



“IRREPRESSIBLE CURIOSITY”

MASTERPIECES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY FROM THE LEONE PICCIONI COLLECTION

“My pride, my heritage.”: with these words Leone Piccioni (Turin, 1925 – Rome, 2018), writer, literary and art critic, scholar, journalist, director, and deputy General Director of RAI, described his remarkable collection of works by the Masters of the Twentieth Century.

Throughout a life rich in interests, encounters, friendships, and collaborations, Piccioni’s love for contemporary art occupied a place of utmost importance: fostered through direct and lasting relationships with artists, this passion nourished his critical reflection and inspired the creation of an extraordinary collection, carefully preserved in his home in Rome, alongside his vast library.

The figure who most profoundly opened the doors of the art world to Piccioni, both in Italy and abroad, was the poet Giuseppe Ungaretti (1888–1970), with whom Leone graduated in Rome in 1948 and to whom he remained bound by a deep and unbreakable friendship. “Ungà,” as the poet was affectionately known, had been, since the 1910^s, one of the young protagonists of the avant-garde art scene, living in Paris alongside Picasso, Braque, and Modigliani and maintaining passionate exchanges with major artists such as Alberto Burri, Giorgio Morandi, Jean Fautrier, and Piero Dorazio. He also took an active role in Italian artistic life as a member of the Jury of the Venice International Art Biennale.

Sharing these significant relationships with his mentor, Leone Piccioni developed a personal and distinctive relationship with both artworks and artists. Such relationships shaped and guided his acquisitions, which gradually formed his private collection. A deep bond with the artists is the unifying thread of the collection: visiting their studios, getting to know their habits, spending time or traveling together, discussing exhibitions and future projects, politics or even football, all contributed to a privileged and essential perspective, unique and specific to each encounter.

From his respectful ties with the great masters Carlo Carrà and Ottone Rosai, to the intellectual and convivial circle that gathered in Tuscany, at Forte dei Marmi, with Mino Maccari and Mario Marcucci; from deep and enduring friendships with Alberto Burri, Carlo Guarienti, Renato Guttuso, Giacomo Manzù, Giorgio Morandi, and Venturino Venturi, to his active and vital participation in the vibrant Roman art scene alongside Afro, Giuseppe Capogrossi, Mario Ceroli, Piero Dorazio, Giosetta

Fioroni, Mario Schifano, and the French artist Jean Fautrier.

Behind the choice and acquisition of each work lies a story, a memory, an encounter. Even the pieces acquired through the art market, such as drawings by George Grosz and Lorenzo Viani, or paintings by Filippo De Pisis and Graham Sutherland, occupy a deliberate place within the collection, reflecting Piccioni's belief in the social responsibility that art can, and must, embody.

In presenting the Leone Piccioni Collection to the public, we have created "rooms" that highlight different aspects of his taste and his encounters, beginning with his bond with Ungaretti, to whom both the first and last rooms are dedicated. The final room also gathers several examples of fine books editions, an activity that Leone pursued with great passion throughout his life.

In 2024, Giovanni and Gloria Piccioni, the writer's children and heirs, donated a significant nucleus of their father's collection to the Vatican Museums, which we present here to celebrate the occasion of the centenary of Leone's birth, and to pay tribute to the profound gesture of generosity of sharing such a precious Heritage and making it accessible to the wider community.