



MARONCELLI 12

Innocent as doves Wise as serpents

Opening: Wednesday May 27, 2026 | 6:30pm – 9pm

On view: May 28 – September 25, 2026

They have been called innocent, dreamers, prophets of the past, primitive. "Innocent as doves, wise as serpents" kicks off on May 27th at Galleria Maroncelli 12: an exhibition featuring around forty small-format Naïf works from the Dino Menozzi collection.

The phenomenon of Naïve art is far from homogeneous. As Cesare Zavattini (writer, screenwriter, and leading promoter of Italian Naïve art, who founded the "C. Zavattini" National Museum of Naïve Arts in Luzzara, Reggio Emilia, in 1967) points out, there is a strong presence of 'idyllic painting', when 'nature is seen as an ideal place of peace, of serenity', writes Zavattini in the preface to "I Naïfs italiani," 'artists are not farmers but employees, laborers, housewives'. Theirs is an 'approximate' nature that lacks 'vegetal truth'. If the painter is a peasant, he is not inclined to idyllic painting. 'His nature is richer and more vital', Zavattini continues, 'the whole is less dreamy and full of earthly moods... We are faced with a strong, elemental realism'. Then there is the countryside populated by witches and devils, '...and hence the texture of a particular rustic, grotesque surrealism'. Many Naïf artists speak of anecdotal painting too, expressing themselves with 'episodic painting with a moralistic and satirical taste', balancing irony and anguish. It is spontaneous, pure art, but the artists are not amateurs imitating famous artists. They are self-taught, diverse in style but extremely original. A tribute to history. In the 1960s and 1970s, Naïve painting and Art Brut overlapped in Italy, because the phenomenon of Outsider Art was not yet known in our country. So that artists like Ligabue and Pietro Ghizzardi, today leading artists of Italian Art Brut, were considered Naïfs painters at the time.

Most critics of the time agreed on one point: overall, Naïve art urges us to reclaim nature, and therefore ourselves.

Let's return to the exhibition. "Innocent as Doves, Wise as Serpents", the title, was suggested to us by Zavattini's words in a fragment of the documentary "Naïfs of the World: Italy", 1975, by Gianpaolo Tescari. The exhibition, in addition to displaying the small-format works so dear to the Naïfs artists (28 authors are featured), offers the



opportunity to consult various volumes and catalogs of that period in the gallery. All material was collected and organized by Menozzi in a collection of books on the subject, previously acquired by the gallery. Special thanks therefore go to Dino Menozzi, who, guided by his instinct and, above all, a strong passion for art, amassed a wealth of works and anecdotes during his forays into the Po Valley. This meticulous research, combined with a desire and awareness of the need to publicize it, led him to the foundation of the quarterly magazine "L'arte naïve" in 1974, which was published until 2002.

Due to space constraints, we will not delve here into the 28 artists' biographies. Without ranking them, we will highlight the stylistic originality of some particular artists. The dreamlike compositions of Enrico Benassi (Casale di Mezzani, 1902 – Parma, 1978) are striking, as are the almost surreal images by Mario Bortolami (Voltagarozzo, Padua, 1924 – 2001); the bold descriptions of the villages perched on the hills that form the backdrop to the memories of popular festivals and traditions by Giuseppe Gagliano (Centuripe, Enna, 1897 – Catania, 1985); the delicate rural poetry, rendered with meticulousness of sign by Rodolfo Macca (Gualtieri, 1936); the formal elegance in the representation of urban structures by Lina Muzzi (Bologna, 1929 – n.p.); the atmospheres of ancient castles by Stanislao Ponzi, known as Nello (S. Maria del Piano, Parma, 1897 – 1984); the robust and essential, almost harsh, depiction of the human figure by Toni Roggeri (Pieve Modolena, Reggio Emilia, 1927 – 2003); and finally the peculiarity in depicting people always with their heads bowed by Serafino Valla (Luzzara, 1919 - Reggiolo, 2014): a way to express the weight of his suffered vicissitudes but also humble submission to divinity.

Maroncelli12 - Via Maroncelli 12 – Milano
Tuesday – Friday, 3pm – 7pm
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