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Parte del circuito
MASILLugano

Balla '12 Dorazio '60. Dove la luce

24 September 2023 – 14 January 2024
Collezione Giancarlo e Danna Olgiati

PRESS RELEASE
Lugano, 28 September 2023

Curated by Gabriella Belli
Exhibition design by Mario Botta

In collaboration with the Archivio Dorazio
Special contribution from GAM, Turin

The exhibition "Dove la luce" ("Where the Light") is the story of an extraordinary elective affinity between two great masters of 20th century Italian art, Giacomo Balla (1871- 1958) and Piero Dorazio (1927-2005). As the title - from a collection of poems of the same name by Giuseppe Ungaretti - suggests, the theme is light, the wellspring of all life, but also an enduring challenge for the artists who have sought to engage with it in their works. The show is a visual exploration conceived by Danna Battaglia Olgiati that presents 47 masterpieces created in two different periods: Balla's *Compenetrazioni iridescenti* (Iridescent Interpenetrations) saw the light in 1912, and Piero Dorazio began producing his famous *Trame* (weaves) in 1960. "There are almost fifty years between these works, yet what still captivates and intrigues us about the phenomenon of light, that these works interpret and pay tribute to, is the mystery that lies beyond all the scientific explanations, and that magnetically pulls our gaze into the surfaces" Gabriella Belli, curator of the exhibition, notes.

The *Compenetrazioni iridescenti* represent one of the most interesting chapters of Balla's artistic career, for their pioneering experimentation with abstract and geometric forms. These works were produced in the space of just a few months, between July and December 1912, when the artist was staying in Düsseldorf, a guest at the Löwenstein family's villa. Invited to decorate the studio of the beautiful house overlooking the Rhine, Balla spent part of the time exploring a new idea of painting, almost in secret (these works only became fully known in the 1950s). Undoubtedly based on observations of nature and light, they nonetheless take the form of original triangle-based grids arranged in autonomous sequences: abstract/geometric compositions that were truly ahead of their time.

On the pages of a simple notepad, the artist explored the idea of capturing the mysteries of the spectrum and the complexity of refracted light. With scientific rigour, using coloured pencils, tempera and watercolours, he created a repertoire of potentially infinite variations: patterns of triangles, lines and spheres that represent the "anatomy" of light. It was a quest to capture "the invisible" and free the infinitesimal atoms of the colours of the rainbow, from red to orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet.

The *Iridescent Interpenetrations* are a limited series of stunning, diminutive masterpieces mostly painted on paper, though some are on canvas. A huge departure from Balla's previous practice, they can justifiably be classed as precursors to abstract art.

There are more than twenty of these pieces in the exhibition, hailing from prestigious private and museum collections, such as the Galleria d'arte Moderna in Turin and the Mart in Trento and Rovereto. Some of them testify to the transition between sketchpad and larger format: here the artist's practice and experimentation gives rise to compositions that take on a life of their own, with frames, often designed by the painter himself, lending added gravitas.

Among the works on display is the priceless postcard Balla sent to his friend and pupil Gino Galli in November 1912, which bears the first account of his new *Compenetrazioni*: on the front is a sort of spectrum of light worked in a chromatic sequence of triangles, "a shape that has long been used to represent the splitting of a beam of light, but which in Balla's work also takes on a symbolic value, evoking the hermetic and esoteric realms", as Gabriella Belli explains, continuing, "Though these works doubtless draw on observations of nature - as critics have always pointed out - his practice is never a cold, calculated application of scientific theories, but rather a deep dive into nature, seeking to probe its most hidden, mysterious connections."

Almost fifty years later, this extraordinary nucleus of works was to inspire the young Piero Dorazio, who was one of the first people to understand the groundbreaking import of Balla's studies. His large canvases, titled *Trame* (weaves), painted in the late 1950s and early 1960s, are dense with light/matter and constructed with irregular crisscrossed lines. Light and shade materialise in grids of triangles, showing startling similarities with Giacomo Balla's experiments.

His *Trame* weave a dense mesh of vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines executed with a light touch, in a palette of primary and complementary colours in closely wrought combinations, creating the visual effect of lines which are not actually there, but the result of an optical adjustment.

There are more than 20 of the series in the show, produced between 1959 and 1963, and richly varied. Most explore different levels of brightness and perceptual interferences between the background and the surface, as well as the relationship between space and time. "The sudden glimmers of light that rise to the surface in the gaps between the crossed lines, between the filaments, issuing from the triangles that form there (an eloquent tribute to Balla's patterns) create an extraordinary effect in the weaves of these paintings, like a revelation of reality emerging from the highly refined matter, applied layer by layer," Gabriella Belli comments.

Some highly significant works in this sense are those in which the weave breaks up, is interrupted, and the palette undergoes an abrupt change, like *Time Blind* (1963), or *Tenera mano* (Tender Hand) (1963): the "gaps" in the weave reveal the internal structure of the painting, highlighting the artist's technique and, as Dorazio himself suggests, become the site of "an unexpected illumination of consciousness, a way of visualizing the fleeting moment."

Among the things that Dorazio and Balla have in common, it is interesting to note that the experiments with the *Trame* and the *Compenetrazioni* both occupy a very short period of time. Yet, from the perspective of a continuous arc tracing the development of modern Italian art from the avant-garde movements to the art of the post war period, there can be no doubt that the special parallels between the two series make them a highly significant part of the picture.

The exhibition layout by Mario Botta highlights the differences and affinities between the two artistic practices. Botta has come up with a new way of using the exhibition space, specially designed to showcase these works in all their splendour: Balla's are suspended in white niches, surrounded by empty space that

throws them into focus, while the large canvases by Dorazio are presented against sweeping expanses of black, a strikingly effective approach that above all ensures a visual reference to Balla's works.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue published by Mousse-Milano, featuring texts by Gabriella Belli, Francesco Tedeschi, author of Piero Dorazio's *Catalogue Raisonné*, and Riccardo Passoni, director of the GAM in Turin, where Giacomo Balla's most important works on paper are preserved. Rich critical apparatuses edited by Giulia Arganini (for Giacomo Balla) and Valentina Sonzogni (for Piero Dorazio) complete the volume. An interview with Mario Botta offers insight into the design of the exhibition.

The title of the exhibition, "Where the Light", comes from the poem of the same name by Giuseppe Ungaretti, which is included in the book *La luce. Poesie 1914-1961* (Erker Presse, San Gallo, 1971), illustrated with 13 colour lithographs by Piero Dorazio. As we know, the poet was a friend of Dorazio's, but he was also a great admirer of Balla, and he wrote the foreword for the book *Balla Futurista. An Album of His Life and Work*, by Virginia Dortch Dorazio's (Piero's wife), dedicating his elegant critical prose to Balla's exploration of light.

Collezione Giancarlo e Danna Olgiati

The Collezione Giancarlo Danna Olgiati, which is open to the public in the art space alongside the LAC cultural centre, hosts exhibitions of major artworks selected from the couple's vast collection. One of the most significant collections of Italian art dating from the early 20th century to the present, as well as the Nouveaux Réalistes and international contemporary art, it presents two key exhibitions a year, alternating with temporary shows that explore the work of featured artists in more depth. The exhibition opening in the autumn throws the focus on Arte Povera and the Italian masters of the post-war period, such as Accardi, Colla, Consagra, De Dominicis, Fontana, Scarpitta, Turcato, and Vedova.

Information

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Opening hours:

Thursday – Sunday: 11 am – 6pm
Free entrance

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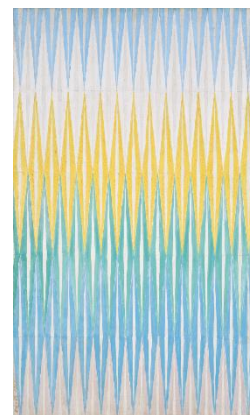
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Press images

01.
Giacomo Balla
Compenetrazione iridescente n°1
1912
Pencil, oil and wax pastel on paper
99 x 59
Palazzo Maffei, Casa Museo, Verona
© 2023, ProLitteris, Zurich



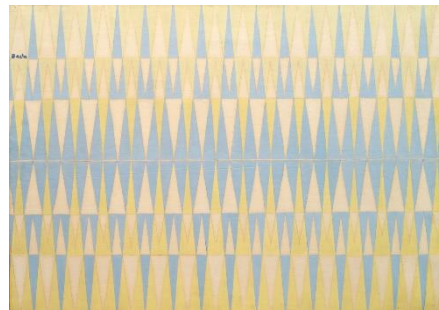
02.
Giacomo Balla
Compenetrazione iridescente radiale
(Vibrazioni prismatiche)
ca. 1913-1914
Tempera on cardboard
GAM - Galleria civica d'Arte Moderna e contemporanea.
By concession of the Fondazione Torino Musei
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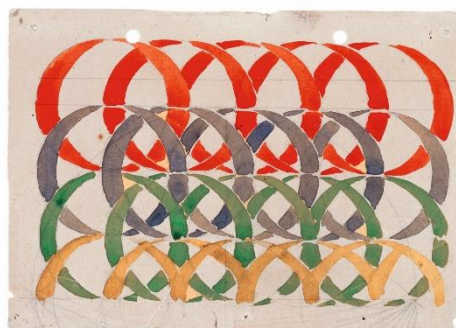
03.
Giacomo Balla
Compenetrazione iridescente n°7
ca. 1912
Oil on canvas
77 x 77 cm
GAM-Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin.
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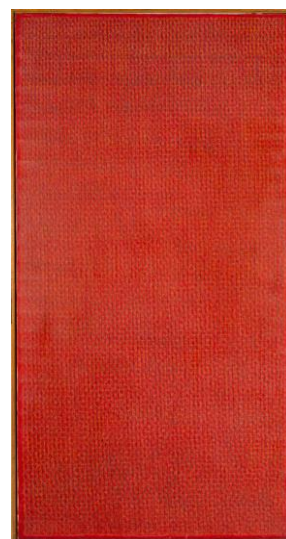
04.
Giacomo Balla
Compenetrazione iridescente n.4
1912-13
Oil and pencil on canvas paper
55 x 76 cm
MART, Museo di arte moderna e contemporanea di
Trento e Rovereto, Rovereto
On deposit from a private collection
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05.
Giacomo Balla
Compenetrazioni Iridescenti (studio)
1912/1913
Watercolour on paper, sheet from Düsseldorf's
notebook
12.5 x 17.7 cm
Collection Gian Enzo Sperone
© 2023, ProLitteris, Zurich



06.
Piero Dorazio
Backed in silence
1960-1961
Oil on canvas
197 x 97 cm
Collection Giancarlo e Danna Olgiati
© 2023, ProLitteris, Zurich



07.
Piero Dorazio
Il primo viaggio 1
1961
Oil on canvas
195,6 x 114 x 2,7 cm
Private collection
© 2023, ProLitteris, Zurich



08.
Piero Dorazio
Troppo segreto
1961
Oil on canvas
197 x 114 cm
Courtesy vitart S.A., Lugano
© 2023, ProLitteris, Zurich



09.
Piero Dorazio
Allo scoperto
1963
Oil on canvas
162 x 114 cm
Pinacoteca "Corrado Giaquinto", Bari
© 2023, ProLitteris, Zurich



10.
Piero Dorazio
Few roses
1963
Oil on canvas
162,8 x 130,5 x 3 cm
Private collection
© 2023, ProLitteris, Zurich



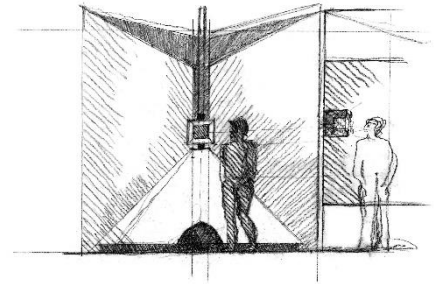
11.
Piero Dorazio
Crack verde [Senza titolo]
1959
Oil on canvas
81 x 100 cm
Collection Intesa San Paolo
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12.
Cardboard study model
Mario Botta Architetti
Photo © Enrico Cano



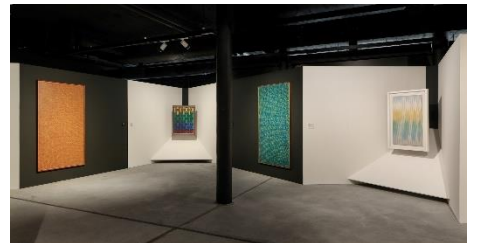
13.
Sketch
Arch. Mario Botta



14.
Installation view "Balla '12 Dorazio '60. Dove la luce"
Collezione Giancarlo e Danna Olgiati,
photo © Studio Fotografico Enrico Cano Sagl



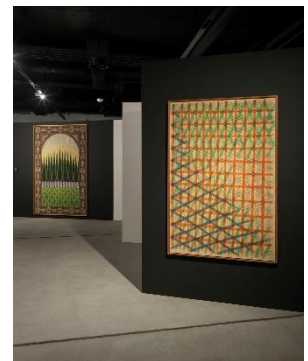
15. Installation view "Balla '12 Dorazio '60. Dove la luce"
Collezione Giancarlo e Danna Olgiati,
photo © Studio Fotografico Enrico Cano Sagl



16.
Installation view "Balla '12 Dorazio '60. Dove la luce"
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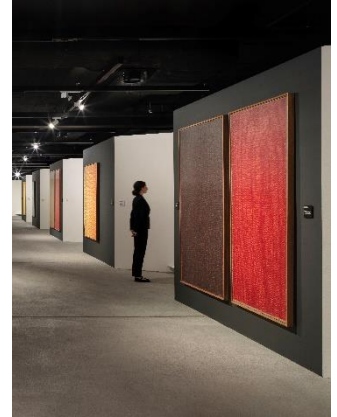
17.
Installation view "Balla '12 Dorazio '60. Dove la luce"
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photo © Studio Fotografico Enrico Cano Sagl



18.
Installation view "Balla '12 Dorazio '60. Dove la luce"
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photo © Studio Fotografico Enrico Cano Sagl



19.
Installation view "Balla '12 Dorazio '60. Dove la luce"
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20.
Installation view "Balla '12 Dorazio '60. Dove la luce"
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21.
Installation view "Balla '12 Dorazio '60. Dove la luce"
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