

PAUL VI AND THE ARTISTS.
"YOU ARE THE CUSTODIANS OF BEAUTY IN THE WORLD"

EXHIBITION

17 OCTOBER - 15 NOVEMBER 2014
CHARLEMAGNE WING

CATALOGUE
CURATOR FRANCESCA BOSCHETTI
EDIZIONI MUSEI VATICANI

PRESENTATION

Giovanni Battista Montini was a man of acknowledged intellectual and cultural depth, extended and refined during his years as Nuncio in Paris. He was an admirer of the philosopher Jacques Maritain, a friend of Jean Guittou, who wrote his spiritual biography, attentive to the avant-garde, and sensitive to the movements and ideas which were sweeping through Europe in the early 1900s. He was able to know and spend time with Cocteau, Severini, Chagall and Rouault, among others, and to reflect on the writings of Paul Sérusier and Maurice Denis.

Of reflective temperament and inclined to pessimism, Giovanni Battista Montini knew that to heal the rift between art and the Church would be a difficult and extremely risky undertaking, however, as an intellectual and as a pastor, he believed that the risk must be taken, that Catholicism could not escape confrontation with the artistic reality of the times.

In his speech to artists held in the Sistine Chapel on 7 May 1964, a year after his succession to the Throne of St Peter with the name of Paul VI, Giovanni Battista Montini elaborated and proposed an aesthetic doctrine destined to become one of the most important pages in the history of 20th century Catholicism. Paul VI regarded the artist as a person called to render visible that which is transcendent, inexpressible, *"ineffable"*, in the fullness of his expressive freedom and therefore in the exercise of his *"creative"* spontaneity.

The Collection of Contemporary Art, an autonomous department of the Vatican Museums inaugurated by Paul VI on 23 June 1973, after he had personally and lovingly taken part in its construction, together with his secretary Mons. Pasquale Macchi, was destined to witness to the *"religiosity"* present in modern and contemporary art; now entrusted to traditional iconographies, now underlying *"secular"* subjects, such as landscapes, still life, portraits, and informal compositions. Starting with the recognition of the innate *"religiosity"* in the figurative forms of modernity would it be possible – this was the Pope's ultimate thinking – to set about healing the rift between the Church and artists and prefigure the *"sacred art"* of the future.

For all these reasons and more the Vatican Museums' Gallery of Contemporary Art, with its 450 works on display and thousands more in store, with its masterpieces by Matisse and Van Gogh, Chagall and Otto Dix, Bacon and Fontana, Rouault and Severini, Arturo Martini and Manzù, appears today as one of the greatest bequests to the universal culture of the twentieth century Church. We of the Museums cannot let the beatification of this great Pontiff pass without expressing our gratitude and our admiration for what he did for the world of the arts.

In the exhibition in the Braccio di Carlo Magno, designed by the architect Roberto Pulitani, we have arranged a collection of the most important documents which show Pope Paul VI's intellectual journey together with the works which best illustrate his interests as a collector.

In the catalogue which these lines introduce, Francesca Boschetti tells the story of a Pope who loved artists because he held them to be *«the custodians of beauty in the world»*. My colleague has known how to bring this delicate work to a conclusion with the greatest professional competence and wisdom. For this I remain sincerely grateful.

ANTONIO PAOLUCCI
DIRETTORE DEI MUSEI VATICANI