

HAUSER & WIRTH

Press Release

Fausto Melotti. Theatre

Hauser & Wirth London

19 January - 20 April 2022

Curated by Saim Demircan



A selection of sculptures, ceramic pieces and works on paper by Italian sculptor, painter and poet Fausto Melotti are displayed for the first time at Hauser & Wirth in London. Curated by writer and curator Saim Demircan, the exhibition places an emphasis on the theatrical within Melotti's practice and includes works spanning five decades from the 1930s until his passing in 1986. As Demircan says, 'it wasn't until the early 1980s that he designed set pieces for the actual stage. This exhibition looks back throughout Melotti's lifetime to consider how theatre – conceptually as much as a dramatic art – informed the artist's own creativity.'

Fausto Melotti is considered a pioneer of Italian art and is acknowledged for his unique contribution to the development of mid-century European Modernism. Coming of age in prewar Milan and living through the horrors of the Second World War, Melotti metabolized wartime devastation in his work by returning to Renaissance principles of harmony, order, geometry, and musical structure, which he integrated into a highly personal yet universally accessible artistic language that expresses the full range of emotional experiences in modern human existence.

Considering the South Gallery as a stage, a selection of Melotti's teatrini (little theatres) provide a backdrop for sculptural works that allude to the artist's sensibility for dramaturgy, storytelling and allegory. These often share material qualities that resemble set design, such as 'Ifigenia (Iphigenia)' (1978) or 'L'ombra dell'anima (The Shadow of the Soul)' (1984) or narrative scenes with miniature figures in 'Tabernacolo Violato (Violated

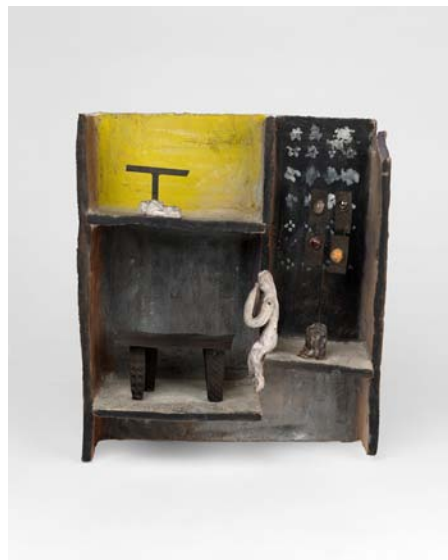
HAUSER & WIRTH



Tabernacle)' (1980) and 'Il passo della zingara (The Step of the Gipsy)' (1983). Elsewhere, works such as 'Da Shakespeare (After Shakespeare)' (1977) and 'Madame X' (1982) refer directly to theatrical protagonists.

Melotti's close connection with dramaturgy is best exemplified in his series of ceramic works, the teatrini. Within a clay-fired 'stage', framing a single moment or multiple mise-en-scènes and featuring miniature objects and figures, Melotti's little theatres offer lively and fragmented narratives acting as theatrical portals into other more metaphysical worlds. One of the first examples from this series, 'Teatrino (Little Theatre)' (c. 1950), is on display and re-encapsulates the artist's synthesis of lyrical abstraction and meticulous craftsmanship. Poised between narration and symbolism, Melotti produced the teatrini as autonomous works within his artistic practice. Additional teatrini include 'Le mani (The hands)' (1949), a tableau in which he used brass as well as clay to construct a theatre of the absurd, with disembodied hands being overlooked by a Giacometti-esque figure; and the visibly more figurative 'Buona notte, bambini (Good Night, Children)' (1984), featuring distinctly child-like characters.

Melotti was involved in the stage and costume design for numerous productions. This includes the 1982 ballet entitled 'Le chant du rossignol' with music by Igor Stravinsky on the occasion of 45th Maggio Musicale Fiorentino in Florence. In 1984, Melotti was also responsible for the stage setting and costume design of 'Belfagor' based



HAUSER & WIRTH



on the novel by Niccolò Machiavelli at the Teatro Comunale in Pistoia, Italy. In the final year of his life, he designed a set for an opera festival organized by the Teatro dell'utopia at the Cenacolo di Ognissanti in Florence.

The exhibition is designed in collaboration with artist Aaron Angell who has developed custom made pedestals for Melotti's sculptural works, and a coved wall in which to display the teatrini. The show will be further complemented by a series of drawings and two-dimensional works in mixed media relating to the theatrical which provide further insight on Melotti's process, including preparatory drawings for the teatrini series.

About the curator

Saim Demircan is a curator and writer based in New York and Turin. Recently, he has curated exhibitions at 80WSE, NYC; Aspen Art Museum, Colorado, and Fridericianum, Kassel. He was the 2017 recipient of the Goethe-Institut New York's curatorial residency program, Ludlow 38 in NYC. Between 2012 and 2015 he was a curator at Kunstverein München in Munich. Previously, he curated a two-year program of offsite projects, as well as an exhibition of works by German artist Kai Althoff at Focal Point Gallery in Southend-on-Sea. Demircan has published on numerous artistic practices; his writing regularly appears in periodicals such as Art Monthly, frieze and Texte Zur Kunst.

Press Contacts:

Alice Haguenauer
Hauser & Wirth London
alicehaguenauer@hauserwirth.com
+44 7880 421823

Hauser & Wirth

23 Savile Row
London W1S 2ET

Gallery hours:

Monday to Saturday, 10 am – 6 pm

www.hauserwirth.com

Copyright and courtesy credits:

All images:
© Fondazione Fausto Melotti, Milano
Courtesy Fondazione Fausto Melotti, Milan and Hauser & Wirth

Fausto Melotti
Da Shakespeare (After Shakespeare)
1977
Brass, painted fabric
88.9 x 75.6 x 36.8 cm / 35 x 29 3/4 x 14 1/2 in
Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography Zürich

Fausto Melotti
Teatrino (Little Theater)
1950 ca
Glazed ceramic, painted clay
46 x 30 x 9 cm / 18 1/8 x 11 3/4 x 3 1/2 in
Photo: Alex Delfanne

Fausto Melotti
L'ombra dell'anima (The Shadow of the Soul)
1984
Painted plaster, painted refractory, brass
25.4 x 59.4 x 41.9 cm / 10 x 23 3/8 x 16 1/2 in
Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography Zürich

Fausto Melotti
Buona notte, bambini (Good Night, Children)
1984
Painted terracotta, glazed ceramics, painted fabric and brass
36.5 x 32.1 x 8.9 cm / 14 3/8 x 12 5/8 x 3 1/2 in
Photo: Timothy Doyon

Fausto Melotti
Meditazione domestica (Domestic Meditation)
1959
Painted terracotta, brass and glazed ceramic
45.7 x 41.3 x 15.9 cm / 18 x 16 1/4 x 6 1/4 in
Photo: Todd White Art Photography

Fausto Melotti in his studio in via Leopardi, Milan (early 1970s)
Photo: Ugo Mulas
© Ugo Mulas Heirs. All rights reserved

Fausto Melotti
Teatrino (Little Theater)
1945 ca
Polychrome wax crayon on cardboard
35 x 25.5 cm / 13 3/4 x 10 in
Photo: Daniele de Lonti, Milano