

CIVICO MUSEO "PARISI VALLE"

TEATRALMENTE:

Salvatore Fiume
Artist, Writer, Stage Designer

from 15.12.2024 to 16.03.2025

Exhibition Guide

1

The Civico Museo 'Parisi Valle' opens the 2024/2025 exhibition cycle with a special comeback of a great 20th century artist, Salvatore Fiume (Comiso, 23 October 1915 - Milan, 3 June 1997). It also presents works from the rich heritage of the permanent collections. The Sicilian master had in fact been celebrated in the early years of the museum, in 2000, with a fortunate exhibition curated by Luigi Cavadini who also edited the catalogue.

Now, the nearly forty works by Salvatore Fiume, which are one of the highlights of the museum's collections, are once again presented to visitors.

The works on display consist of a group of early drawings from 1935-1937, mainly inks, and a series of impressive etchings that 'make Fiume's early (and so far completely unknown) production known. These drawings were executed during his last years at the Regio Istituto d'Arte del Libro and in his first year of fatigue and hunger in Milan - 'what I suffered here only God knows', he writes on one of the exhibited drawings, dated Milan 7.5.1937. These drawings show a good mastery of the graphic means: the artist moves freely, sometimes letting the pen run fluidly, sometimes slowing it down to underline and highlight, sometimes moving it convulsively, but always following an already lucid concept (Cavadini)'.

The group of drawings (exhibited in Room 1) also documents Salvatore Fiume's early interest in the theatre, long before his beginnings as a stage designer at La Scala in Milan in 1952 on the recommendation of Alberto Savinio. For the next forty years he would paint immense stage sets for *Nabucco* (1958), *William Tell* (1965) and Ravel's *Boléro* (1967). He also worked at the Teatro Massimo in Palermo for Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi* (1954), at London's Covent Garden (*Aida*, in 1957) and at the Opéra Monte-Carlo in Monaco (Gaetano Donizetti's *Il Campanello*, in 1992), the last stage design by Fiume.

Around the dramatic *Revolution at the Theatre*, an Indian ink of 1937, other sheets are inspired by masks, costumes, dancers, through which the young artist studies, dissolves the line into curves and windings of rare elegance, experiments with different techniques in chiaroscuro (charcoal, pencil, ink). Above all, through the mediation offered by traditional scenery, he starts to develop a personal relationship with history: *Venetian Masks* and *Solar Chariot* (1937). Important in those years is the encounter with Milan: the theatres, the great opera performances, but also the pubs and parks traversed by processions of *Seminarists* (1936).

The drawings are accompanied by twenty etchings (exhibited in Room 2) that are a most eloquent testimony of Fiume's brilliance in the art of engraving. Here, the exquisite graphic sign is emphasised by a complex, but very rigorous, composition that masterfully treats the third dimension. Outstanding among the etchings are the large prints of the *Last Judgement*

and the portraits of Dante and Virgil, but above all the complete sequence of illustrations for Alessandro Tassoni's *La secchia rapita*, a volume published in 1941 by the Regio Istituto d'Arte del Libro di Urbino [FC].

Before the visitor's eyes, a River of Ink (un *Fiume d'inchiostro*) is truly flowing, as the newspaper *Corriere della Sera* titled its review of the 2000 exhibition.

→ **Books.** Discover the exhibition catalogue and the catalogues of the more than one hundred exhibitions of the Civic Museum 'Parisi Valle' since 1998.

→ **Online.** Discover the highlights of our permanent collection at www.museoparisivalle.it.

→ **Complete Index.** Discover the complete index of the art and archaeology collections on the website of the Lombardy Region www.lombardiabeniculturali.it.

Exhibition Guide

Room 1

The Revolution at the Theatre

Via Leopoldo Giampaolo, 1
21061 | Maccagno con Pino e Veddasca | Lago Maggiore (Varese)
Tel. +39 0332 561201 | www.museoparisivalle.it
info@museoparisivalle.it | [instagram](#) | [facebook](#) | [youtube](#)

Salvatore Fiume was born in Comiso in 1915. He was a painter, sculptor, architect, writer and stage designer. At the age of sixteen, he received a grant for the **Royal Institute for Book Illustration in Urbino** where he acquired a profound knowledge of printing techniques: lithography, serigraphy, etching and woodcut. After he had finished his studies, in 1936 he moved to Milan where he met artists and intellectuals such as **Dino Buzzati** and **Salvatore Quasimodo**, with whom he made friends.

In 1938, he went to Ivrea to work for Olivetti as art director of a cultural magazine that was especially dear to the president, Adriano Olivetti. Renowned intellectuals like Franco Fortini and Leonardo Sinisgalli were collaborating to the magazine. Although Fiume planned a career as a painter, his first success was a literary work, the autobiographical novel **Viva Gioconda!**, published in Milan in 1943 by the publisher Bianchi-Giovini.

In 1946, Fiume gave up his job at Olivetti to dedicate himself completely to painting. He moved to Canzo, near Como, where he converted a huge 19th century spinning factory into a studio. It was to become his permanent residence from 1952 and is now the seat of the **Salvatore Fiume Foundation**. His painting, strongly influenced by the Italian Quattrocento and the metaphysical painting of de Chirico, Savinio and Carrà, hardly succeeded in those years. So, in 1948 he painted a series of paintings inspired by Spanish tradition and folklore, signing them **Francisco Queyo**, a fictitious Roma painter. Fiume even invented a fake story about Queyo living as a political refugee in exile in Paris. These paintings were successfully exhibited at the Galleria Gussoni in Milan.

1949 was the year of his first official exhibition, at the Galleria Borromini in Milan, where his *Islands of Statues* and *City of Statues* aroused considerable interest among critics. During the exhibition at the Galleria Borromini, the director of the MoMA Collections in New York, Alfred H. Barr Jr., acquired the *City of Statues* (1947), which is now at the **MoMA**. The Jucker Collection in Milan also bought a painting presented in that exhibition. In 1950 Alberto Savinio, Giorgio de Chirico's brother, favoured Fiume's participation in the **Venice Biennale** where he exhibited the triptych *Islands of Statues* (now in the Vatican Museums). That was worth an entire page to the American magazine 'Life'.

In 1951, **Gio Ponti** asked Fiume to create an enormous painting (3 x 48 metres) for the first class lounge of the **transatlantic liner Andrea Doria**. He painted an imaginary Italian Renaissance city full of art masterpieces from different historical epochs so that passengers would get an impression of what they might have seen in Italy. Unfortunately, in 1956 the gigantic painting got lost forever in the sinking of the liner near the island of Nantucket, Massachusetts.

In 1953, the magazines 'Life' and 'Time' commissioned him for their New York offices a series of works illustrating an imaginary history of Manhattan and New York Bay, which Fiume reinterpreted as *Islands of Statues*.

From 1949 to 1952, on the invitation of the manufacturer Bruno Buitoni Snr., Fiume completed a sequence of ten large paintings on the theme of the 'Adventures, misfortunes and glories' of ancient Umbria, in which the influence of Italian quattrocento masters like Piero della Francesca and Paolo Uccello is clearly visible. In 1988, the paintings were donated by the Buitoni family to the Region of Umbria. They are now preserved in Perugia in the *Sala Fiume* in **Palazzo Donini**, which is open to visitors.

In 1967 Fiume carried out the draft for the large mosaic in the **Basilica of the Annunciation** in Nazareth in the Holy Land. In 1973, together with his friend, the photographer Walter Mori, Fiume went to Ethiopia, to the **Babile Valley**, where he painted his *Islands* on a rock formation using marine varnishes. For the large retrospective in 1974 at the **Palazzo Reale** in Milan, Fiume created a full-scale polystyrene reproduction of part of the rocks painted in Ethiopia, which took up almost the entire Caryatid Hall of Palazzo Reale. On the same occasion, he presented for the first time the *African Mona Lisa*, now in the Vatican Museums, a tribute to African female beauty inspired by Leonardo's Mona Lisa. In 1975, Fiume offered to decorate for free the historian centre of the Calabrian town **Fiumefreddo Bruzio**, an initiative that was warmly welcomed.

Fiume's oeuvre as a sculptor includes large works like the bronze statue at the **European Parliament in Strasbourg**, the sculptures at the **San Raffaele hospitals** in Milan and Rome, the bronze group for the **Wine Fountain** in Marsala and two bronzes at the **Park Museum in Portofino**. In 1995, the Centro Allende in La Spezia realised his last sculpture exhibition in its outdoor areas. In 1985, Fiume held a large exhibition of paintings at Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome. In 1991, he showed his architectural projects at the International Architecture Exhibition in Milan, at the Palazzo della **Triennale**. In 1992, he exhibited his paintings at **Villa Medici**, seat of the French Academy in Rome.

After his death in 1997, Fiume is commemorated with several retrospectives: at the **Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea** in **Arezzo**, for the tenth anniversary of his death, at the **Auditorium-Parco della Musica** in Rome, at **Spazio Oberdan** in Milan (2018). In 2012, the municipality of **Varese** installed a sculpture by Salvatore Fiume in the Piazza del Tribunale. Since 2012, thanks to a donation from his children, eleven large-scale works have revived the Spazio Fiume inside the new Palazzo Lombardia in Milan.

→ Source: www.fiume.org

Exhibition Guide

Room 2

The Last Judgment

Room 2 is dedicated to the entire sequence of illustrations that were created by Salvatore Fiume for the volume *La secchia rapita* from 1934 to 1936, while he attended engraving courses at the Regio Istituto d'Arte e del Libro in Urbino.

La secchia rapita (*The Stolen Bucket*) is a mock-heroic poem in twelve chants in octave rhyme by Alessandro Tassoni (1565-1635), which was written in 1615 but not published until 1622 in Paris. It tells the story of a bucket stolen by the residents of Modena from the people of Bologna, an event that in the end would lead to war.

When he worked on the illustration of the volume, Salvatore Fiume produced more etchings than were actually necessary. The collections of the Civico Museo 'Parisi Valle' contain the proof prints of fifteen etchings, executed on paper of a smaller format and on display in the exhibition. Twelve of them were used to illustrate the twelve chants of the poem. Another print, which opens the series in the exhibition, was intended as a frontispiece, but later was rejected and substituted by a new image. On display are two further compositions, all of them of great interest.

The technical and drawing mastery of the young Fiume can be witnessed in the detailed rendering of hundreds of figures. A few lines are all he needs to depict a human body or to trace the features of a face. The play of light and shadow seems purposely enforced and leads to very effective narrative results.

The influence of the European masters of engraving is evident in the entire work: from the Dutch Lucas van Leyden and the German Dürer, to the Spanish Goya and finally Giovanni Battista Piranesi and Bartolomeo Pinelli [Luigi Cavadini].

TEATRALMENTE:

Salvatore Fiume

Artist, Writer, Stage Designer

dal 15.12.2024 al 16.03.2025

Organisation and coordination:

CIVICO MUSEO "PARISI VALLE"

Exhibition curated by

Federico Crimi

Exhibition Guide

Gallery

In the gallery that surrounds the two rooms, the rotating presentation of the collections of the Civico Museo 'Parisi Valle' continues, with a particular focus on sculpture.

Sculptures by **Giuseppe Parisi** (Maccagno, 1915 - Rome, 2009) in transparent and coloured plexiglass (blue, red, violet), created from the 1970s on, and multiples, also in plexiglass, by **Giuseppe Capogrossi** (Rome, 1900 -1972) interact with iron works by **Ettore Colla** (Parma, 1896 – Rome, 1968) and by **Maria Dompè** (Fermo, 1959). These works have been part of the museum's collections since the beginning, due to the close friendship and professional ties between Giuseppe Parisi, Ettore Colla and Maria Dompè.

Furthermore, the exhibition presents several sculptures that came to the museum through subsequent donations (the so-called 'second donation'). These include the vigorous stone sculpture by **Nino Cassani** (Viggiù, 1930 - Milan, 2017).