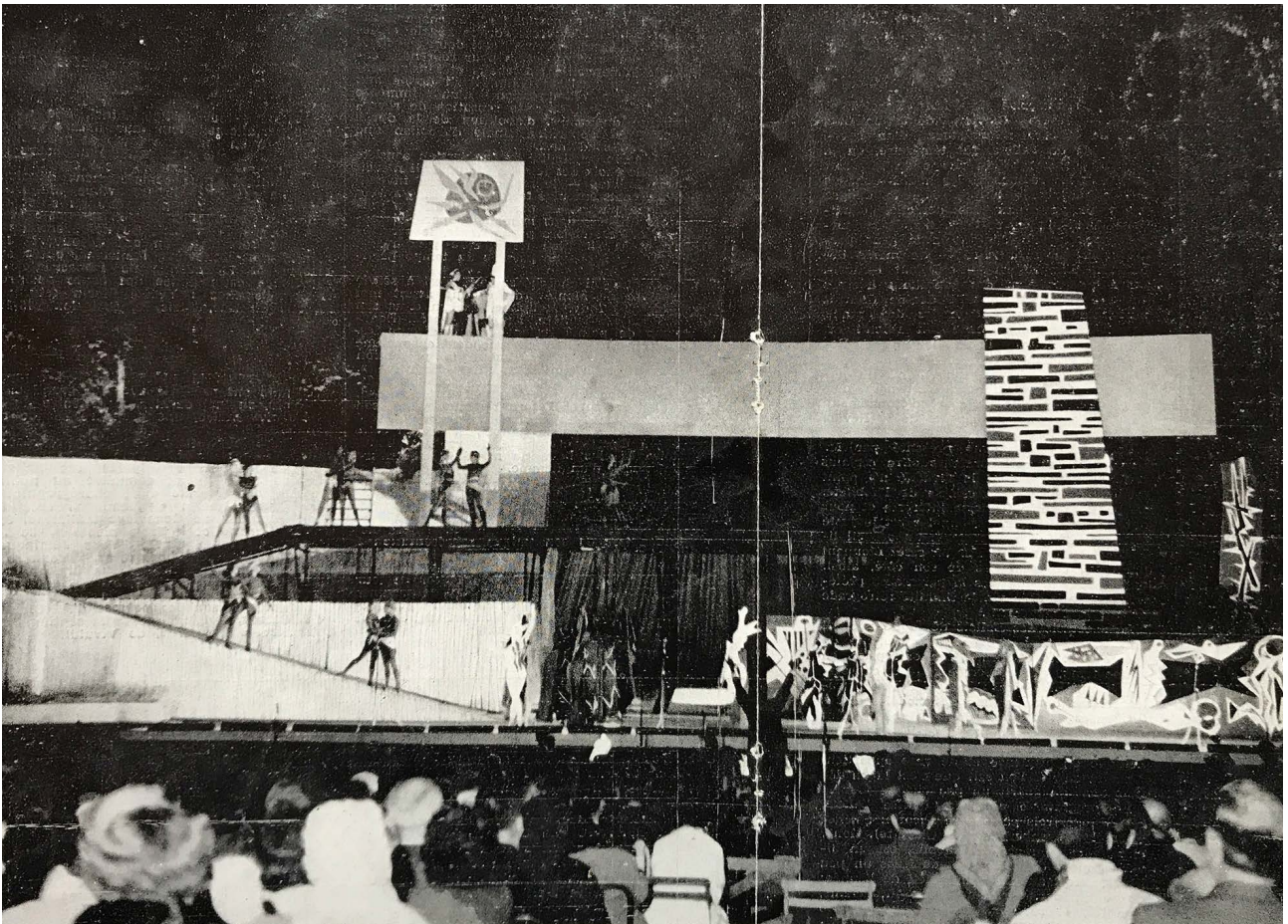
Theater", which was a subject of constant interest to both of them.<sup>12</sup> In 1953, he supervised the set design, costumes and lighting for the ballet "Il filo errante" staged for the VI Italian High Fashion Show at the Giardini di Boboli in Florence, with music by Luigi Dalla Piccola and choreography by Grant Muradoff. [Fig. 3] He wrote:

With the advantage of being in the open air, the stage becomes a living element inserted in nature and creates new dimensions in space. Moreover, the stage is built with superimposed elements, which give a greater impression of depth and width. Because of this, the actors can move on different levels making it possible for them to do away with the three-dimensional element of the ordinary stage and create a four dimensional atmosphere [...] I have tried to make a sketch of the lighting. What



12 The subject was familiar to Michelucci who, in 1942, saw his project of an "Open Air Theater" at E42 in Rome come to a halt: Claudia Conforti, *Teatro all'aperto per l'E42. Roma, 1938-42*, in Claudia Conforti, Roberto Dulio, Marzia Marandola, *Giovanni Michelucci 1891-1990* (Milano: Electa, 2006), 176-178.





4

I had in mind was something like pure music creating light effects in the space. I hold that with more appropriate means one could attain a keyboard from this elementary solution. Instead of sound, colored lights would come out of it.<sup>13</sup>

The structure is conceived as a “living element,” like a construction site with differentiated heights and dimensions not at least through the use of stairs to emphasize the “four-dimensional atmosphere” generated by the dancers’ movement.

Ricci curated the set design for Monteverdi’s “Orfeo” in Aix-les-Bains again in the summer of 1955. In France, as we can read in the press, he is remembered first as a painter and then as an architect, so he was invited as decorator and set designer for said occasion.<sup>14</sup> [Fig. 4] For the journal “Le progrès”, Henry Planche interviewed Ricci in his house-studio in Monterinaldi that had been completed just a few years before. Planche was impressed by the absolute freedom of the place and wrote that the only present conformist element was the whiskey.<sup>15</sup> Even the design of “Orfeo” is conceived on the movement of the actors within a space, set on planes placed at different heights that insist on horizontal and vertical directions - like the grammar of his house-studio - obtained through

13 From the event brochure in English now in “Giornali di Bordo”, Casa Studio Ricci.

14 The various reviews are collected in the “Giornali di Bordo”, Casa Studio Ricci.

15 Henry Planche, “Leonardo Ricci prepare le festival D’Aix-les-Bains”, in *Le Progrès* (June 4, 1955). Now in “Giornali di Bordo”, Casa Studio Ricci.

Fig. 4

Set design by Ricci for Monteverdi’s “Orfeo”, Aix-les-Bains 1955, Casa Studio Ricci.



decorations conceived and made by Ricci himself.

As already mentioned, in the early 1950s Ricci, as a painter, had the opportunity to exhibit in Florence and, among other shows, in 1951 he took part in a group exhibition within the Florentine space of the well-known gallerist-painter Fiamma Vigo.<sup>16</sup> This *sui generis* gallery had the same name as the magazine that Vigo had founded with the architect Alberto Sartoris. They chose to name both “Numero”. Although directed by personalities from different cultures (Sartoris was a leading figure of European functionalism, while Vigo was an eclectic intellectual interested in different aspects of art), they both agreed on the promotion of abstract art and on the transversal potential of this language. They adopted a not obvious international openness and engaged with first-rate collaborators.<sup>17</sup> Under the auspices of these precepts, “Numero” organized an international congress of “Avant-Garde Art in Contemporary Life” in December 1951 as an alliance of painters and architects in “defence of the achievements of the plastic arts and modern architecture,” as we read in the records.<sup>18</sup> A mixed group participated including the architect Giovanni Michelucci and the painters Atanasio Soldati, Achille Perilli, Gualtiero Nativi, Mario Nigro, Piero Dorazio, and even Fiamma Vigo. [Fig.

5] The contributors transmit their vision based on the need to seek “plastic-aesthetic affinities between painters and sculptors following abstract and concrete tendencies”. In opposition to the law of 2% “residue of tradition and liberty style in Italian architecture”, they proposed for art and architecture alike investigations into color, form, and materials, thus decrying the lack of specialized events and publications that would welcome these new directions of plastic research. Yet



5

16 1ª Mostra d'Arte in vetrina del giornale Numero, edited by Unione Generale dei Commercianti di Firenze, Firenze, negozi di via Tornabuoni (May 7-12, 1951).

17 On the activities of the Magazine and Gallery “Numero”: Rosalia Manno Tolu, Maria Grazia Messina, eds., *Fiamma Vigo e “numero”. Una vita per l’arte* (Firenze: Centro Di, 2003). See also: Caterina Toschi, *La promozione di Fiamma Vigo: presenze e assenze toscane alla Biennale di Venezia (1951-1970)*, in Flavio Fergonzi, ed., *Presenze toscane alla Biennale Internazionale d’Arte di Venezia* (Milano: Skira, 2017), 105-131.

18 Piero Dorazio Archive, Milan: typescript of “Congresso di pittori e architetti”, Florence, December 28-29, 1951. Like all conferences devoted to the theme of the relationship between the arts, also this appointment highlights a great difficulty in dealing with the topic. A report of the various speeches is presented by Alberto Sartoris and Giusta Nicco Fasola in *Numero* (December 1951 – January 1952): 1-3.

Fig. 5  
Poster for the international congress “Avant-Garde Art in Contemporary Life” organized by *Numero*, Florence, December 28-29, 1951. Poster design by Oreste Borri. Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Fondo Fiamma Vigo.

in 1953, the magazine "Numero" organized a survey among Italian and French architects accompanied by a questionnaire asking how a new idea of synthesis of the arts could be conceived.<sup>19</sup> Among others, the questioned architects are Giovanni Michelucci, Ludovico Quaroni, Ico and Luisa Parisi, Franco Albini, Figini and Pollini, André Sive, André Wogenscky, and Claude Parent. What could be deduced from the answers was how the "artificial" decoration was averted since the plastic elements of the architecture already constituted a whole sculptural and pictorial value. In these years, for several interpreters, maintaining specializations was the only solution to the dilemma of unity of the arts, which needed new spaces and no more walls. Ricci himself claimed the need to return to easel painting, which is emblematic of the bourgeois conception of the artist but "free" and autonomous from certain operative practices that are typical for the historical avant-garde orientedness on a hierarchy of the arts.

Although Ricci led a rather secluded intellectual life, the city of Florence was the scene of a new artistic "Renaissance" at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s, that had recently been recognized as a "Bauhaus on the banks of the Arno."<sup>20</sup> The Florentine abstractionists of the "Arte d'oggi" group (1947) and then of "Astrattismo classico" (1950), which included painters such as Vinicio Berti, Bruno Brunetti, Alvaro Monnini, Gualtiero Nativi and Mario Nuti among others, reinterpreted Marxist theories on the sociality of art through the preservation of the autonomy of their work. Thanks to the city's typical craft heritage, the art-life relationship took on a more concrete measurability. In addition to appearing on several occasions within the magazine, a good part of these artists gravitate around the "Numero" gallery, which in these years offers an intense and diversified exhibition activity. Fiamma Vigo established some important axes. On the one hand, we have the one from Florence to Rome, thanks to the contribution of the Roman artists of the Age d'Or group and on the other hand, there is the one between Florence, Milan and Paris, taking advantage of the expansionist aims of MAC (Movimento Arte Concreta), which had been twinned with the French Groupe Espace since 1954. The "Numero" Gallery was an outsider to the canonical rules of the market that distinguished the more prominent galleries. To meet the artists' needs who demanded to move out of the boundaries of their ateliers, Fiamma Vigo supported experimental actions that went beyond the gallery space. She promoted new ways of fruition in close relation to the social and urban context as an unprecedented artistic setting.

In 1953, the magazine "Numero" published a long contribution by Leonardo Ricci entitled "Painting as Language" in which some "instinctive" aspects of his creative process are emphasized. The text is accompanied by images of some of his sets, some of his paintings and architectures including the very recent house-studio in Monterinaldi that represents a perfect synthesis of his research.

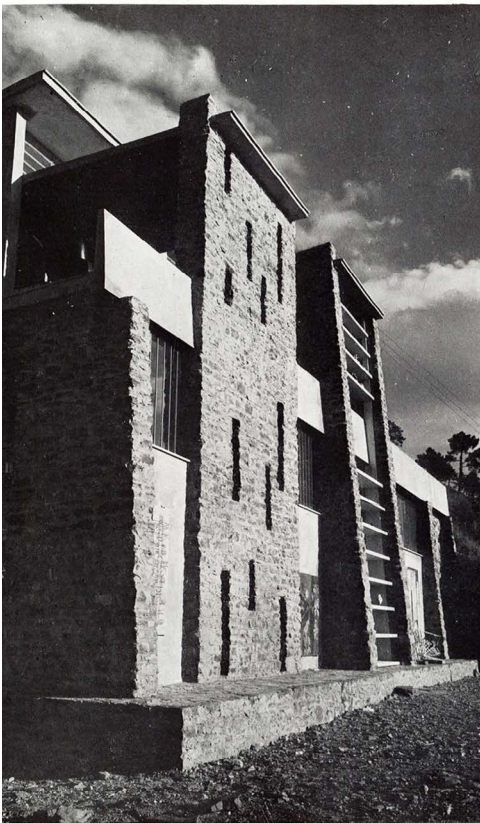
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19 "Un'inchiesta", in *Numero*, Special issue dedicated to Benedetto Croce and contemporary Italian and French architecture (January-March 1953): 15-25.

20 Kevin McManus, *Astrattismo Classico. Un'esperienza concretista a Firenze* (Milano: Electa, 2022), 140-186.

## Habitation près de Florence

Leonardo Ricci, architecte.



Photos Talani

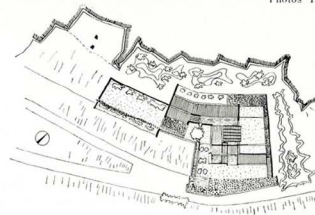
L'architecte a construit sa maison à partir de deux considérations de base :

— la manière de vivre de sa famille ;  
— la situation même de la construction sur un terrain de roches et de carrières, dans un paysage merveilleux, sur l'une des collines qui, dominant Florence, permet de découvrir un très beau panorama sur la ville.

Le but était de créer un cadre pour qu'à la vie puisse se dérouler dans l'intimité des êtres et des choses, la maison s'intégrant aussi parfaitement que possible dans le paysage.

Ne pouvant concevoir qu'à certaines heures de la journée il y ait des « zones mortes » dans sa maison, l'architecte a créé un ensemble unique dans lequel les espaces, s'interpénétrant, sont conçus de façon à suggérer à chacun une fonction déterminée.

En ce qui concerne les matériaux, il a utilisé ceux qu'il pouvait avoir le plus facilement et les plus économiques : pierre, béton armé, fer et verre. Ricci pense, en effet, que l'expression moderne ne découle pas seulement de l'emploi de matériaux nouveaux et riches, mais de la manière dont on les utilise. D'autre part, se maintenir dans des limites de prix assez étroites lui paraît indispensable à notre époque.



Where do I begin? I start with the search for the other. I study the other. I try to get in touch with them directly and away from conventions. First of all, I am interested in women. They are the first 'other' for me. Then men, children, animals, the sun, the moon and so on. All those things that, despite everything, have remained at the foundation, the ones that had already been there when man appeared on earth.<sup>21</sup>

### The Stage: the Home-Studio in Monterinaldi as an Artistic Device

Cohabitation, knowledge exchange and, above all, community integration are at the core of the design of the Monterinaldi village. The genesis of the neighborhood is long and complex. After buying part of the land, Ricci began designing his house-studio in 1949. [Fig. 6] This first establishment became

Fig. 6

"Habitation près de Florence" in *Aujourd'hui, art et architecture*, no. 5, 1955. Leonardo Ricci's Studio-house, Monterinaldi and detail of the quarry as an integral part of the architecture.

<sup>21</sup> Leonardo Ricci, "La pittura come linguaggio" (from a lecture given at the Brooklyn University NY, in 1952), *Numero*, no. 6, (November-December 1953): 17-19.





7

the prototype for subsequent architectures and community services that would be built in the village.<sup>22</sup> Until 1962, still under his supervision, the hill located along Via Bolognese Nuova, would in fact be “populated” by other single-family houses. [Fig. 7] Despite his efforts to create outdoor spaces without “boundaries” and separations to stimulate exchanges, as well as “living” architectures that could always be modified according to individual needs, the experiment did not have the desired outcome even though artists including the sculptor Pierluca degli Innocenti, the painter Romola Bellandi and the ceramist Marcello Fantoni chose to live there. Ricci intended for this neighborhood to become a sort of colony of artists and intellectuals like in Darmstadt.<sup>23</sup> The idea behind the German colony (1901), with buildings and houses designed by Joseph Maria Olbrich and Peter Behrens, was to elevate everyday life to an aesthetic experience: from painting to decoration, from decoration to object, from object to architecture, from architecture to environment and from environment to behavior. It was supposed to achieve the most complete result through the concept of the synthesis of the arts. The theory behind it is that the home represents the ideal place for the fusion between art

22 Ricci, *Anonimo del XX secolo*, 150. Concerning the copious secondary literature, I'd simply like to highlight: Chiara Baglione, “Leonardo Ricci: le case di Monterinaldi”, *Casabella*, no. 669 (July-August 1999): 47-61; Corinna Vasić Vatovec, *Leonardo Ricci. Architetto “esistenzialista”* (Firenze: Edifir, 2005), 97-116; Michele Costanzo, *Leonardo Ricci e l'idea di spazio comunitario* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2009), 25-28; Maria Clara Chia, *La nostra città è tutta la terra. Leonardo Ricci architetto (1918-1994)* (Wuppertal: Steinhäuser Verlag, 2021), 77-95.

23 Antonella Greco, *Riflessioni su Ricci, scrittore architetto artista*, in *Leonardo Ricci 100*, 15.

Fig. 7  
Village of Monterinaldi, late  
Fifties.



and life. It is thus the perfect “frame” for the success of the “Total Work of Art” that takes its starting point from theatrical and procedural premises in which interior and exterior spaces play a key role as they are shaped and designed starting from the movement of the inhabitants’ body and their expressive and sentimental needs.<sup>24</sup>

In these terms, the parallel with Monterinaldi works perfectly with the substantial difference that Ricci does not aspire to connect to an aesthetic dimension. His idea of architecture starts from nature to meet the basic needs of the inhabitant, which are very simple and common to the savage, the modern man and the man of the future. In fact, the neighborhood has been renamed as “Village of the Martians”. “A ‘modern’ house is basically just a house that contains the whole history of man,” writes Ricci.<sup>25</sup> One could speak of “the beginning of architecture,” or “the beginning of art,” as Giedion would have preferred. In his book, “The eternal present”, Giedion speaks of the primitive cave precisely as an immeasurable and changeable space. In other words, it is a pre-architectural space par excellence shaped by nature itself.<sup>26</sup> It is not by chance that Ricci was convinced that Leonardo da Vinci, the protagonist of the Italian Renaissance who blended architecture and nature, had long been going to the hill of Monterinaldi.<sup>27</sup>

The first establishment built is the house-studio that Ricci designed for himself and his family. It is a real organism that emerges and takes its impetus from two abandoned stone caves that have become an integral part of the architecture, both spatially and materially. [Fig. 6] The conformation of the architecture is totally unprecedented and courageous. Through the creation of hanging gardens, terraces, volumes at different heights, walls and slanted windows, there is no distinction between open and closed areas. The interior space responds to “existential” and not typological needs. As in an organism, every part of the house is “alive”, even if the distribution of rooms is not canonical. It is a dynamic, interchangeable, non-hierarchical space, corresponding to actions and not to cultural legacies. It is a space counteracting boredom, it is a space without doors. The house has a sort of “urban planimetry” that follows the steep hillside and is built on the highest point to enjoy a breathtaking view of the nearby village of Fiesole and the city of Florence. As Le Corbusier had noted during his dazzling Tuscan trip in 1907, viewing the city from an elevated lookout point allows for unusual points of intersection between nature, landscape and architecture: the Brunelleschi dome is a hill among hills. Conversely, if the viewpoint is reversed, i.e. from the city towards the hill, even

24 Marco De Michelis, *Il teatro della vita*, in Stefano Setti, eds., *Sintesi astratta. Espansioni e risonanze dell'arte astratta in Italia* (Milano: Electa, 2022), 19-25.

25 Leonardo Ricci, “A Monterinaldi presso Firenze”, in *Domus*, no. 337 (December 1957): 1-10.

26 Siegfried Giedion, *The Eternal Present. The Beginning of Art. A Contribution on Constancy and Change* (Washington D.C: The National Gallery of Art, 1962).

27 Ricci, *Anonimo del XX secolo*, 150.

the village of Monterinaldi seems to be molded directly into the mountain. "I wanted to use materials that were within my reach because one must work within certain limits and not create aprioristic concepts of matter. I wanted architecture to become a landscape and landscape to become architecture" Ricci wrote in his book "Anonymous to the 20th century", explaining better than anyone else the adopted process against trends and against styles. "It is not about beauty but about truth. Even if it sometimes rains from the roof".<sup>28</sup>

The house-studio, and later the entire village, are immediately placed in the spotlight of national and international critics.<sup>29</sup> Most reviews grasp the novelty and quality, while others distance themselves from the "so-called" harmonious integration with nature. On the pages of "Zodiac", Giulia Veronesi tries to mitigate Wright's indirect contribution, which in those years was mistakenly overlapping with a Brutalist reading of the complex starting with the absence of forms that are typical of art brut.<sup>30</sup> Much of the criticism in fact concerns close reactions between Ricci's double activity as a painter and architect. In this regard, it is Ricci himself to clarify in what way the pictorial sensibility had remained present in his work. In a lecture given in 1952 at the University of Southern California entitled "Architecture in relationship to the other arts", Ricci explains that the relationship between the arts refers to the designer's ability to create complex spaces that can respond both to the needs of each art and to the different aspects of human sensibility: "To satisfy my woman's senses I became a musician, a painter, a sculptor, an architect and a poet," Ricci writes. These arts, he adds, are like "doors that open a passage between the external and internal worlds".<sup>31</sup> The goal that architect Ricci sets for himself is to create spaces that are capable of responding to both, human needs and those of the different arts. Not self-referential spaces but backdrops, or "scenes," capable of catapulting us into unexpected dimensions, just as happens in theater and cinema.<sup>32</sup>

In a later interview, Ricci said that the environments of the house must force us to "make movements as if we were different individuals."<sup>33</sup> Monterinaldi's studio house is in fact conformed from a precise rhythm dictated by the movement of the human body. The subdivision of the rooms is as if corresponding to theatrical acts separated from each other by precise intervals. In a well-known 1981 text entitled "Conscious Man. Art and Knowledge in Paleohistory", Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti identified theater, but especially dance, as the origin of

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28 Ricci, *Anonimo del XX secolo*, 150.

29 The various reviews are collected in "Giornali di Bordo", Casa Studio Ricci.

30 Giulia Veronesi, "New look on the hills near Florence", *Zodiac*, no. 4 (1959): 11.

31 Leonardo Ricci, *Architecture in Relationship to the Other Arts*, Unpublished typescript now in: Ilaria Cattabriga, eds., "Leonardo Ricci (1918-1994). Archives I", *Histories of Postwar Architecture*, no. 9, 2021, 97-110, <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2611-0075/v4-n9-2021>.

32 In reference to some environments in the home-studio, Ugo Dattilo mentions the filmic space: Ugo Dattilo, *La casa teorica. Ricerca continua di un nuovo spazio architettonico*, in *Leonardo Ricci 100*, 64, <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2611-0075/v4-n9-2021>.

33 From an unpublished interview that can now be found in: Costanzo, *Leonardo Ricci*, 13.

architecture: the result of projections and geometric-three-dimensional extensions of the human body in action.<sup>34</sup> The human body, Ragghianti continued, determines a rhythm, tectonics, a volume and especially that vertical-horizontal relationship that is typical for the architectural elevation and plan. Ricci himself carefully studied the relationship of these two spatial diagrams (as a paradigm of being alive) for a “theoretical house” that was never realized but that he would have liked to build in Monterinaldi.<sup>35</sup>

The embryonic architecture of the house-studio seems to have theatrical prerogatives that Ricci measured with the actions of the human body, but also with the possibilities offered by different arts. In order to verify this latter hypothetical aspect, he decided to stage a plastic show of sculptures and paintings in this house together with the gallerist Fiamma Vigo in 1955 as an unprecedented and original, or for him natural, declination of the concept of “synthesis of the arts”.

### “La Cava”: The Show

Leonardo Ricci endorsed the interest of gallery owner Fiamma Vigo in seeking alternative spaces for new expressions of contemporary art capable of establishing unusual dialogues with the public and with architecture. Vigo had a versatile team of artists to draw on and Ricci had recently completed the construction of his home-studio under the auspices of a new “vital” relationship between user, space and landscape. It was a perfect match that led to staging an exceptional exhibition.

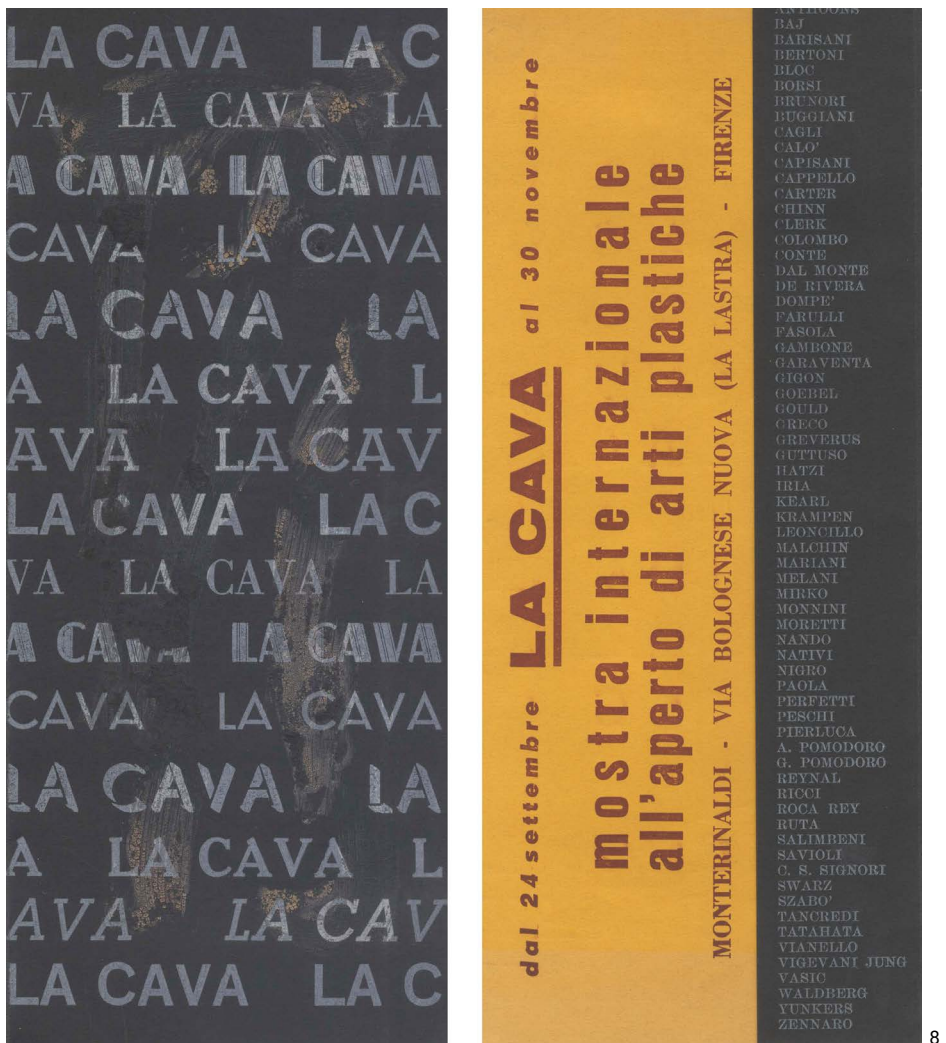
On September 24<sup>th</sup>, 1955 the show “La Cava. International outdoor show of plastic arts” was inaugurated. It was organized by “Numero” with the collaboration of architect Leonardo Ricci, who offered the outdoor spaces of his house-studio in Monterinaldi.<sup>36</sup> The chosen title recalls the place while the subtitle refers to the singularity of the event that intends to liberate the arts from the most canonical set-up constraints to facilitate the freedom of the viewer. The invitation and the catalog, published for the occasion as a special issue of the magazine “Numero”, list the presence of around sixty international artists including painters and sculptors. [Fig. 8-9]

The heterogeneity of the selection immediately stands out. Some of the exhibitors participating in the show were part of the Milanese nuclear movement (Enrico Baj and Joe Colombo) and amongst these were names like: Willy Anthoons, Paris; Renato Barisani, Naples; Andrè Bloc, Paris; Corrado Cagli, Rome; Carmelo Cappello, Milan; Guido Gambone, Florence; Gigon, Lausanne; David Gould, New York; Will Greverus, Marburg; Renato Guttuso, Rome; Leoncillo, Rome; Mirko, Rome; Arnaldo and Giò Pomodoro, Milan; Yuen Yuey

34 Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, *L'uomo cosciente. Arte e conoscenza nella paleostoria* (Bologna: Calderini, 1981), 62-80. See also: Tommaso Casini, Annamaria Ducci, Fabio Martini, eds., *ART before ART. L'uomo cosciente e l'arte delle origini: con e dopo Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti*, Lucca: Edizioni Fondazione Ragghianti Studi sull'arte, 2022.

35 Dattilo, *La casa teorica*, 60-67.

36 *La Cava. Mostra internazionale all'aperto di arti plastiche*, Monterinaldi, September 24 – November 30, 1955.



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Chinn, Canton-China. Along with the former, the show also saw participating the Florentine abstract artists Nigro, Monnini, Nativi and Ricci himself with a mosaic entitled “shadows”.<sup>37</sup> These presences reflect Vigo’s eclecticism, which was evidently a piece of interest, along with Ricci, in testing the tightness of the works in context rather than finding conformity between very distant languages.<sup>38</sup> However, with the exclusion of a few authors, such as the figurative Emilio Greco, Renato Guttuso and the “classical” abstract artists, upon more careful observation, it is possible to notice a certain unity among the works. Many of these even in terms of material and technique choices, present organic-primitive or automatic-surreal research, which categorise them in direct dialogue with the cave-architecture. In some cases it seems that the earth gave birth to those works, paraphrasing what Ricci wrote about his home.<sup>39</sup> With a few

37 Unfortunately, it is impossible to verify everyone’s actual participation due to the limited documenting material and the lack of some reproductions in the catalog. *La Cava. Mostra internazionale all’aperto di arti plastiche*, exhibition catalogue, special issue of *Numero*, Fall 1955. In that same year *Domus* gives news of the show by listing all the artists and publishing the sculpture by Roberto Fasola: “Notiziario d’arte”, in *Domus*, no 312 (November, 1955): 60; 64. This report appears along with news of another outdoor sculpture show on the terrace of a Milanese apartment, organized by Galleria Montenapoleone.

38 In 1955, Vigo’s gallery in Florence hosted, among others, shows by Madi Art Group from Argentina; paintings by Bice Lazzari; prints of Adja Yunkers presented by Piero Dorazio and “Proiezioni dirette” by Bruno Munari. For a complete timeline of the shows: *Fiamma Vigo e “numero”*, 253-264.

39 Ricci, *Anonimo del XX secolo*, 150-152.

Fig. 8  
Invitation for the exhibition “La Cava”, Monterinaldi 1955.



24 SETTEMBRE - 30 NOVEMBRE 1955

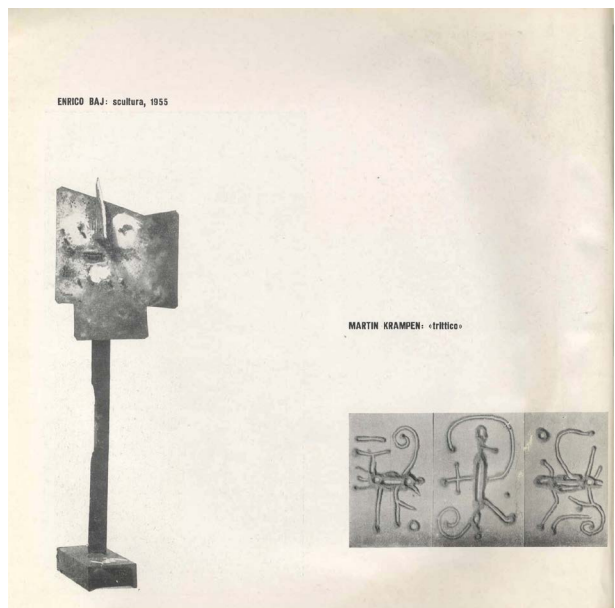
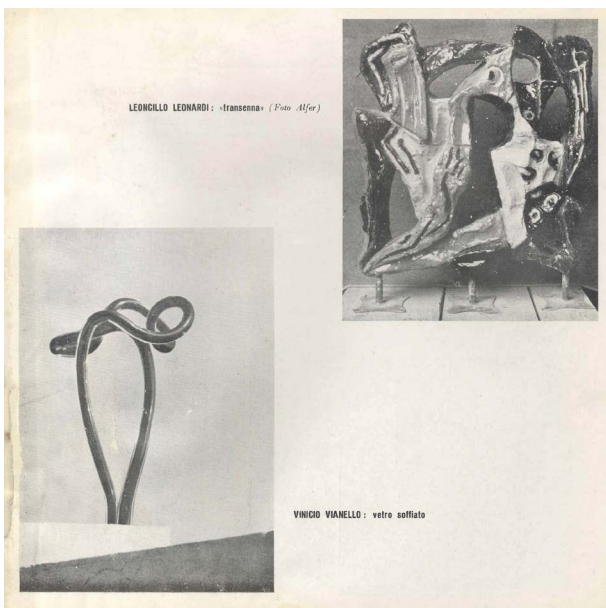
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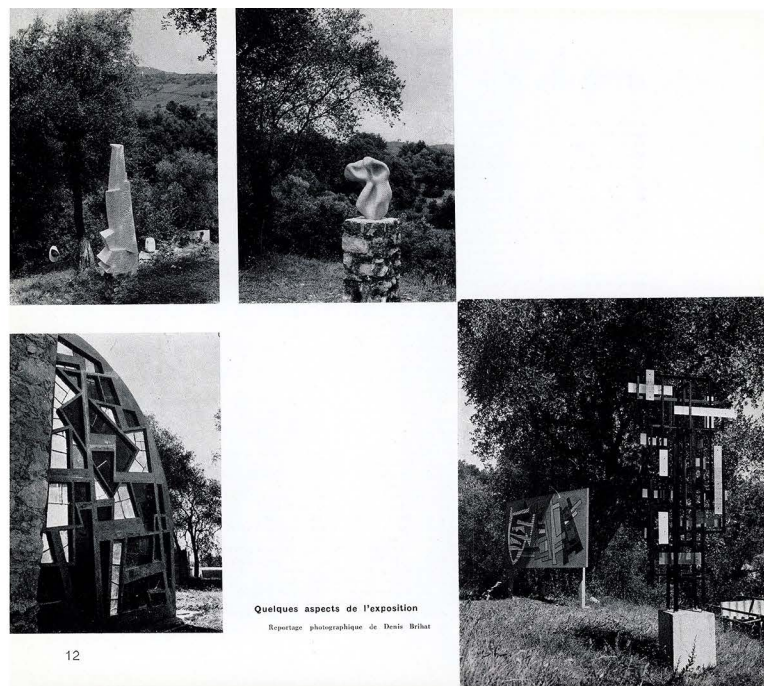
## LA CAVA

mostra internazionale  
all'aperto di arti plastiche

MONTERINALDI - VIA BOLOGNESE NUOVA (LA LASTRA) - FIRENZE

Fig. 9  
Catalogue for the exhibition  
"La Cava", Monterinaldi, 1955,  
Cover and some pages.





10

exceptions, many of the creations were made with techniques and materials so as to enhance the plasticity of the forms also through the use of craft practices such as blowtorch, terracotta, stained glass and mosaic. Indeed, abstract and organic researches had given the opportunity to all three arts (painting, sculpture and architecture) to independently achieve the same “plastic” results through processes inherent in the language of each medium. This was one of the purposes of the show whose real novelty, however, consisted in the open-air setting. On the first pages of the catalog, Pierre Guéguen, a French critic close to André Bloc’s newspapers (“Art d’aujourd’hui” and then “Aujourd’hui. Art et architecture”), emphasizes this aspect and speaks of “laboratories” of forms for a new idea of synthesis.<sup>40</sup>

“All art must have a confrontation with space and not be condensed as decorations on architectural surfaces”. A similar experiment, he continues, “had been proposed the previous year in Biot, Côte d’Azur, where artist members of the Groupe Espace from all over Europe had presented their achievements in direct contact with nature for the show ‘Espace Architecture Formes Couleur’.”<sup>41</sup> [Fig. 10] The purpose of said exhibition was in line with the mission of Groupe Espace, which was founded in 1951 at the behest of the artist-architect-editor André Bloc and the painter Félix Del Marle, who advocated an increasingly incisive social involvement of abstract art in everyday life. We no longer speak of “integration des arts plastiques,” but “integration des arts plastiques dans la vie”, as Bloc wrote.<sup>42</sup>

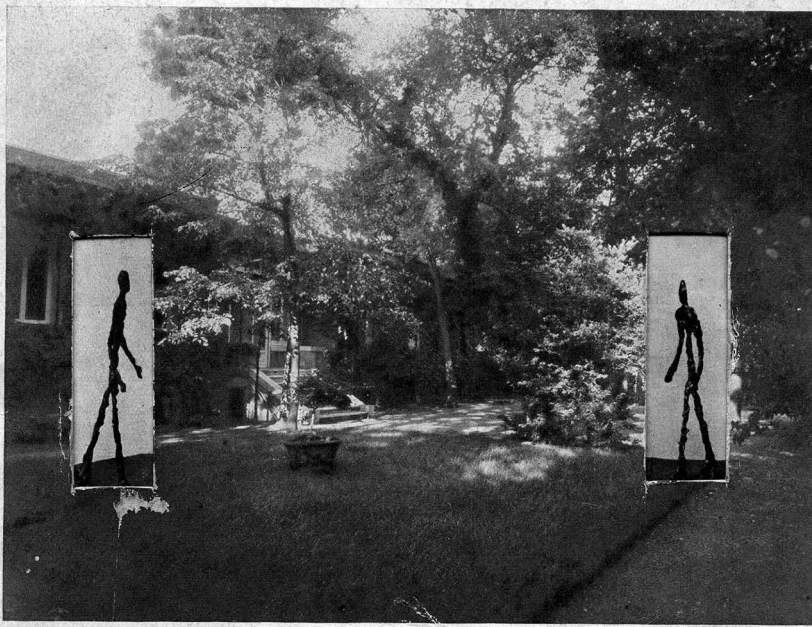
40 Paul Guéguen, *Coexistence des arts plastiques*, in *La Cava*, no page numbers.

41 *Espace. Architecture Formes Couleur*, Biot, July 10 – September 10, 1954.

42 André Bloc, *Intégration des arts plastiques dans la vie*, in *Espace Architecture Formes Couleur* (Exhibition catalogue, Paris 1954), 4-5. See also: Paul Guéguen, *André Bloc et la réintégration de la plastique dans la vie* (Boulogne sur Seine: Editions de l’Architecture d’aujourd’hui, 1954). More recent study in: Diana Gay, ed., *L’été 1954 à Biot: architecture, formes, couleur*, catalogue for the exhibition (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux-Grand Palais, 2016).

Fig. 10  
Catalogue for the exhibition  
*Espace Architecture Formes  
Couleur*, Biot 1954.





## GIARDINO DEL PALAZZO VENIER DEI LEONI

VENEZIA - S. GREGORIO 701

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At the turn of the 1940s and 1950s, in line with the just mentioned propositions, the placement of sculptures in public places, as well as the choice of placing artworks in less affluent building complexes for temporary events or permanent projects, became imperative. According to the open-air dimension, the record belongs to the city of Varese in Italy, which starting in 1949 proposed international sculpture shows held in the park of Villa Mirabello (in which authors such as Arp, Moore, Fontana, Leoncillo and Hepworth would take part) to encourage a new public debate in a city that had been severely compromised by the fascist regime.<sup>43</sup> Regarding the relationship between sculptors and architects, the art-critic Argan, in the catalog of the first edition of the "Premio Varese", stresses the importance of formal conception and construction rather than the more "compromised" concepts of decoration or destination.<sup>44</sup>

"La Cava," however, has some differences with both these latter exhibitions and the one in Biot mentioned in the catalog which, although their importance,

43 On these shows: Riccardo Prina, *Le due mostre di scultura all'aperto a Varese, 1949-1953*, in Fabrizio D'Amico, ed., *Quaderni di scultura contemporanea n. 3* (Roma, 2000): 123-149; Paola Torre, *Sculture nel verde. Le prime esposizioni all'aperto di scultura contemporanea: le esperienze italiane in relazione alla scena europea (1948-1957)*, *Rivista di linguistica Letteratura Cinema Teatro Arte. Annali online Sezione di Lettere*, XIII (Ferrara: Università degli Studi, 2018): 199-228.

<https://doi.org/10.15160/1826-803X/2094>.

44 Gulio Carlo Argan, ed., *Premio di scultura città di Varese* (Varese 1949), 4.

Fig. 11

Catalogue for the exhibition, *Mostra di scultura contemporanea*, Palazzo Venier dei Leoni (Peggy Guggenheim House), Venezia 1949.



“merely” place sculptures made elsewhere in a green space. Monterinaldi is not a public park but a private place where the architecture of the house-studio plays a primary role. Also Peggy Guggenheim hosted a show of contemporary sculpture between the interior and exterior of her Venetian residence in 1949. The extraordinary cover of the catalog conceived by the artist Sebastian Matta, features an interesting assembly of images in which two Giacometti figures, that are part of a larger sculpture, invade the garden as intruders through two cut-out “windows”. [Fig. 11] Despite this “opening”, the works were mostly read in continuity with the reflections of the water or the natural elements of the garden, and no particular displaying direction is evidenced in relation to the architecture of Palazzo Venier dei Leoni.<sup>45</sup>

By contrast, Monterinaldi’s entire show is built around Ricci’s architecture like a “natural” setting, a filter with the landscape that works as a device of vision in the same way as some sculptures. Because of the various spatial interpenetrations and the play between interior and atmospheric voids, the house-studio itself has been read as a sculpture. It is more in line with Moore than with Wright, wrote the painter-architect Leonardo Savioli.<sup>46</sup>

The catalog of “La Cava” also published a letter by Leonardo Ricci addressed to the authorities of his city, with the hope that an exhibition such as this may become a model to be promoted over time.<sup>47</sup> Ricci emphasizes how this show manages to touch the essence of some issues. Thanks to a set-up designed in a real-life context, the audience could indeed understand the spiritual and material utility of art. These are the same purposes that on an international level Sigfried Giedion invoked from the CIAM conferences about the need to bring art into the open space: “To work for the creation of a physical environment that will satisfy men’s emotional and material needs and stimulate his spiritual growth”.<sup>48</sup> Ricci even wanted this show to become a kind of “market show” and not one of pure contemplation. The first to understand this need, Ricci wrote, were the artists who agreed to participating by sending works at their own expense.

The surviving pictures captured the spirit of the exhibition neatly. Through careful placement, the sculptures are freely located in the garden without enclosures, to stimulate interaction with the view and with the body of the spectator. Many others, including the few works on the wall, were hung on the exterior walls of the house, emphasizing a kind of symbiosis with the building to highlight the importance of living the exterior as the interior and the need to live in close contact with works of art by following inclinations away from bourgeois prerogatives. This aspect was central in Ricci’s thought, who, like his mentor Michelucci, believed in the importance of design, furniture and craftsmanship as instruments for improving society.

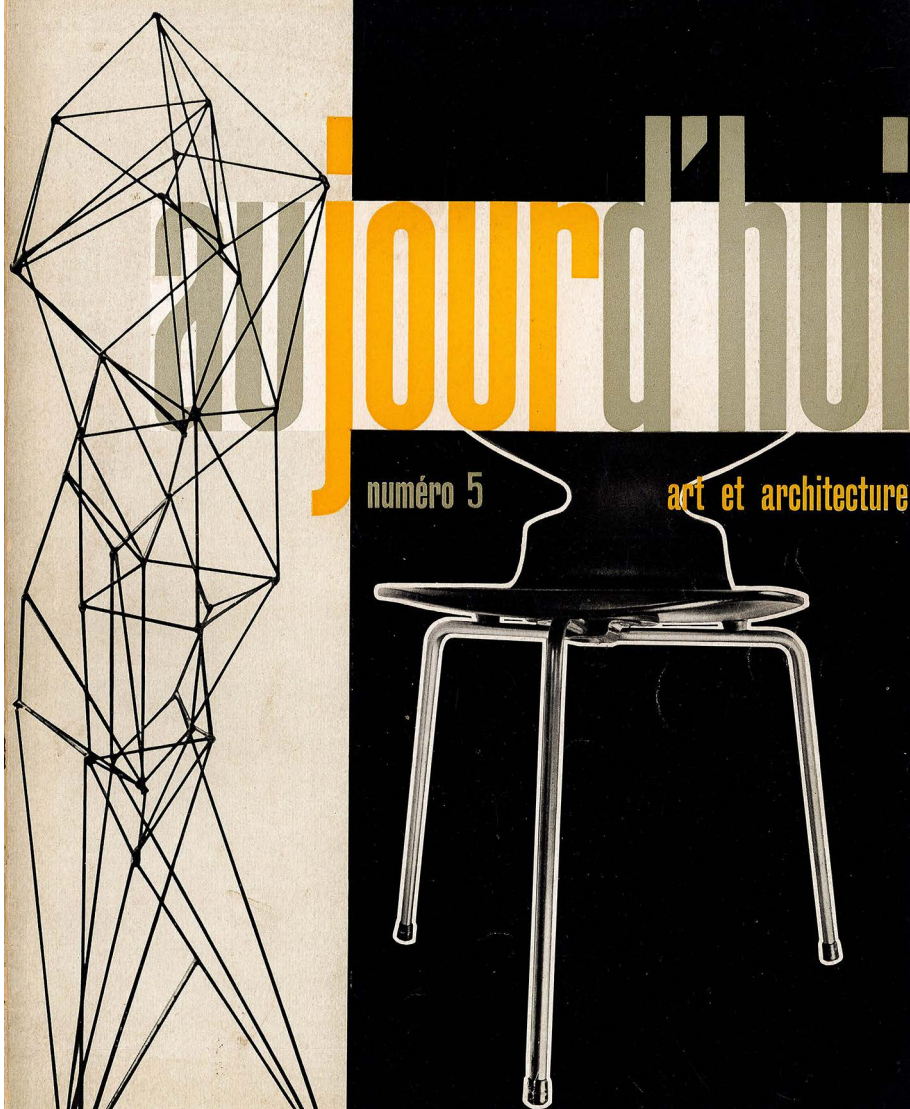
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45 Giuseppe Marchiori, ed., *Mostra di scultura contemporanea* (Venezia, 1949). The artists who took part in the show are: Arp, Brancusi, Calder, Consagra, Giacometti, Hare, Lipchitz, Marini, Mirko, Moore, Pevsner, Salvatore, Viani.

46 Leonardo Savioli, “Una casa sulla collina nord di Firenze”, *Architetti* (1952): 11-13. Now in “Giornali di bordo”, Casa Studio Ricci.

47 Leonardo Ricci, in *La Cava*, no page numbers. In the early 1900s, some art exhibitions were set inside private homes due to commercial reasons. Bruce Altshuler, ed., *Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions that Made Art History*, vol. 1, 1863-1959 (London-New York: Phaidon, 2008): 16-17.

48 This was the central node, “The Aim”, of the CIAM 6, Bridgwater 1947. See: Siegfried Giedion, *A Decade of New Architecture* (Zürich: Edition Girsberger, 1951), 17.



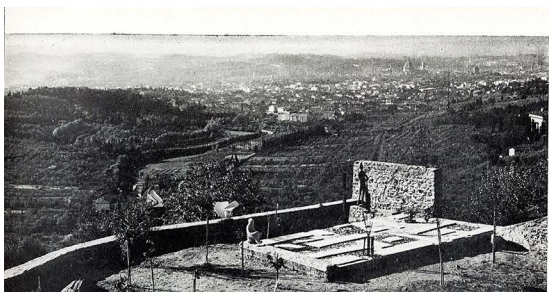
# Aujourd'hui

## art et architecture

numéro 5

Fig. 12

"Exposition internationale d'arts plastiques", *Aujourd'hui art et architecture*, no. 5 (1955). Cover with sculpture by Gould.



Habitation près de Florence

### Exposition internationale d'arts plastiques "La Cava"

Organisée par la revue « Numéro ».

Peintre et architecte, j'ai médité depuis longtemps de présenter des œuvres picturales et sculpturales dans le cadre de l'architecture moderne. Mon projet se rattachait à des buts précis :

1° Voir si, de nos jours, peinture, sculpture et architecture sont plus ou moins liées entre elles au point de former un monde spécifique ;

2° Voir si ces trois arts, depuis longtemps séparés, au moins dans le sens de « cohabitation », ont des langages stylistiquement propres ou si la longue séparation a créé une confusion des moyens d'expression. C'est-à-dire voir si en architecture, sculpture, peinture, l'espace — pour prendre l'un des nombreux éléments qui composent l'œuvre d'art — a acquis un style particulier à chacun de ces arts ou si leurs moyens d'expression se confondent dans une certaine mesure ;

3° Voir si les artistes sont prêts à travailler en équipe sans qu'il y ait confusion des buts, pour un enrichissement réciproque et vital de chacune des œuvres sans qu'aucune d'elles ne soit soumise aux autres ou déformée par elles ;

4° Tester de soustraire la sculpture et la peinture à l'emprise des marchands et des galeries, méthode qui, à mon point de vue, va à l'encontre de l'histoire, car les opportunités de nos contemporains ;

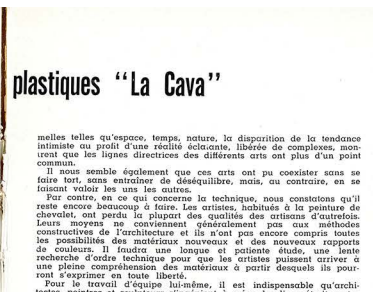
5° Voir si les sculpteurs et les peintres, mis à part la valeur des œuvres elles-mêmes, sont techniquement préparés à réaliser des œuvres qui, au lieu de se montrer dans les musées ou de pendre au murs des « salons bien », s'intègreraient dans la vie des hommes dans les cités nouvelles, dans la nouvelle architecture, deviendraient en somme des objets familiers avec lesquels s'établirait un colloque comme aux époques romane ou gothique ;

6° Voir si, avec cette méthode, la sculpture et la peinture peuvent reconquérir la rôle social qu'elles avaient, d'est-à-dire être acceptées par une majorité au lieu d'une minorité d'esthètes individualistes, ainsi qu'il est advenu pour l'architecture depuis quelque temps ;

7° Observer si le public, qui a maintenant accepté l'architecture moderne mais reste sceptique à l'égard de la sculpture et de la peinture, ne leur trouvera pas une signification et une justification nouvelles, lorsque, au lieu d'être dans les galeries et les musées, elles feront partie de la maison à l'intérieur comme à l'extérieur.

Nous pouvons d'abord affirmer qu'à travers les expériences, les écoles, les réussites les plus diverses, malgré quelques contradictions apparentes, on peut déjà parler d'un dénominateur commun entre les courants artistiques, aussi bien du point de vue social que du point de vue esthétique, la poursuite d'un objectif anonyme.

La recherche d'une réussite anonyme plus que de la réussite individuelle, un langage commun exprimant des valeurs for-



### plastiques "La Cava"

nelles telles qu'espace, temps, nature, la disparition de la tendance intimiste au profit d'une réalité éclatante, libérée de complexes, montrant que les lignes directrices des différents arts ont plus d'un point commun.

Il nous semble également que ces arts ont pu coexister sans se faire tort, sans entraver de déséquilibre, mais, au contraire, en se faisant valoir les uns les autres.

Par contre, en ce qui concerne la technique, nous constatons qu'il reste encore beaucoup à faire. Les artistes, habitués à la peinture de chevalet, ont peiné la plupart des qualités des artisans d'outre-mer. Leurs moyens ne conviennent généralement pas aux méthodes constructives de l'architecture et ils n'ont pas encore compris toutes les possibilités des matériaux nouveaux et des nouveaux rapports de couleurs, il faut une longue et patiente étude, une lente recherche d'ordre technique pour que les artistes puissent arriver à une pleine compréhension des matériaux à partir desquels ils pourront s'exprimer en toute liberté.

Pour le travail d'équipe lui-même, il est indispensable qu'architectes, peintres et sculpteurs s'ingénient à créer des liens étroits entre les recherches de leurs arts respectifs.

Il faut que les architectes, qui doivent leur formation esthétique à la peinture et à la sculpture contemporaines perdent le sentiment de médianité qu'ils ont en général pour les peintres et les sculpteurs qu'ils ne prennent pas au sérieux ou qu'ils tiennent tout au moins pour des hommes de laboratoires retranchés de la vie sociale de leur temps. De leur côté, peintres et sculpteurs doivent être mieux au courant de l'architecture nouvelle, nouvelles valeurs formelles de l'espace et du temps, nouvelles techniques et nouveaux matériaux.

Quant au public, nous avons pu constater que les œuvres qui gagnent en valeur et en signification lorsqu'elles font partie d'un tout perdent de leur intérêt une fois exposées dans une galerie. Si les artistes consentaient à se servir de techniques mieux adaptées aux réalités économiques, on verrait vite les œuvres d'art envahir les foyers, comme c'est déjà le cas pour les reproductions en couleurs.

La question des prix qui semblerait devoir rester étrangère aux problèmes artistiques me semble être, au contraire, d'une grande importance. Les architectes sont habitués à travailler sous une contrainte économique rigide. Il faut que les peintres et les sculpteurs s'y soumettent aussi afin d'arriver à participer à la vie sociale.

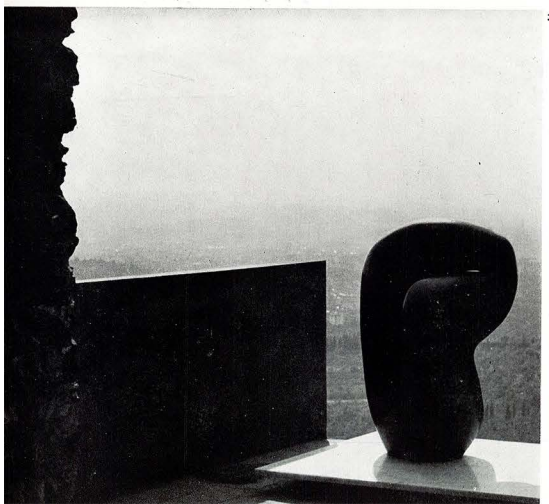
Pour conclure, je voudrais formuler le vœu que se réunisse un congrès des artistes des différents disciplines et des critiques afin d'examiner à fond ces problèmes. Cette prise de contact entre ceux qui s'adressent au public et ceux qui fixent les valeurs devrait faire naître une ambiance favorable où nul ne se sentirait isolé, où chacun prendrait conscience de faire partie intégrante d'une corporation.

Comme on devait être au temps des « besoins de cathédrales », il faut que les artistes ne paraissent complexes ou craintifs, précieusement Chacun se sentirait appuyé, mêlé spirituellement au travail de recherche des autres et l'œuvre d'art prendrait toute son « utilité », c'est-à-dire qu'elle serait autant qu'un achèvement artistique, un élément fondamental d'une société qui ne serait plus théorique et utopique, mais efficace et concrète.

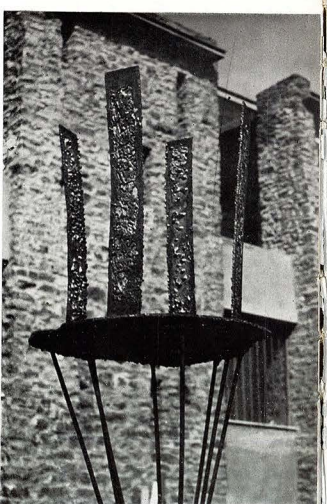
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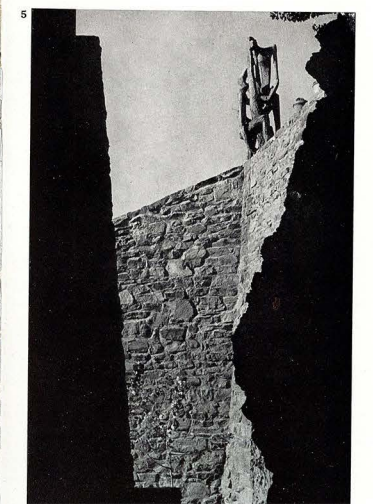
Photos Tallini



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André Bloc's French magazine "Art d'aujourd'hui" devoted an in-depth article to the show and published a text by Ricci that was slightly different from the one in the catalog.<sup>49</sup> In this paper, Ricci stresses the need to experience art outside the commercial circuits of art-market and galleries, since painting and sculpture have a different aim. This is to be read as a sort of "anonymous" achievement for the whole society rather than an individual achievement typical of museum logics. A sculpture by David Gould exhibited at "La Cava" is on the magazine cover, while the article is accompanied by some overview shots. [Fig. 12] On the natural terrace facing the land slope, one can recognize the *figura seduta* (sitting figure) of Emilio Greco in the pictures of the magazine that takes on an almost metaphysical character in its dialogue with a white

49 "Exposition internationale d'arts plastiques", *Aujourd'hui art et architecture*, no. 5 (1955): 32-33. The article is introduced by a focus on the house in Monterinaldi, 31-31.

Fig. 13

"La Cava", 1955. Mosaic "Rito nuziale" by Cagli on the wall, floating copper plaque by Mirko and sculpture "Vlupar" in white concrete by Grevus.

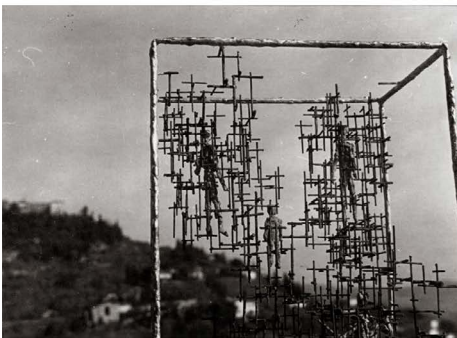
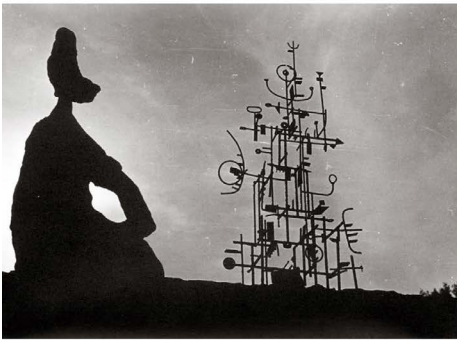


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sheet metal sculpture placed on the parapet and with another iron sculpture presented by David Gould. In the garden facing the façade, instead of the water pool that was built later, there is a glimpse of a “forest” of iron, concrete and steel (weatherproof materials), while there are two-dimensional art pieces on the wall, including Cagli’s mosaic, Melani’s woods, Monnini’s hardstone inlay and Nigro and Nativi’s enamel paintings. [Fig. 13] On the right, we can distinguish Carmelo Cappello’s sculpture *Acrobati* (Acrobats) and not *L’uomo nello spazio* (Man in Space) published in the catalog. The best-known images catch some single works as is the case of Pierluca’s sculpture, Mirko’s copper plaque floating in space playing with light reflections, Arnaldo Pomodoro’s oneiric work, as well as the two “conflicting” sculptures by Bloc and Gigon placed as a dyptich at the end of the railing-free balcony overlooking the city of Florence. [Fig. 14] On a side note, it is interesting to observe that in his magazine, Bloc decides to publish only his sculpture in relation to the landscape, cutting out Gigon’s work. [Fig. 12 and 14]

Fig. 14  
 “La Cava”, 1955. Sculptures by  
 Bloc and Gigon on the terrace.  
 Casa Studio Ricci.





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Fig. 15  
 "La Cava", 1955. Works by  
 (from left to right): Pierluca;  
 Mirko; Arnaldo Pomodoro; Bloc  
 and Gigon; Swarz; Tatahata and  
 others. Casa Studio Ricci.

Fig. 16  
 "La Cava", 1955, Casa Studio  
 Ricci.



17 |

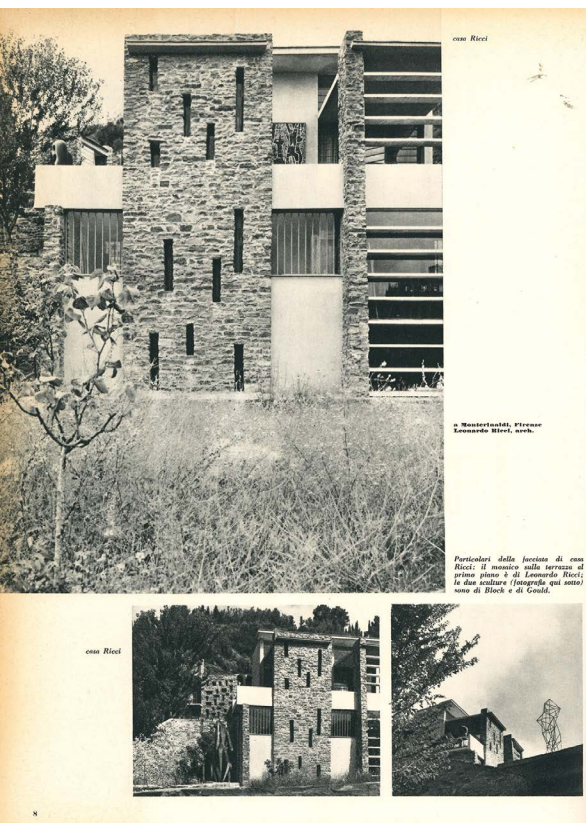
Finally, Lionello Venturi wrote a laudatory article about the show and the Italian artist-critic Gillo Dorfles, who had been on the front lines of the battle for the synthesis of the arts in those years, criticizes the formal result of the “deliberately barbaric” show but appreciates the intent on the pages of “Domus”, which urges to bring artists and architects together to engage in dialogue even through experiments like this one.<sup>50</sup> Although the exhibition was conceived on the basis of a renewed interaction with the public, unfortunately, there are unknown shots depicting this “dialogue.” On the other hand, even in the press, the works are framed as organic presences in continuity with the architecture and the place, sometimes even “burned” by the light contrasts. It seems that the sculptures are ready to come to life, much like background actors. [Fig. 15] Architecture plays a pivotal role and is always present in its ambiguity. With its textured nature, its volume, its openings, its unevenness, it is the protagonist of the spectacle but

50 Lionello Venturi, “Una vetrata per San Domenico”, *L'Espresso* (October 30, 1955); Gillo Dorfles, “Una mostra all’aperto di arti plastiche” *Domus*, no. 313 (December 1955): 61; 64. A lengthy article appears also in the local press and highlights those same difficulties described as “uncaring” in the selection of artists: Giovanni Colacicchi, “Arte all’aperto. L’originale iniziativa realizzata sulle terrazze e le verande di un architetto fiorentino. Opere di pittura e scultura astratta inserite nel paesaggio”, *La Nazione Italiana* (November 4, 1955). In “Giornali di bordo”, there is also an article from a German newspaper: J. Guadagna, “Palast im Steinbruch”, in *Der Standpunkt* (January 20, 1955).

Fig. 17

Henry Moore, “Large Square Form with Cut”, 1969-70, Forte del Belvedere, Firenze 1972. Reproduced by permission of The Henry Moore Foundation.

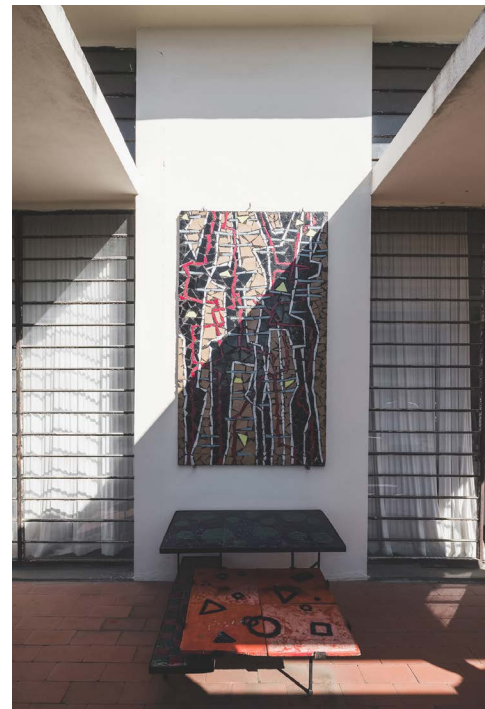




18a



18b



18c

at the same time a scenography for the works, as well as a device of vision to measure the tightness of these works in the landscape. The sequence architecture, work and landscape can be read well in the shots that frame André Bloc and André Gigon's art pieces. These sculptures, that are juxtaposed so as to enhance the contrast between organic and geometric shapes, are dynamic pivots for the space of our vision as they relate to two other works of art: the villa and the city of Florence. [Fig. 16] A game of representations that, beginning with the Renaissance frescoes, repeatedly involves the inevitable leading part of Florence, which will again become central more than a decade later when in 1972, Henry Moore, with his monumental sculpture-architectures, "designs" a new plastic spectacle once again in relation to the city.<sup>51</sup> [Fig. 17]

### Final Act

The mosaic executed by Ricci and the sculpture by Bloc has been standing on the balcony until this day. The sculpture was put in an elevated position immediately after the show. [Fig. 18] Unfortunately, the circumstances that led Bloc to exhibit at "La Cava" are not documented, yet we know that he tested the role of sculpture as a visual pivot of a whole architectural narration on that occasion.<sup>52</sup> This work became

51 On this event: Alessandra Acocella, Beatrice Mazzanti, "Un'architettura medicea per la città contemporanea. Il recupero del Forte Belvedere e l'antologica di Henry Moore, 1955-1972", in *Critica d'Arte*, no. 3-4 (2019): 79-92; D. Nobili, *Mass Sculpture. Henry Moore and Sculpture in città in the 1970s*, in Giovanni Carandente. *Una vita per l'arte* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana editoriale, 2021): 68-74.

52 Most probably Bloc arrived in Florence through the interception of Giovanni Michelucci or Fiamma Vigo herself, who was a regular of the Parisian milieu as Ricci himself.

Fig. 18a

Ricci's Studio-house. Above: a shot taken after the show where we can take a glimpse at Ricci's mosaic and Bloc's sculpture (already in elevated position) that is still on the terrace. Below: a shot from the show with Gould's sculpture in the foreground.

Fig. 18b, 18c

Terrace of Leonardo Ricci's Studio-house in present day with Ricci's mosaic and Bloc's sculpture. Foto Dario Borruto.

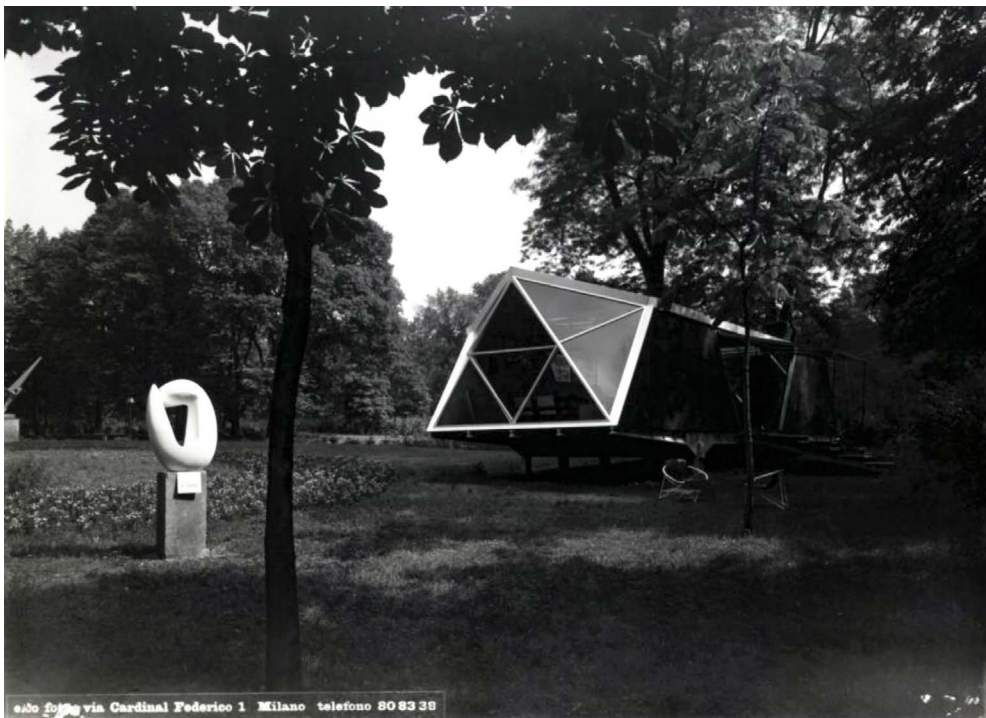


a sign: it is a major landmark from the outside when climbing the stairs and is also an eye-catching sight when seen from inside the house and silhouetted against the landscape. The dynamic role of sculpture becomes the paradigm of an open trajectory of architectural space that, in Ricci's vision, rejects predetermined forms.

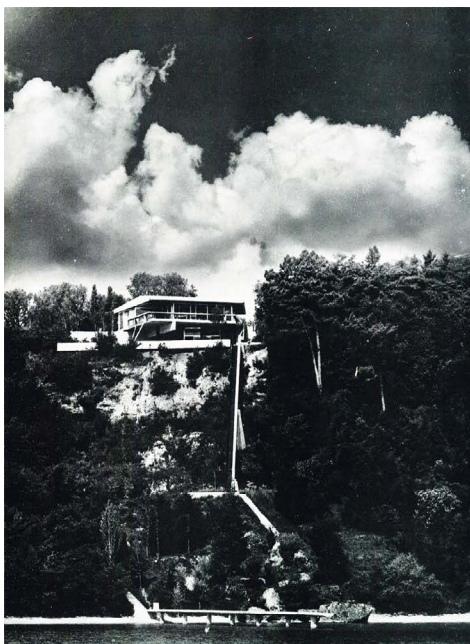
The previous year, Bloc had presented a similar work in white Carrara marble in the park of the 10th Milan Triennale, set up by painter Luigi Veronesi. The sculpture, placed on a solid base, was the centerpiece of a "visual telescope" that started from the stereometrically glazed façade of the prefabricated "Casa sperimentale" (experimental house) made by studio B24, to conclude itself in the organic form of the sculpture immersed in nature.<sup>53</sup> [Fig. 19]

After "La Cava," it's again a marble sculpture of the same shapes to become the protagonist of a well-known architecture designed between 1953 and 1958 by Milanese architect Vittoriano Viganò as Bloc's vacation home on Lake Garda in northern Italy. Villa "La Scala" has similar characteristics to Ricci's house-studio. Both control and encompass the landscape, both are built on the dynamism and instability of viewpoints, on the contradiction of internal and external concepts of space and on the material and structural strength of horizontal and vertical axes. Also in villa "La Scala" the role of some of Bloc's sculptures is primary as is the case with *Portese*, first placed in the park and then positioned inside the villa as a visual pivot and metaphor for the elliptical path of the dwelling.<sup>54</sup> [Fig. 20]

A similar test had been carried out by architect Ico Parisi in an equally well-known villa built in Monte Olimpino, Como, in 1953. In Italy, Casa



19



20

Fig. 19  
André Bloc's sculpture next to the B24 experimental house, X Triennale di Milano, 1954  
Archivio della Triennale di Milano. Courtesy © Triennale Milano – Archivi.

Fig. 20  
André Bloc, "Portese" 1957 in the garden of "Villa La Scala" Portese del Garda, late Fifties.

53 *Casa sperimentale*, in *Decima Triennale* (exhibition catalogue, Milano: S.A.M.E, 1954): 452-54.

54 A. Viati Navone, "Maison escalier de Vittoriano Viganò pour André Bloc, Portese del Garda (1953-1958): de l'instabilité perceptive à la 'fonction oblique'", in *FabricA. Travaux d'histoire culturelle et sociale de l'architecture et de ses territoires*, no. 8 (2014): 125-149.



21 |

Bini has become a symbol of the postwar concept of the synthesis or integration of the arts. Through a calculated articulation, its conception simultaneously exalts and transforms both the decorative designs of fascist propaganda and some dogmas of rationalism.<sup>55</sup> Once again, as the photographs well describe, the pivot of the vision is a white concrete sculpture created in 1950 by the young sculptor Francesco Somaini, a friend of Bloc, with the meaningful title *Dancer*. The work's kinetics contrasts with both the white box on the back and with Mario Radice's abstract-geometric mosaics, making the above-mentioned contradictions clear, but at the same time announcing the axis of the internal spiral development. [Fig. 21] What is interesting to emphasize in these examples is how on the one hand architecture becomes a vehicle for looking at and framing art without imitating its plastic forms, and on the other hand how some sculptures when correctly displayed, are able to reveal to us something more than a mere commentary or formal integration to the building.

The aim of the "La Cava" show was not to integrate architecture through the use of other arts. As was effectively highlighted by Penelope Curtis, when architecture and sculpture start from the same formal and material premises, they require autonomy and not integration.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the relationship between the arts with architecture becomes exciting when useful divergences emerge to connote space in new ways and when this relationship functions as a

55 Flaminio Gualdoni, *Ico Parisi, La casa* (Milano: Electa, 1999).

56 Penelope Curtis, *Patio and pavilion. The place of Sculpture in Modern Architecture* (London – Los Angeles: Ridinghouse – The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008).

Fig. 21

Francesco Somaini's "Danzatrice" in front of Casa Bini by Ico Parisi with mosaics by Mario Radice, Monteolimpino – Como, 1953 Archivio fotografico Parisi, Pinacoteca Civica di Como.



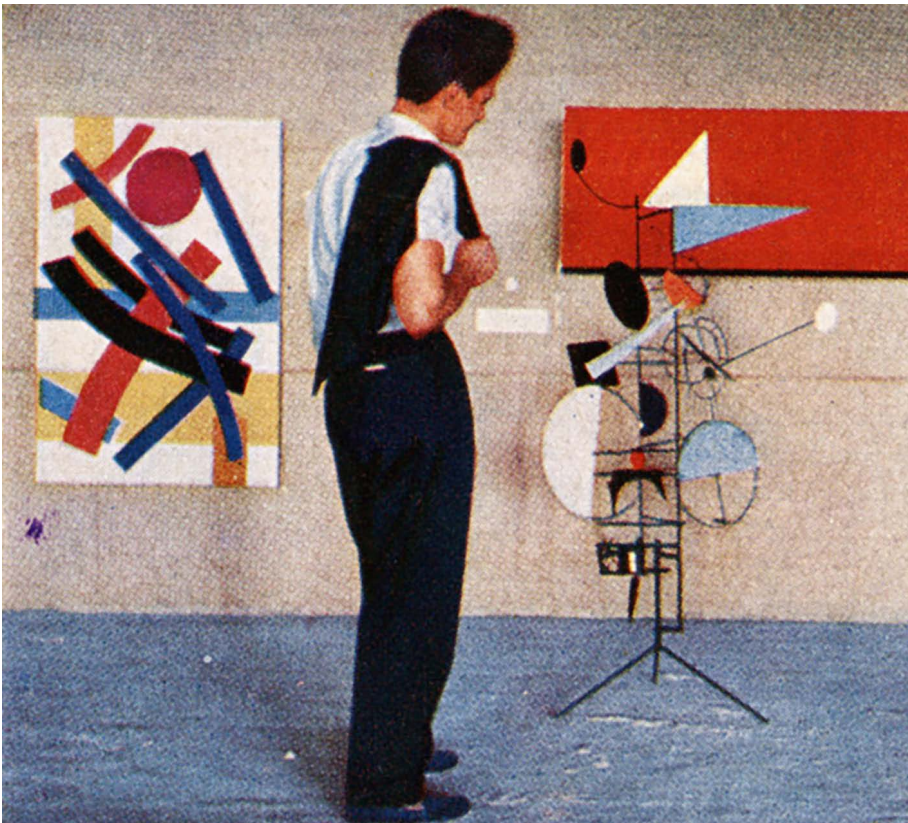
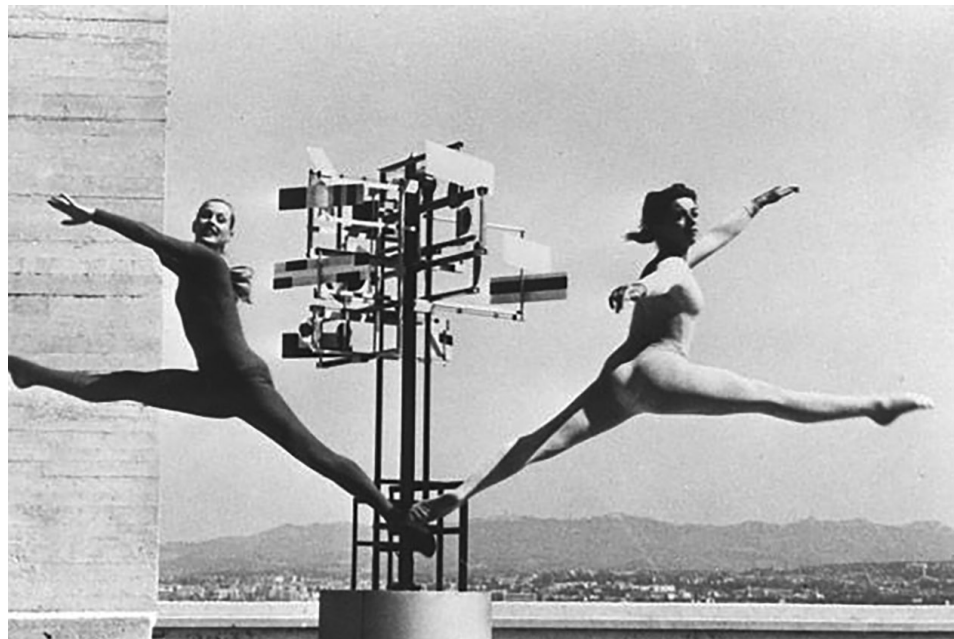


Fig. 22  
Festival de l'Art d'Avant-Garde  
in Le Corbusier's Unité d'habi-  
tation (Marseille 1956). Interior  
view and performance on the  
roof among the sculpture by  
Schöffer.

vehicle for new experiences and not as a finished result.<sup>57</sup> In the same period, namely between 1953 and 1956, even Le Corbusier was verifying these premises. His Unité d'Habitation in Marseille became a scenic device to mediate the presence of performances and works of art together with the public, who was called to experience this architectural icon in a completely new way. In 1956 the Unités hosted the first Festival of Art d'Avant-Garde curated by Jacques Polieri with exhibitions of abstract and kinetic works (Agam, Fautrier, Klein, César, Soulages, Tinguely among others) between the interior and exterior of the building and electronic installations, sculptures, music and dance performances among the architectural elements of the roof-stage.<sup>58</sup> [Fig. 22]



57 "Ricci, the architect who is also a very good painter and who knows precisely for this reason where the limit of architecture and painting lies, does not confuse these. All the same, he hugely makes use of all those spatial achievements that architecture has arrived at only through the critical lesson of painting, but he does not 'apply' it to his building." Leonardo Savioli, *Una casa sulla collina nord di Firenze*.

58 Anna Rosellini, *Unité d'Habitation in Marseille, experimental artistic device*, in R. Baumeister, eds., *What Moves us? Le Corbusier and Asger Jorn in Art and Architecture* (Zürich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2015): 38-45.

The "La Cava" show does not have such explosive prerogatives but, like the Unités in Marseille, it offers to the other arts a connoted architectural context - to be read and interpreted - capable of concurring and directing the success of an experience that cannot be confined to the more schematic and harmonious relationship between painting sculpture and architecture. The analysis of this exhibition adds to a very rich scenario of temporary "museographic" practices held in contexts considered alien such as homes, bookstores, and stores. In a country that at this time does not yet have spaces deputed and designed to host contemporary art, these venues help to establish a different relationship with the viewer who has an integrative and performative function. Here the proximity to the performance is to be considered as a new and improvised model of the synthesis of the arts. "La Cava" is a show-manifesto that seeks to reflect on the role that different arts can play in everyday life within the domestic setting to surprise and perturb the inhabitants, anticipating a disciplinary contamination that in the following decade will feature the overlap of artwork and design. "La Cava" is a show in which, as in the best scripts, it is not clear who has the main role.

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