

# HAUSER & WIRTH

Press Release

## Fausto Melotti Jewelry

Hauser & Wirth Zurich, Bahnhofstrasse  
13 December 2023 – 9 March 2024



Opening 13 December 2023 at Hauser & Wirth Zurich, Bahnhofstrasse, 'Fausto Melotti. Jewelry' is the first comprehensive survey of the Italian artist's jewelry oeuvre. Organized in collaboration with the Melotti Foundation, the exhibition highlights his meticulously crafted jewelry from the 1960s, '70s and early '80s, featuring exceptional creations in gold, silver and brass, complemented by a focused selection of sculptures in the same materials. Admired for his unique contribution to the development of mid-century European Modernism, the versatile Italian artist, sculptor and poet worked in a variety of media. Oscillating between abstraction and figuration, Melotti developed a unique artistic language based on Renaissance principles of harmony, order, geometry, and musical structure, which is reflected in his jewelry making practice.

Melotti's first jewelry pieces are a series of necklaces in glazed ceramic or terracotta that he made for his wife in the 1940s. From 1959, the artist turned to brass and later gold, using the malleability of the materials to create jewelry with slender lines that mirrored his sculptures of the period. These are characterized by curved and spiraling note-like forms that seem to dematerialize in space. The shapes of the jewelry pieces are derived from Melotti's sculptures—metal grids, curls, ellipses, twisted wires, moons, circles or triangles—that have been transformed into the wearable earrings, pendants or brooches, which are on view in Zurich.

Throughout the 20th Century, jewelry evolved into a medium for individual artistic expression, led by artistic movements such as Art Nouveau and Art Déco. Artists including Pablo Picasso and Max Ernst ventured into the field of jewelry making, experimenting with unconventional materials and pioneering techniques, blurring the boundaries between traditional jewelry making and avant-garde design. These avant-garde movements gave rise to what became known as 'artist's jewelry,' introducing a new medium for artistic exploration and establishing it as an integral part of the artistic landscape.

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The post-war era saw the emergence of Italian artists who ventured into jewelry design, notably Fausto Melotti and Lucio Fontana. Their exceptional wearable creations reflected their artistic approaches, embodying elegance and autonomy within established jewelry conventions, and placing them in the company of other masters such as Calder and Giacometti. In his 1963 landmark article 'L'incertezza' (Uncertainty) in the Italian architecture and design magazine *Domus*, Melotti identified with the pre-war avant-garde movement's ethos of questioning fixed artist labels and embracing creative freedom, which he expressed in his diverse media including sculpture, architecture, design, ceramics and jewelry.

Initially trained in figurative art under the Symbolist sculptor Adolfo Wildt, Fausto Melotti turned to abstraction alongside Lucio Fontana in the 'Abstraction-Création' movement of the 1930s. After the war, he returned to figuration and began to work in small format and in ceramics, embracing the intimate immediacy of the medium. The 1950s saw a radical shift in Melotti's creative approach, as he began to incorporate wire into his work. Within his late oeuvre of the 1960s to the 80s, he subsequently moved away from strict line and structure towards a gestural exploration, which extended into his jewelry making, echoing the forms of his sculptures.

Melotti employed a variety of materials—brass, silver, yellow, rose and white gold, precious stones, coral, crystals and diamonds—ranging from the modest to the luxurious, sometimes casting the same piece in different materials. Among the early exhibited works is 'Grata (Grid)' (1966), a necklace with a square metal grid pendant designed to move with the wearer's body, casting ever-changing shadows on the dress and highlighting the elegance, balance and lightness of this modest material. Melotti's skillful handling of metal wire can be seen in the 'Arabesco (Arabesque)' (1966) necklace from the same year, which features a chest piece made of neatly woven yellow gold wires—an elegant method of draping materials directly onto the body.



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In the 1970s, Melotti experimented with playful jewelry designed for the sophisticated yet unconventional woman. Examples include 'Arabesco II (Arabesque II)' (1971)—intriguingly curled yellow gold earrings that accentuate the sinuous contours of anatomy, clusters of thin brass threads as in 'Spilla (Brooch)' (1970), or the pair of earrings 'Luna (Moon)' (1971), with a waxing and waning crescent moon in yellow and white gold, recalling Melotti's 1967 brass sculpture of the same name.

'Collana (Necklace),' (1978), a delicate yellow gold and lapis lazuli necklace with matching earrings, or the earlier leaf necklace of the same name, made of soldered brass in 1971, employ more organic structures. The latter is reminiscent of a large crown to be worn on the chest and recalls the leaves in the sculpture 'Alberello (Little Tree),' (1965). A subtle vein of irony can be found as well in some of the other later jewelry pieces, such as the necklace 'Route (Wheels)' (1984), which evokes a complex intertwining of two-dimensional wheels and comes with matching earrings.



A series of exhibitions of Fausto Melotti's work are being held to mark the centenary of the birth of Italian writer and intellectual Italo Calvino, Melotti's close friend, who died in 1985. The city of Siena is the starting point with the exhibition 'In leggerezza. Fausto Melotti. A tribute to Italo Calvino' at Palazzo Squarcialupi from 6 December, curated by Michela Eremita in collaboration with the Fausto Melotti Foundation. Melotti's works will also be on show at 'Favoloso Calvino. Il mondo come opera d'arte. Carpaccio, de Chirico, Gnoli, Melotti e gli altri,' from 13 October 2023 to 4 February 2024, Scuderie del Quirinale, Rome, Italy and 'Calvino cantafavole,' from 15 October 2023 to 7 April 2024, Palazzo Ducale, Genoa, Italy.

### About the Artist

Fausto Melotti's (1901 – 1986) first retrospective was at Museum Ostwall Dortmund, Germany, in 1971. Other major exhibitions include: Palazzo della Pilotta, Parma, Italy (1976); Palazzo Reale, Milan, Italy (1979); Forte Belvedere, Florence, Italy (1981); Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome, Italy (1983); IVAM – Centre Julio González, Valencia, Spain (1994 – 1995); Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art, Nagoya, Japan (1999); a complete survey at Kunsthalle Mannheim, Mannheim, Germany (2010) which subsequently toured to Kunstmuseum Winterthur, Winterthur, Switzerland (2011); Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, Italy (2014); Villa Paloma, Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, Monaco (2015); and Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, London, UK (2019). The artist is represented in important public collections around the world including Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome, Italy; The Museum of Modern Art, New York NY; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis MN. Melotti died in 1986 and was posthumously awarded the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale that year.

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### Opening hours:

Tue – Fri 10 am – 6 pm  
Sat 11 am – 5 pm

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Fausto Melotti  
Senza titolo (Untitled)  
ca. 1943  
Polychrome glazed ceramic  
47 x 33.5 x 27 cm / 18 1/2 x 13 1/4 x 10 5/8 in

Collana (Necklace)  
ca. 1971  
Brass  
22 x 25 cm / 8 5/8 x 9 7/8 in  
Photo: Sergio Anelli, Milano

Portrait of Fausto Melotti

Fausto Melotti  
Senza titolo (Untitled)  
ca. 1943  
Polychrome glazed ceramic  
47 x 33.5 x 27 cm / 18 1/2 x 13 1/4 x 10 5/8 in

Grata (Grid)  
ca. 1971  
Brass  
36.3 x 10.7 cm / 14 1/4 x 4 1/4 in

Fausto Melotti  
Arabesco II (Arabesque II)  
1971  
Yellow gold (18 kt)  
Each 8 x 3.2 cm / 3 1/8 x 1 1/4 in  
Photo: Daniele De Lonti

Fausto Melotti  
Clair de lune  
1973  
White gold, rock crystal  
62.7 x 12 x 17 cm / 24 5/8 x 4 3/4 x 6 3/4 in  
Photo: Jon Etter

Fausto Melotti  
Alberello (Little Tree)  
1965  
Silver  
55 x 18.5 x 18 cm / 21 5/8 x 7 1/4 x 7 1/8 in  
Photo: Jason Klimatsas

Fausto Melotti  
Tracce (Traces)  
1975  
Rose gold (18 kt)  
Each 6.5 x 3 x 0.7 cm / 2 1/2 x 1 1/8 x 1/4 in  
Photo: Daniele De Lonti

Fausto Melotti  
Luna (Moon)  
ca. 1967  
Brass  
38.5 x 11.5 x 4.6 cm / 15 1/8 x 4 1/2 x 1 3/4 in  
Photo: Jon Etter

Fausto Melotti  
Luna (Moon)  
1971  
White gold (18 kt), diamonds (ct. 0.07 B)  
Each 5.4 x 2.6 cm / 2 1/8 x 1 in  
Photo: Daniele De Lonti

Fausto Melotti  
Collana (Necklace)  
1973  
Yellow gold, lapis lazuli  
106.5 cm / 41 7/8 in  
Photo: Daniele De Lonti