

The European Central Bank and the Bank of Italy

Address by the
Governor of the Bank of Italy
Antonio Fazio
on the occasion of the vernissage

“Images. Italian art from 1942 to the present”

Frankfurt, 29 November 2000

In fully embracing the spirit of this initiative by the European Central Bank and the national central banks, aimed at fostering the enjoyment of our artistic heritage, we hope to show that the world of finance does not shrink from cultivating art.

Art enhances the value of Man, his creativity, his ability to adopt a broad, open-minded vision. Knowledge, art and science are a powerful agent for the unification of peoples, an antidote to conflict and division. Their diffusion, cultural exchanges and the coming together in the enjoyment of books, music and painting can create a substratum of relationships and shared experiences, a fellow-feeling that, when it comes to building a new reality, perhaps counts for more than laws and institutions. Laws are not, nor should they be, mere formal constructs; they require the substance provided by Man's nobler activities and basic political choices.

In this age of globalization we need to revisit the unification of European culture that the Church, through the Benedictines, accomplished in the Middle Ages and then renewed in later periods of historical transition; other Christian churches followed suit.

Art is beauty. That which is beautiful implies a judgement shared by all members of society. A need for harmony elicits a judgement that is recognized by everybody. Herein lies the universality of art.

Our aim here today is to offer a cross section of modern Italian art.

This exhibition is a sort of "temporary export" to the city of Goethe. It offers an introduction to the key movements in Italian painting in the last half of the twentieth century, a glimpse of Italy's artistic heritage.

Chronologically, the show opens with several outstanding painters who, albeit in the diversity of their styles, are emblematic of modern artistic tendencies. These works, which

make up the first section, are on display in a room on this floor. They all come from the Bank of Italy's collection.

The section starts with two paintings from 1942 by Giorgio Morandi and Filippo De Pisis. After contributing to the metaphysical movement of the twenties, these two artists gradually distanced themselves from the rhetoric of Italian art between the world wars.

This room also contains works by a small but important group of innovators who, in the fifties, opened a new dialogue with Europe and the main currents of international artistic exploration.

The second section of the show, which is located on the thirty-sixth floor, is dedicated to the generation that contributed most to the international dialectics of Italian art in the second half of the century. We find masters who are still faithful to what one might call a "classical" abstraction, and who use the canonical materials of painting and sculpture, together with others who refer to "conceptual" and "poor" art.

The third section — the works shown in this room — is given over to a younger generation that adopted many strands of expression. Some of the artists represented here use forms of language and enquiry that know no frontiers and are not concerned with preserving a national identity. Such roots can be seen to survive in the works of others, though inevitably intertwined with the stimuli provided by international innovation.

A society without art is inconceivable. Today, the adage *litterae et musica non dant panem* should have largely lost its force. Indeed, at this gathering it is worth stressing the benefits that investment in art and the environment can bring; but this is not the aspect I wish to address here.

Art can help us to climb to lofty reaches of science and the spirit. It is one response to the indifference and uncertainties of our society; to the inaccessibility and invisibility that

Heine perceived as impotence. Above all, it is a need that stems from awareness of Man's imperfections, his finiteness.

The artist is a mediator between nature and the world of the spirit; he is attracted by a mysterious force; he sees a light in the darkness.

Today it is necessary to combine scientific, technical and economic knowledge with humanism; this is the way to enrich Man and enable him to cope with the challenges inherent in great transformations. Economics would not have a future worthy of its tradition if it were sustained only by a "weak philosophy", it would be an arid branch of knowledge if it were divorced from higher ethical values. The Weberian *homo technologicus* is even more of an abstraction than *homo oeconomicus*. A "strong philosophy" is necessary.

In this exhibition experimental concepts are intermingled with classical approaches, artistic languages that go beyond Italy's borders coexist with exclusively national visions.

Art is a way of giving a sense to existence, of passing from the known to the unknown, of reaching towards God, with the ardour of Dante's Ulysses in his pursuit of *virtute e canoscenza*.