

Peggy Guggenheim COLLECTION

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Press release

MASTERPIECE FROM THE GIANNI MATTIOLI COLLECTION

September 6, 1997

Opening September 6, 1997, twenty-six masterpieces of the world-renowned collection of early 20th century Italian art formed between 1949 and 1953 by collector Gianni Mattioli will be placed on long-term loan at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.

Gianni Mattioli (1903-1977) was born in Milan, Italy. At the age of fifteen he was obliged to leave school and to work in a cotton importation firm. By the early 1920s he had come to know, through Fortunato Depero, the circle of artists and writers that gather round Futurism's founder, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. He developed a precocious interest in contemporary literature, theatre, painting and sculpture, and especially in the art of Umberto Boccioni. The mid-1940s were a turning point in his life. Towards the end of the war, he worked with the Resistance to secure escape routes for the persecuted Jews, and in this way forged an alliance with one of the most influential figures in the Milanese post-war art scene, his cousin Fernanda Wittgens who was later to be Director of the Breara. After the war Mattioli's business flourished and he found himself able at last to begin the collection of modern Italian art that he had dreamt of since his early years. In addition he became active, together with Wittgens, in opening the doors of Milan's museum to important 20th century acquisitions, and promoting Italian art exhibitions outside Italy, such as *Twentieth Century Italian Art* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1949.

By 1943 Mattioli's collection was fully formed. In the 1950s and 60s, it could be viewed in Milan once a week or by appointment. By this time its images had become fixtures in the textbooks of modern Italian art. Between 1967 and 1971 the collection was celebrated on a world tour that included the USA, Europe and the Far East.

The earliest work in the collection is Boccioni's definitive oil sketch (1910) for his first great work, *The City Rises*. Boccioni's *Materia* may be his single most important work, while the slightly later *Dynamism of a Cyclist* (1913), with its scintillated lights and explosive forms, may be his most beautiful. Russolo's *The Solidity of Fog* is the last major painting in private hands by this exceedingly rare artist. Two paintings by Balla, including *Mercury Passing Before the Sun* (1914) and Severini's *Blue Dancer* complement paintings by these artists already owed by Peggy Guggenheim Collection. A series of paintings by Carrà, including his Cubist masterpiece *The Gallery in Milan* and perhaps the most famous image in the collection, a collage titled *Interventionist Demonstration*, complete the quintet of founding Italian Futurist painters. Other works by artists in the orbit of the Futurists – Soffici, Sironi, Rosai, and Depero – make the combined holdings of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection and Gianni Mattioli Collection one of the finest Futurist exhibitions in the world.

Carrà's *The Engineer's Mistress*, his last work in the style of *pittura metafisica*, complements three paintings by de Chirico in the Peggy Guggenheim Collection. The *Portrait of the Painter Frank Haviland* (1914) by Modigliani (an artist missing from the Peggy Guggenheim Collection), is among his first painting following a five-year period in which he dedicated himself to sculpture. Finally, the *coup de gras* is represented by six oil paintings by Morandi from the period 1913-17. *Bottles and Fruit Dish* (1916) is generally considered the earliest masterpiece of this Bolognese master's characteristic tonal studies of closely-observed still lifes.

Masterpieces from the Gianni Mattioli Collection opens to the public on September 6 and will be on view in the Barchessa of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection. A collection handbook, published by

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Electa in English and Italian, will include essays by Laura Mattioli Rossi and Emily Braun, with catalog notes by Philip Rylands.

The exhibitions of the of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection are made possible by the support of the Regione Veneto and Intrapresæ Collezione Guggenheim: Aermec, Arclinea, Barbero 1891, Bisazza Mosaico, Cartiere Miliani Fabriano, DLG AG, Gruppo 3M Italia, Gruppo Imation Italia, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Luciano Marcato, Rex Built-it, Sàfilo Group, Swatch, Wella

58, September 1997