

A detailed ceramic sculpture by Pietro Melandri. It depicts a woman's face in profile on the right, looking towards a small rabbit on the left. The rabbit is nestled in a woven basket. The woman's hand is visible, holding a single rose. The sculpture is highly detailed with various colors like red, orange, green, and blue, and a glossy finish. The background is a dark, textured surface.

ROBERTO COBIANCHI

The Superfluous Essential  
The Ceramics of Pietro Melandri

BRUN FINE ART



Roberto Cobiانchi

# The Superfluous Essential The Ceramics of Pietro Melandri

with an essay by Claudia Casali

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# “Ceramic Faenza” Between the Wars. Various Expressions of Art Deco

Claudia Casali

I taly’s artistic fervour during the twenty years between the two world wars is reflected in the field of ceramics with successful results, and particularly in the experiments taking place in the Faenza area.

A crucial role was played by the extraordinary work begun by the International Museum of Ceramics (Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche) in Faenza, founded in 1908 by Gaetano Ballardini, its first, farsighted director capable of seeing beyond the narrow confines of the town. In under two decades, he succeeded in establishing international ties with the world’s principal institutions devoted to ceramic art, opening a library and a centre for ceramic research, establishing the specialized scholarly journal *Faenza* and founding the Royal Institute for Ceramics (Regio Istituto per la Ceramica) in 1919 (fig. 1). All of these were fundamental in revivifying local artistic production and drawing attention back to Faenza, a long-standing centre of ceramic production but still alive and active in the contemporary world.

The characteristic style of the interwar years is Art Deco (or the “1925 style”), developed in the wake of the 1925 Paris exhibition, the *Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs*. This “fashion”, as it was often described, has its roots in Art Nouveau and the *avant gardes* (like Futurism) but moves radically beyond their premises. The spirit is that of modernity at any cost, as glorification of the new, of new materials, of speed and of the metropolis, all features clearly deriving from Marinetti’s Futurist movement. In terms of form, there is a clear shift away from the floral, sinuous and symmetrical lines of Art Nouveau in favour of a more rigorous, clear-cut, even abstract “zigzagging” formal concision. Art Deco is a “polyphonic” form of expression in which we see an infatuation with the exotic and with rare animals (panthers, baboons, leopards) and plants (palms and cactuses); the revival of Rococo with young women, fans and Pierrots; the modernity of the metropolis<sup>1</sup>, the car and speed in place of the myth of nature; the glorification of new modern materials (aluminium, bakelite, cement, linoleum, frosted glass, etc); the idealization of the modern, emancipated woman with her short haircut and knee-length skirt, a luxury and glamour that replace the *femme fatale* of the Art Nouveau era.

Art Deco shapes the sensibility and expression of a phase that mingles with the categories of

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<sup>1</sup> On this see PAPINI 1930 which glorifies the myth of Universa, the city of the future, of tomorrow, between utopia and Futurist exaltation of the universe.



1. Regia Scuola di Ceramica (Royal School of Ceramics), Faenza, 1930, Courtesy Archivio MIC Faenza.

the return to order, the Valori Plastici and Novecento movements, abstraction and magical realism. Art Deco expresses the eclectic taste of an era of instability.

Under these circumstances and in an atmosphere of solidarity and heartfelt appreciation for artistic craftsmanship and the small and medium-sized business, Guido Marangoni had a central role. He devised and organized the «Prima Mostra Internazionale delle Arti decorative» (the First International Exhibition of Decorative Arts, known as the Monza Biennale) of 1923 which can be considered the forerunner of Paris 1925. This was without doubt the first genuine opportunity to exhibit the new taste of the time, leading even Carlo Carrà himself, in his review of the event, to pen the now famous consideration «I had the feeling that at Monza the aesthetic spirit of living Europe was key»<sup>2</sup>. Thence the sense of “internationalism” of the moment, the event, the style, the desire to live up to the present and to overcome the historical preconception that divided the arts. The time was ripe to embark upon a programme of activities and revival for the imminent post-war period, indicating the potential and benefits for Italy of embracing, supporting and prioritizing this particular form of enterprise and work, with its long-standing and pervasive tradition in the country.

The exhibitions in Monza (1923-1930), later moved to Milan from 1933, served to bolster the Italian craft “industry” against its European competition while simultaneously testifying to Italian production as an “*avant garde*” in household objects and specifically in furnishings.

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<sup>2</sup> CARRÀ 1923, p. 13.

2. Monza Biennial, 1923: particular of the setting with the showcase of the Royal School of Ceramics with pieces of Domenico Rambelli and Anselmo Bucci, Courtesy Archivio MIC Faenza.



Particular attention was devoted to Faenza already in the 1923 exhibition. In the introduction to the catalogue, we read: «Faenza, the mother town of maiolica, after which it was named (“faïence”), does not fail to present itself at this exhibition in a way worthy of its tradition [...] Today, after a brief interval of decadence beginning with the dispersal and death of Farina’s followers, it has been restored to its former glory thanks essentially to the International Museum of Ceramics and the Royal School of Ceramics, directed by Dr. Ballardini. The Royal School of Ceramics was established in Faenza to provide Italy’s ceramics industry, through theoretical and practical courses of study lasting three years and an advanced course, with workshop foremen and decorators for artistic-industrial ceramic factories»<sup>3</sup> (fig. 2). On display, in addition to the products of the Royal School competently directed by Rambelli and Bucci, were pieces made by the Focaccia-Melandri and La Faïence ceramic companies, and by Matteucci for wrought iron with ceramic applications by Giannetto Malmerendi. Other participants from Faenza can be found in the sections for «Book illustrators», with Giovanni Guerrini and Giuseppe Ugonia.

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<sup>3</sup> PRIMA MOSTRA 1923, p. 90: «Faenza, la città madre delle maioliche, che da essa presero nome (“faïences”) non manca di presentarsi a questa mostra in forma degna della sua tradizione. [...] Ed oggi, dopo la breve decadenza che s’iniziò con la dispersione e la fine dei seguaci del Farina è riportata a nuova gloria per merito essenzialmente del Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche e della R. Scuola di Ceramica, diretta dal Dr. Ballardini. Lo scopo per cui è sorta la R. Scuola di Ceramica in Faenza è appunto quello di dare all’industria ceramica nazionale, per mezzo di insegnamenti teorico-pratici della durata di tre anni e di un corso di perfezionamento, dei capi officina e dei decoratori per stabilimenti di ceramica artistico-industriale [...]».



3. Monza Biennial, 1925: dining room design by G. Guerrini, made by Ebanisteria Casalini, Faenza, Courtesy Archivio MIC Faenza.

Faenza and the Romagna region were also represented in later editions, always with the involvement of the local museum, documenting a unique and rare vitality for a provincial town (fig. 3).

After centuries of history and tradition, the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought a new dynamism that owes its vigour to the care devoted to the arts already during the Art Nouveau era, with the famous Cenacolo baccariniano (a group of artists of Domenico Baccarini's circle)<sup>4</sup> that assembled the area's finest minds to debate art and culture with international figures. The names represented at the Monza Biennale are those of members of the Circle. Faenza's artists and ceramicists are the undisputed protagonists of this era, of which ceramics were the absolute star. Melandri's career thus belongs to an art-historical context with clearly delineated phases and protagonists whose style was unique and highly personal (fig. 4).

Among the forerunners of Art Deco, we can mention the multi-faceted and multi-talented Achille Calzi<sup>5</sup> (1873-1919), actively involved in the Salon: an intellectual, artist and designer engaged in a quest for modern and innovative solutions in his artistic and industrial production (he

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<sup>4</sup> The bibliography on the Cenacolo Baccarini, linked to the talented Faenza artist Domenico Baccarini (1883-1907), is now extensive. See the most recent publications: BENTINI 2007; DIRANI, SPADONI 2007.

<sup>5</sup> PIAZZA 2017.



4. Monza Biennial, 1925: Romagna Section, Courtesy Archivio MIC Faenza.

collaborated with ceramics factories, and designed furniture and wrought iron). His works incorporated the geometrical simplicity of Secessionist derivation, a taste for fantastical exoticism and updated mythical themes, alluding *ante litteram* to the later Art Deco, which his premature death sadly prevented him from developing (fig. 5).

From 1919 to 1926, Francesco Nonni (1885-1976)<sup>6</sup>, with Anselmo Bucci, Pietro Melandri and Paolo Zoli, was responsible for perhaps the most important Italian Art Deco works produced in Faenza. Like Calzi, Nonni tackled various artistic genres during his long career (small sculptures, paintings, graphic design, intaglios, furnishings and fashion sketches). The high point was reached in his woodcuts, stylistically indebted to the German and Austrian Secessionists, for which he was expressly invited to Monza with an individual space to present the work connected with his publication *Xilografia*,<sup>7</sup> launched in 1924. His woodcuts and small sculptures (young women and Pierrots) convey the atmosphere of the period in the refined and unusual garments (culottes, overalls, crinolines, cloche hats), the dreamy and ironic attitudes, the all-encompassing fashion for

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<sup>6</sup> For a complete bibliography cfr. Dirani 2003-2013.

<sup>7</sup> *Xilografia* cannot be considered a magazine but is a collection of booklets with woodcut plates executed by Nonni and other artists between 1924 and 1926.



5. Achille Calzi, *Dish with fantastic animals (phoenix and chimera)*, 1918-1919, Faenza, Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche (MIC), inv. n. 20144, Courtesy Archivio MIC Faenza.

new dances (the tango and fox-trot), the exoticism and theatricality of the bayadères (an allusion to Josephine Baker) and of the *Corteo Orientale*, displayed at Paris 1925. His ceramics take on life and movement, becoming dynamic thanks to their decoration and the lines that occupy and dominate the surrounding space, defined in a split second.

Giovanni Guerrini (1887-1972)<sup>8</sup> was present at the Biennali<sup>9</sup> with paintings, graphic designs, furnishings executed by the legendary Ebanisteria Casalini, lamps, tripods and vase holders in wrought iron made with the well-known Matteucci company. Guerrini fully embodies the spirit of his time, of the modernity of Art Deco and later of the 1930s and 1940s, dedicating himself

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<sup>8</sup> Cfr. BERTONI 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Monza 1925 saw Guerrini's definitive consecration with the execution of the official Manifesto (after winning a national competition) and the exhibition of the Dining Room made by the Ebanisteria Casalini. Another important participation was at Monza 1930 where he displayed his mirrors.



6. Domenico Rambelli, *Vase with golden spheres*, 1939, Faenza, Liceo Torricelli Ballardini, Raccolte Museali Interne, inv. n. 606, mod. 398, Courtesy Archivio MIC Faenza.

alternately to painting, mosaics (founding the Ravenna School), engraving and graphic design with Secessionist echoes that draw on the new modern spirit (his are the covers of the magazine *Emporium* and the advertisements for Monza), fabrics, interior design and architecture. He collaborated at length on various projects with E.N.A.P.I., Ente Nazionale per l'Artigianato e le Piccole Industrie (National Authority for Craftworking and Small Industry), of which he was the artistic director from 1927 to 1942, responsible for national and international projects. His major achievement was to take up and bring to fruition an idea already present in Hoffmann's methods at the Wiener Werkstätte and in the writings of Marangoni of 1918, later endorsed by Gio Ponti in his interior decoration magazines. This was to bring artists and architects together with skilled artisans. In 1928, he wrote in *La Casa Bella*: «Each era has its character, its style, that may well connect to past sensibilities, graft itself onto past creations, but that has its own intimate essence in keeping with contemporary customs, the rhythm of life».

It is impossible to separate the names of Domenico Rambelli (1886-1972) and Anselmo Bucci (1887-1959), contemporaries active at the Royal School of Ceramics from 1919 to 1944.



7. Riccardo Gatti, *Panter*, 1930 ca., Private collection, Courtesy Archivio MIC Faenza.

Rambelli had an artistic career in Italy linked to sculpture and monumental statuary, participating in the Sarfatti's Novecento group, the Rome Quadriennali and the Venice Biennali. His unique and highly personal manner (fig. 6) inclines towards the style of the time in its formal economy, essential volumes and compositional modernity (in this context a famous work is his Monument to the aviator Francesco Baracca in Lugo di Romagna (1936), an absolute masterpiece of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). The pairing Rambelli-Bucci starts with their appointment to the Royal School, opened in 1919 (the same year as the foundation of the Bauhaus), a genuine hotbed of talent that managed to exploit the opportunities provided by an excellent teaching staff and its connection to the Faenza Museum. The encounter of two creative and innovative minds led to the updating of traditional Faentine forms and decorations in line with contemporary modernism: vigour and plastic concision in ample forms, adherence to a rigorous idiom, updating of popular stylistic traits (from terracotta to gold). Rambelli's creative flair achieved full expression thanks to Bucci's great technical and innovative skills.

Riccardo Gatti (1886-1972) opened his own ceramic workshop in 1928. His career was connected to his brief flirtation with Futurism, ending with the Milan exhibition *Trentatre futuristi* at the Galleria Pesaro in 1929. Gatti established a dialogue with Marinetti, Balla, Fabbri, Benedetta and Dal Monte, creating fine pieces from original drawings. Particularly famous is his coffee service designed by Balla, with its bold hexagonal shape reminiscent of the mechanical rivet, fully in the



8. Ercole Drei, *Pegasus*, 1930-40, Fabbrica Melandri, Faenza, Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche (MIC), inv. n. 24156, Courtesy Archivio MIC Faenza.

spirit of modernism. His Futurist interlude was also important for the town of Faenza, bringing with it an avant garde spirit linked to new productive ideas. With his workshop (still in operation today), Gatti successfully adapted traditional pieces to the new demands of the modern world, with decorative and formal repertoires attentive to the sophisticated contemporary taste. His composite creativity is clearly apparent in everyday objects (coffee and tea services, plates) and in his lesser known sculptural models (fig. 7) with a reflective metallic glaze, refined and gravitating to a poetics between Art Deco and the Novecento movement.

Another major figure of this period was Ercole Drei (1886-1973). He embodies an aspect of late Art Deco more connected to modern classicism and fully embraced in Sarfatti's Novecento movement and in productions postdating the 1930s. His sculptural oeuvre combined allusions to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Art Nouveau and late Romanticism, while, thanks to the technical assistance of Anselmo Bucci and Pietro Melandri, his ceramics succeeded in assimilating the classical taste of the time. The artist drew on recognized clichés (linked particularly to mythical and historical themes) and replicated them in a personal manner, adapting them to new formal solutions. This is apparent in the *Cup Held up by Pegasus* (fig. 8) whose lustre glaze and metallic reflections succeed in enriching this sculpture with its simple decorative elegance.

Pietro Melandri's work belongs to this stimulating artistic atmosphere with its plethora of major figures.



# A Lifetime in Ceramics

Roberto Cobianchi

In late 19<sup>th</sup> century Faenza, a young boy with artistic inclinations but from a family with limited economic means inevitably trained in a ceramics workshop. When still very young, Pietro Melandri (1885-1976) thus became familiar with the techniques and decorative models of the then newly fashionable Renaissance tradition as a workshop apprentice (between 1897 and 1905) to the brothers Venturino and Virginio Minardi, founders of the «Fratelli Minardi Ceramiche Faentine»<sup>1</sup>.

Initiated into the practice of the art with which this town in Romagna has lived in symbiosis for centuries, Melandri also began to attend evening classes at the local School of Arts and Crafts then directed by the painter Antonio Berti (1830-1912). He thus entered the same environment in which artists such as Domenico Baccarini (1882-1907), Francesco Nonni (1885-1976) and Ercole Drei (1886-1973) had trained. They later became friends and at least the latter two also established fruitful collaborations with Melandri. Subsequently, he began to frequent the so-called *Cenacolo baccariniano* or Baccarini Circle. This group of young artists and intellectuals gathered around the talented and multifaceted Baccarini brought him into contact with new artistic research. Thanks to the *Cenacolo baccariniano*, Faenza became an unlikely centre for the renewal of art and artistic craftsmanship, open to European symbolism and with a strong inclination towards Art Nouveau models<sup>2</sup>. In 1908, the town was given a boost of international scope by the exhibition held to celebrate the third centenary of the birth of the mathematician Evangelista Torricelli (believed at the time to have been born in Faenza)<sup>3</sup>. Here visitors could admire works not only by the most cutting edge painters and sculptors from Italy, Gaetano Previati (1852-1920), Leonardo Bistolfi (1859-1933), Libero Andreotti (1875-1933), Duilio Cambellotti (1876-1960), Adolfo De Carolis (1874-1928), Galileo Chini (1873-1956) and the younger Lorenzo Viani (1882-1936) and Arturo

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<sup>1</sup> On Melandri, see above all the biographical entry by FANTI 2009. See also GOLFIERI 1979; STEFANELLI TOROSI 1987; GAUDENZI 2002; NESTI 2002; GAUDENZI 2017. The now ample bibliography on Melandri includes numerous biographical profiles, accompanied by the reproduction of some works, within broader overviews and repertoires dedicated to Italian 20<sup>th</sup>-century ceramics; in particular we should mention: Rosso 1983, pp. 167-170; BERTONI, SILVESTRINI 2005, pp. 170-172; GAUDENZI 2006, pp. 232-233; TERRAROLI 2007, pp. 299-300.

<sup>2</sup> See the essays in BENTINI 2007.

<sup>3</sup> We now know that Torricelli was born in Rome to parents from Romagna and was raised in Faenza, his mother's hometown. Until 1987, however, it was believed that Torricelli had also been born in Faenza.

Martini (1889-1947), but also from abroad, like Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), Constantin Meunier (1831-1905), Carl Larsson (1855-1919) and Franz von Lenbach (1836-1904).

Obviously, the Faenza exhibition could not neglect the applied arts and considerable space was given over to international ceramics, presenting the modern production of Europe's most important factories and most skilled ceramicists. They included the works of the Swedish Hans Stoltenberg Lerche (1867-1920) and factory productions: Zsolnay of Pecs (Hungary), Alumina and Royal Copenhagen of Denmark and De Distel of Amsterdam<sup>4</sup>.

There is no better way to look back on Melandri in the company of his friends from the Cenacolo caccariniano than to recognize him in a photograph taken in 1908 that portrays him with – among others – Domenico Rambelli (1886-1972), Riccardo Gatti (1886-1972) and Francesco Nonni (fig. 1). We cannot establish the exact role played by these companions in directing their friend towards painting, the chimera that he was pursuing at the time and that in 1906 led him to move to Milan. However, it seems certain that Melandri arrived in the city with a letter of introduction from Baccarini to the art critic Vittorio Pica (1862-1930)<sup>5</sup>. His first achievements in painting, exhibited at the Torricelli exhibition, were praised by Nonni in the name of «all his friends»:

«Dear Pietro / Your works have given us a welcome surprise. I'm telling you this on behalf of all your friends as some will tell you in person. If you make something for Venice, I think you'll be accepted, as long as you do as well as for Faenza [...] work hard and you'll see that you make your way. Note that you've surprised everyone, so great is the delicacy of feeling that dominates in those drawings, try to maintain it and you'll see that sooner or later you'll make a name for yourself [...] Rambelli, Borghi, Paoli, Missiroli etc. wish you the best for your success and congratulate you on the beautiful things they've seen»<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> See for example the observations of the Florentine journalist Mario Simonatti: «Zsolnay di Pecs (Ungheria) ha ottenuto effetti meravigliosi con dei riflessi delicatissimi e dei colori spenti, che danno una dolcezza speciale ai suoi pezzi. / Mentre l'*Alumina* di Copenaghen presenta delle porcellane graziosissime, eseguite con grande finezza ed acuto senso d'Arte. Merita elogio anche la *Reale* di Copenaghen per la sua collezione di animali. / Il genere che ha me piace meno è quello del Lerche. Questo artista di grande valore espone delle ceramiche indubbiamente pregevoli. Ma non mi pare che con le nuove forme di estetica che si vanno svolgendo sia comprensibile una simile concezione d'arte. Si tratta ad ogni modo di un genere radicalmente diverso da tutti gli altri e che può ammirarsi appunto per questo brusco distacco e per questa varietà che vi colpisce subitamente. L'effetto è ottenuto dall'insieme dei colori a tinte forti e dai riflessi, manca la figurazione artistica» (SIMONATTI 1908, p. 21); («Zsolnay from Pecs (Hungary) has achieved wonderful effects with very delicate reflections and muted colours, which give a special sweetness to his pieces. / *Alumina* of Copenhagen presents very pretty porcelains, executed with great finesse and a keen sense of Art. The *Royal Copenhagen* porcelain factory is also to be commended for its collection of animals. / The type that I like the least is that by Lerche. This very talented artist exhibits undoubtedly fine ceramics. But it does not seem to me that with the new forms of aesthetics that are unfolding, such a conception of art is comprehensible. In any case, it is a type radically different from all the others and admirable precisely for this clear detachment and for its instantly striking variety. The effect is obtained by the colour palette with strong tints and reflections, the artistic figuration is lacking»).

<sup>5</sup> Baccarini gives an account of the meeting between Pica and Melandri in a letter of 22 October 1906 to his friend, already in Milan: «Carissimo amico – Ho piacere che Pica ti abbia accolto benevolmente e tu devi cercare di tenerlo conto [...]» (from GOLFIERI 1979, p. 17; «Dear friend – I am pleased that Pica has welcomed you kindly and you must try to keep him with you [...]»). On Melandri as a painter, see SASSI 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Letter from Faenza of 31 July 1908, transcribed in full in GOLFIERI 1979, pp. 17-18 and taken up by DE LUCA, MAZZARELLA 1987, pp. 67-68: «Caro Pietro / Coi tuoi lavori ci ài procurato una grata sorpresa. Te lo dico a nome di tutti gli amici come alcuno te lo dirà a parte. Se tu farai qualche cosa per Venezia credo sarai accettato, purché tu faccia come



1. Domenico Rambelli, Pietro Melandri (first seated on the left), Luigi Borghi, Riccardo Gatti, Francesco Nonni and Antonio Missiroli in front of the monument created by Rambelli and dedicated to General R. Pasi, 1908, Faenza, Dirani Archives.

Life in the Lombard city was not easy for the young painter, who was forced to work as a decorator for a company that made painted theatrical sets. Here, as he later recalled, «the sets had to be full of frills, little fountains, mirrors and so on. But I had something more original in mind»<sup>7</sup>. His Milanese experience ended with the outbreak of the First World War and the call to arms. At the end of the conflict, after long months of internment in a prison camp in Sigmundsherberg, on the Austrian border with Hungary, Melandri returned to Faenza in 1919. This was a definitive return home, followed almost immediately by his debut in ceramics, the art in which he would truly achieve his coveted originality.

Melandri's first works appeared under the «La Faïence» brand, established with Paolo Zoli (1885-1960), with whom he had formerly worked at the Minardi factory. However, this enterprise

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hai fatto per Faenza [...] studia molto e vedrai che ti farai strada. Nota che ài sorpreso tutti tanto è la delicatezza di sentimento che domina in quei disegni, cerca di mantenerla e vedrai che una volta o l'altra ti farai noto [...] Rambelli, Borghi, Paoli, Missiroli ecc. ti fanno i più vivi auguri per la tua riuscita e rallegramenti per le belle cose che hanno visto».

<sup>7</sup> LAMBERTINI 1963: «le scene dovevano essere piene di fronzoli, fontanine, specchiere etc. Io invece avevo per la testa qualcosa di più originale».

lasted less than a year and was dissolved in early 1920<sup>8</sup>. Melandri then worked independently until 1922 at the kiln once owned by Achille Calzi (1873-1919)<sup>9</sup>, before embarking upon the most important and enduring venture of this first phase, into which he poured his creative energies for almost a decade. This was the Focaccia and Melandri company founded in 1922 thanks to the financial investment of the Ravenna industrialist Umberto Focaccia and which remained active until 1931<sup>10</sup>.

Thanks to a training that did not take place exclusively in the workshop, Melandri became an exceptional ceramicist, interested in past art and attentive to the contemporary art world. Despite this, his creative path might have remained confined to high-quality craftsmanship, alien to the cultural and artistic debates taking place in Italy between the two wars. In fact, things went very differently. This was not only thanks to his remarkable technical expertise – constantly refined by his highly personal research on the most unusual lustres and reflective glazes, pursued even at the cost of endangering the works in the firing phase – but also to historical and critical circumstances. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the precious art of ceramics became a protagonist on the exhibition circuit and in the debate on the applied arts<sup>11</sup>. This comeback was ultimately embraced by the Futurist avant-garde as well, with the 1938 *Manifesto of ceramics and aéroceramics* authored by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944) and by the ceramicist Tullio d'Albisola (1899-1971).

## Ceramics in the debate on the applied arts

The debate on the applied arts, which naturally involved ceramics as well, had begun already in the Art Nouveau era<sup>12</sup> (consider the First International Exhibition of Modern Decorative Art in Turin in 1902). It became increasingly heated from the 1920s, amidst a broader discussion of the need for Italy to develop a national style<sup>13</sup>. This artistic debate flourished in the shadow of a political event that led to a twenty-year dictatorship. Nevertheless, it accommodated not only loud voices aligned with or receptive to official propaganda, but also minds capable of interpreting issues like modernity, functionality and rationalism in ways other than a nostalgic classicism. The engagement

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<sup>8</sup> For the trademark see GAUDENZI 2002, p. 386.

<sup>9</sup> For the trademark see *Ibidem*. On the multitalented Achille Calzi, a scholar, painter, furniture designer, ceramicist and director of the Pinacoteca and Museo Civico in Faenza from 1906 to 1919, see PIAZZA 2017.

<sup>10</sup> The story was summed up in these terms: «Nell'agosto del 1922 egli [Melandri] incontra un giovane ricco il quale ha fede in lui: Umberto Focaccia, che acquistò per lui l'antica fabbrica Minardi che era in vendita causa la morte dei vecchi proprietari. Così Pietro Melandri, questo nuovo poeta della ceramica, ebbe il suo campo e creò le cose sue più belle» (BELTRAMELLI 1927, n. pag.; «In August 1922 he [Melandri] met a rich young man who had faith in him: Umberto Focaccia, who bought for him the old Minardi factory that was for sale due to the death of the old owners. So Pietro Melandri, this new poet of ceramics, had his field and created his most beautiful things»).

<sup>11</sup> For a general introduction see TERRAROLI 2007a and for the Italian debate FRANCESCHINI 2007. A useful and concise overview of the production of Italian art ceramics of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is TERRAROLI 2014.

<sup>12</sup> QUERCI 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Consider, for example, the discussion over public monumental sculpture to commemorate the fallen of the great war (FERGONZI, ROBERTO 1992). For the debate on ceramics in contemporary magazines see COSI, FIORINI 1984.



of these intellectuals and artists within the exhibition system and in institutions, starting with the Fascist Union of Fine Arts (Sindacato Fascista Belle Arti), combined with the state's support for art schools, helped to trigger a surprising artistic flourishing<sup>14</sup>.

Perhaps the loudest voice of the time was that of Gio Ponti (1891-1979), the extraordinary architect and designer to whom the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris dedicated a major monographic exhibition in 2018-19 entitled *Tutto Ponti. Gio Ponti Archi-Designer*. Well beyond the specific field of architecture, Ponti succeeded in propounding highly idealized and specific style choices in the applied arts. Fed by Italian tradition, these choices aimed to direct an upper middle class still strongly inclined towards late 19<sup>th</sup>-century eclecticism, especially in furnishing and interior décor, towards a new sensibility and taste.

Another major figure in this lively debate on art was the critic Roberto Papini (1883-1957), who also repeatedly discussed modern ceramics in *Emporium*, the magazine he founded in 1895. He argued particularly in favour of the serial type in the context of a necessary formal renewal<sup>15</sup>. Papini strongly supported the need for industrial production, like that of the Richard-Ginori in Florence and Società Ceramica Italiana (SCI) factories in Laveno, directed from 1923 respectively by Gio Ponti and Guido Andlovitz<sup>16</sup> (1900-1971). At the same time, he always looked with interest to the production of Faenza, still predominantly artisanal<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> On the Fascist organization of the arts see CIOLI 2011, pp. 209-311. The government's interest in schools of art is attested by the birth, in 1930, of the *Rassegna della istruzione artistica*, the magazine published by the General Directorate of Antiquities and Fine Arts (Direzione Generale delle Antichità e Belle Arti).

<sup>15</sup> PAPINI 1925, p. 223: «[...] il trionfo di alcuni principi che su questa venerabile rivista [Emporium], da tanti anni ormai specchio fedele del movimento artistico mondiale, ho sostenuto e sostengo. Ho sempre affermato che le industrie artistiche italiane hanno bisogno di rinnovarsi, coraggiosamente abbandonando l'imitazione degli antichi stili, rinunciando alla comoda e vile abitudine di vivere alle spalle degli antenati. Finché ci si manterrà nella copia dei modelli antichi o nella facile riproduzione dei motivi passati non si giungerà mai al necessario rinnovamento» («... the triumph of some principles that I have supported and support in this venerable magazine [Emporium], for many years now a faithful mirror of the global artistic movement. I have always stated that the Italian art industries need to renew themselves, courageously abandoning the imitation of ancient styles, renouncing the comfortable and cowardly habit of living on the shoulders of their ancestors. As long as we continue the facile copying of old models or reproduction of earlier motifs we will never achieve the necessary renewal»).

<sup>16</sup> On Laveno and Andlovitz see CASPRINI GENTILE 2017.

<sup>17</sup> PAPINI 1923, pp. 18-20: «Chiare e semplici di disegno stilizzato, opulente di toni rari e profondi, perfette di tecnica e di finezza queste ceramiche faentine prodotte dalle fornaci della scuola o da quelle Bubani o "La Faïence", sono certo fra le più belle della produzione internazionale, non hanno nulla da invidiare ai più bei pezzi della maiolica antica. Sintomo evidente del come un'arte possa affermarsi coi soli suoi mezzi, senza bisogno di ricorrere a lambiccate imitazioni o a stravaganti assurdità» («Clear and simple in their stylized design, opulent in their unusual and deep tones, perfect in technique and finish, these Faenza ceramics produced by the school's kilns or by those of Bubani or "La Faïence", are certainly among the most beautiful in international production, they are in no way inferior to the finest pieces of antique maiolica. An obvious sign of how an art can assert itself with its own means, without the need to resort to affected imitations or extravagant absurdities»). PAPINI 1925, p. 228: «Volentieri ripeto gli elogi fatti or son due anni alle ceramiche faentine uscite dalle fornaci della R. Scuola di Ceramica ottimamente diretta da Gaetano Ballardini e delle fabbriche dei Bubani e dei Focacci [sic] e Melandri; sono saggi perfetti di ciò che si può ottenere riallacciandosi alla tradizione con spirito schiettamente moderno» («I gladly repeat the praise given two years ago to the Faenza ceramics that left the kilns of the Royal School of Ceramics excellently directed by Gaetano Ballardini and the factories of Bubani and Focacci [sic] and Melandri; they are perfect examples of what can be achieved by referring back to tradition in a frankly modern spirit»).



2. *Hungarian section: ceramics by Maria Rahmer and others.* Ceramics exhibited at the 5<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1933 in a photograph published by Roberto Papini in «Emporium» (PAPINI 1933, p. 364).



3. *Swedish section: ceramics by Tyra Lundgren.* Ceramics exhibited at the 5<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1933 in a photograph published by Roberto Papini in «Emporium» (PAPINI 1933, p. 364).

Italian and international exhibitions succeeded each other at almost breakneck speed, echoed in the propaganda that now trailed in their wake in the more or less specialized press. They definitively drew the attention of a growing audience towards the decorative arts, occasioning a debate that from the 1920s increasingly involved modern Italian art ceramics. The focus was on its models and repertoires, its relationship with sculpture – consider the works made by Arturo Martini at the kilns of Fenice in Albisola or of ILCA (Industria Ligure Ceramiche Artistiche) in Nervi –, on the necessary quality required of an industrial production but also on the integration of ceramics with modern architecture.

The biennial (1923-1927) and triennial (1930) international exhibitions held in Monza and then, starting from the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of 1933, in Milan, were the main opportunity to assess the “awakening” of Italian creativity in the field of ceramics with respect to its major European counterparts. (figs 2-3) After the first three editions of the Monza exhibition, directed by its creator Guido Marangoni (1872-1941)<sup>18</sup>, the new directors included the architect Alberto Alpago-Novello (1889-1985) and the painter Mario Sironi (1885-1961) alongside Ponti. Their guiding principles were «modernity of interpretation, originality of invention, perfect execution, efficiency of production»<sup>19</sup>.

Preceded by over a decade of theoretical debate, the Monza exhibition of 1930 reserved ten rooms for the works of Italian ceramicists. This special ceramics gallery was intended to represent all of Italy’s regions and their major makers, starting with the Cantagalli factory of Florence with the new maiolica tiles designed by Romano Dazzi (1905-1976, son of the sculptor Arturo). Other important participants were Bitossi of Montelupo, the Mengaroni and Molaroni factories in Pesaro, Mastro Giorgio of Gubbio and the maiolica tiles by the Calabrian Goffredo Mongione. In such a context, the leading makers of Faenza, including Focaccia and Melandri in addition to Ugo Bubani (1872-1941) and Anselmo Bucci (1887-1955), could obviously not be absent.

## Focaccia and Melandri

The production trademarked Focaccia and Melandri (fig. 4) had already been mentioned in *Emporium* by the Marche art historian Luigi Serra (1881-1940) at the second *National Exhibition of Modern Ceramics* held in the summer of 1924 in Pesaro. While Serra appreciated contemporary Italian ceramics for its combination of traditional features and much-needed modernity, he saw in Focaccia and Melandri specifically an «original refinement in looking to archaic forms of expression»<sup>20</sup> (fig. 5).

What were these «archaic forms of expression»? We find the answer in the company’s two

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<sup>18</sup> SCHIAVI 2018.

<sup>19</sup> PONTI 1930: «modernità di interpretazione, originalità di invenzione, perfetta esecuzione, efficienza di produzione».

<sup>20</sup> SERRA 1924, p. 520: «raffinamento originale nel vagheggiare arcaistiche espressioni».



4. Focaccia and Melandri's mark with the Goshawk inside a circle, 1925 c. (cat. 3B).

5. Ceramics by «la Faience» of Faenza, Cantagalli of Florence, Focaccia and Melandri of Faenza respectively. Photograph published in 1924 by Luigi Serra in «Emporium» (SERRA 1924, p. 521).



catalogues, of 1923 and 1925 respectively, which show numerous quotations of earlier models with traditional Faentine (carnation, peacock, goshawk) or Raphaelesque decorations (figs 6-7 and cats 6-7). However, by comparing the two brochures we can also begin to outline Melandri's innovative research path<sup>21</sup>. The title page of both catalogues advertises «decorations in the new style and imitations of classical antiquity». However, over this short period the number of pieces in the «new style» clearly increases and becomes more varied, thanks in particular to decorative vases and “art statuettes” of the *Empire Woman* and *Butterfly Woman* types (cat. 1).

This new production, modern in form and decoration, was also remarkable for its technical

<sup>21</sup> The catalogues of 1923 and 1925 are reproduced in their entirety in GAUDENZI 2002, *Fonti d'Archivio* pp. 273-298. The 1925 version can be read at [https://issuu.com/micfaenza/docs/\\_focaccia\\_melandri\\_faenza\\_maioliche\\_d\\_arte\\_](https://issuu.com/micfaenza/docs/_focaccia_melandri_faenza_maioliche_d_arte_)



6. Cover of the 1925 sales catalogue of the company Focaccia and Melandri. This copy of the catalogue was amended, carefully deleting the name Focaccia by hand, after the firm was dissolved in 1932, so that it could also be used after this date.

aspects. Almost all the vases had metallic reflective glazes, not a novelty in itself since lustres had already been widely used in Italy, with great success, for example by Galileo Chini. Yet Melandri's research in this field, essentially beginning at this time and never abandoned, already followed a personal line in the creation of astonishing iridescences.

Not coincidentally, the works by Melandri presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monza Biennale of 1925 in the section devoted to Romagna with displays by the architect Francesco Saporì (1890-1964), were noted specifically for the metallic qualities of their colours. The pieces were arranged in an ideal dining room designed by architect Giovanni Guerrini (1887-1972) «[...] and everywhere, on the walls as in the vitrines and on the shelves, are Melandri's most beautiful ceramics. The ceramic vases are almost all monochrome with tonal shades that give an impression of mysterious and valuable metals»<sup>22</sup> (Casali fig. 3).

However, the adjective «monochrome» conveys only one aspect of the uniqueness of Me-

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<sup>22</sup> Rossi 1925, p. 64: «[...] e dovunque, alle pareti come nelle vetrinette e sulle mensole, le più belle ceramiche di Melandri. I vasi ceramici sono quasi tutti unicromi con sfumature di tonalità che danno la sensazione di misteriosi e preziosi metalli».



7. Plate 4 from Focaccia and Melandri's 1925 catalogue.

landri's creations of this time. In many pieces, the ornamentation of prevalently floral inspiration is predominant (figs 8-9 and cats 3-5).

As we have said, the main protagonists of the debate on modern ceramics from the 1920s to the postwar period were Ponti and Papini. Yet even a painter as committed to criticism as Carlo Carrà (1881-1966) was no stranger to these issues. He expressed his opinion in what is also one of the earliest critical reviews of Melandri's work, presented in June 1928 in a group exhibition at the Micheli Gallery in Milan<sup>23</sup>:

«Anyone wishing to play the intellectual by speaking of Pietro Melandri from Faenza could easily throw together a lengthy discourse on the art of ceramics and recall that the art of maiolica has been triumphantly established in Faenza since the 14<sup>th</sup> century and that this city has boasted the most famous workshops in Europe [...]

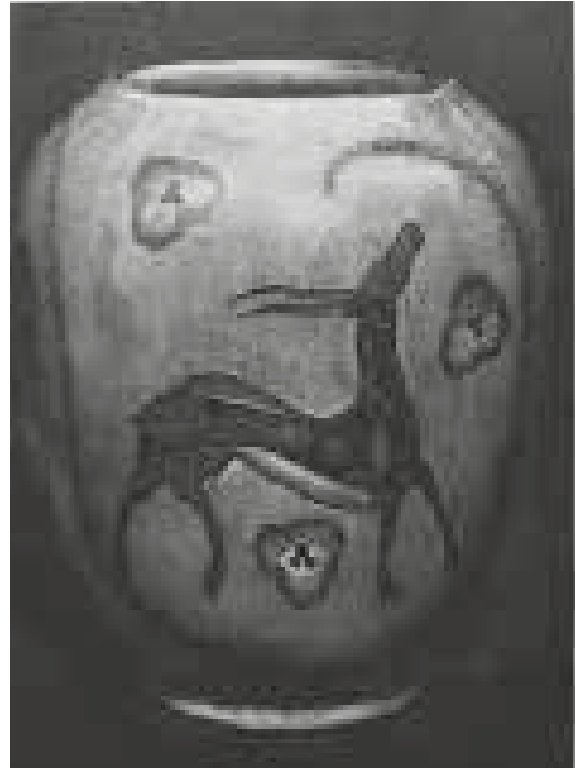
But what does all this matter? We wish to note that the decline of this field, too, is about to end and that Pietro Melandri has succeeded in dispelling the scepticism that until a few years ago blocked any effort at renewal. This scepticism had previously led the Italians to be nothing more than imitators of

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.catalogovagando.info/archivio-opere-pittori-800-900/1928-milano-galleria-micheli-domenico-abate-franco-bargiggia-achille-cavaliere-pietro-melandri/>.



8-9. Two plates with works by Melandri from the catalogue of the group exhibition held at the Galleria Vitelli in Genoa in January 1927 (MOSTRA D'ARTE 1927, n. pag.).





10-11. Two vases by Pietro Melandri reproduced in 1928 by Roberto Papini in «Emporium» (PAPINI 1928, p. 124).

antiquity. Today this is no longer the case and there are many in Italy who, in addition to improving the techniques, seek to be modern and up to date in the art of ceramics. Pietro Melandri is one of these makers, capable of starting from the basics of good craftsmanship and drawing on the developments of an ancient and modern taste. Pottery of all kinds leaves the kilns of Pietro Melandri, which are often true works of decorative art. The purity of the shapes and the harmonious polychromy of the glazes, in the different techniques used, make this young potter from Faenza an example of nobility worth noting. The rest will come in its time»<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> Carlo Carrà, *Pietro Melandri alla collettiva della galleria Micheli di Milano*, in L'Ambrosiano, 6 giugno 1928 (from *PIETRO MELANDRI* 1979, p. 20): «Chi volesse far la figura dell'erudito parlando di Pietro Melandri faentino, potrebbe facilmente imbastire una lunga disquisizione sull'arte della ceramica e rammentare che a Faenza fin dal secolo XIV l'arte dei maiolicari si affermò vittoriosamente e che questa città ha potuto vantare le botteghe più celebri d'Europa [...] / Ma che conta tutto ciò? A noi interessa notare che la decadenza sta per finire anche in questo campo e che Pietro Melandri seppe vincere lo scetticismo che inceppava fino a pochi anni fa ogni iniziativa rinnovatrice. Il quale scetticismo aveva portato già gli italiani ad essere non altro che degli imitatori dell'antico. Oggi non è più così e non sono pochi in Italia quelli che nell'arte della ceramica cercano, oltre che i perfezionamenti della tecnica, di essere moderni ed attuali. Pietro Melandri è uno di questi realizzatori, che sanno procedere dagli elementi del buon mestiere e attingere agli sviluppi di un gusto antico e moderno. Dalle fornaci di Pietro Melandri, escono vasellami di ogni genere, che sono spesso delle vere e proprie opere d'arte decorativa. La purezza delle forme e le policromie armoniose degli smalti, nelle differenti tecniche impiegate, fanno di questo giovane artefice faentino un esempio di nobiltà che va segnalato. Alla sua stagione verrà il resto». Melandri exhibited with the painters Domenico Abate Cristaldi (1891-1949) and Achille Cavalieri (1898-1963), and the sculptor Franco Bargiggia (1889-1966).



In the exhibition catalogue, Melandri was presented by the writer and journalist from Romagna Antonio Beltramelli (1879-1929). Despite some rhetorical flourishes, he nonetheless captured the beauty of these pieces in form, decoration and colour:

«Pietro Melandri is a thoroughbred artist. New shapes, wonderful decorations, polychrome glazes, harmonious contrasts emerge constantly from his restless imagination. He studies colour and fire; fire has its mysteries that he observes and seeks to master. He will succeed. The field covered by this young creator is now vast, true works of art leave his kilns. And they will not be forgotten»<sup>25</sup>.

The pieces exhibited in Milan in 1928 were made at the factory founded with Focaccia, but by this point the name of its artistic director, Melandri, preceded that of the financing partner in the maker's mark<sup>26</sup>. Though responsible for managing a company that had to guarantee a commercial production capable of succeeding in a fairly crowded market, Melandri did not neglect his art. During this period, he created pieces of considerable artistic quality, in which technical experiments with polychromy ran alongside the quest for new forms and decorations.

Melandri's artistic vocation predominated from 1932 when he began to work independently, assisted by a few specialized collaborators after the closure of the double-name company.

## Melandri «master, artist and great ceramicist»

In 1928, in the newborn *Domus*, we see for the first time an elegant pear-shaped reflective vase by Melandri, with very thin handles of abstract Art Deco elegance<sup>27</sup>.

Papini also reproduced two vases by Melandri in *Emporium* in 1928, this time wide-mouthed and globular, one with a seabed – among his favourite subjects at the time – and the other with an elegant gazelle (figs 10-11). The photographs of the two pieces, exemplifying his finest works, illustrated a piece on an exhibition of art objects held in Rome to support a bold entrepreneurial venture. This was the *Boutique Italienne* opened in Paris by a «woman of grace and intellect»<sup>28</sup>, Maria Monaci Gallenga (1880-1944), then a famous fashion designer and designer of precious printed fabrics who was also at the forefront of the promotion of the Italian applied arts outside the country<sup>29</sup>. Papini wished to demonstrate that the Italians were not exporting «to Paris the usual

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<sup>25</sup> BELTRAMELLI 1928: «Pietro Melandri è un artista di razza. Forme sempre nuove, meravigliose decorazioni, smalti policromi, contrasti armonici escono di continuo dalla sua fantasia che non riposa. Egli studia il colore e il fuoco; il fuoco ha i suoi misteri che egli spia e che vuole padroneggiare. Vi riuscirà. Il campo corso da questo giovane creatore è ormai vastissimo, vere e proprie opere d'arte escono dalle sue fornaci. E non saranno dimenticate».

<sup>26</sup> Initially, until about 1923, the company logo consisted of the names Focaccia and Melandri (or the initials F and M) separated by a goshawk and the legend Faenza, but the name order was later reversed (GAUDENZI 2002, p. 387).

<sup>27</sup> *Domus*, I (1928), no. 10, p. 35. The vase appears in the illustrated catalogue of the Focaccia and Melandri company published in 1925, as no. 1 of Plate 27 (reproduced in GAUDENZI 2002, p. 296).

<sup>28</sup> PAPINI 1921, p. 110, celebrating the A.M.I (Arte Moderna Italiana) company founded by Monaci Gallenga.

<sup>29</sup> In general on Monaci Gallenga's work see DE GUTTRY, MAINO 2018.



12. Anselmo Bucci, *Female figure (Bather)*. Ceramic exhibited at the 5<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1933 in a contemporary photograph, Milan, Fondazione La Triennale, Archivio Fotografico.



13. Italo Griselli, *Female figure*. Ceramic exhibited at the 5<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1933 in a contemporary photograph, Milan, Fondazione La Triennale, Archivio Fotografico.

junk, fake antiquities or eccentric modern pieces», but up-to-date and internationally competitive products. Melandri's ceramics largely responded to this assertion:

«Melandri's Faenza ceramics have also been vindicated. Mrs Gallenga has chosen among those productions that are slightly languishing and is preparing to give all the help of her lively organization to the good furnace of Faenza. There are some truly exquisite pieces, and they are the ones that best interpret the spirit of Faentine tradition in a modern key. The others are less praiseworthy because with their iridescent tones they emulate too closely the production of the Doulton and Zsolnay factories, now unsurpassable in the genre they have created and that should not be imitated»<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> PAPINI 1928, p. 126: «Un'altra riaffermazione è quella delle ceramiche faentine del Melandri. La Signora Gallenga ha scelto fra la produzione che un poco languiva; e si prepara a dare tutto l'aiuto della sua viva organizzazione alla buona

Exhibitions like those organized by Monaci Gallenga and the Galleria Micheli tell us that Melandri's ceramics were appreciated and circulated among a sophisticated audience. Later the master's work was presented to a wider public by numerous Italian exhibitions, prompting critical judgements of his work. In this context, the 5<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale of 1933 was particularly important for ceramicists in general and for Melandri in particular. They were divided into three classes (industry, factories, ceramic artists) comprising the different components of the sector that was to help achieve a new balance between creativity and serial production: good examples being the works by Anselmo Bucci and Italo Griselli (1880-1958) (figs 12-13).

Two works by Melandri are reproduced in the extensive chronicle of the event published in *Emporium*, in which Papini attempted an appraisal of the ten-year activity of these exhibitions (fig. 14). Preferring a «fair balance between the encouragement to be given to creative artists by calling them to a strict discipline and that to be given to the art industries»<sup>31</sup>, the critic identified Melandri's work as sporadic, albeit of high quality. He questioned whether his pieces could truly be considered a serial production, as they might be «lucky accidents that occurred in the fiery mysteries of the kiln»<sup>32</sup>.

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fornace di Faenza. Vi sono pezzi veramente squisiti e sono quelli che meglio interpretano con modernità lo spirito della tradizione faentina; gli altri non sono altrettanto lodevoli perché arieggiano troppo da vicino con i loro toni iridati alla produzione delle fabbriche di Doulton e di Zsolnay, ormai insuperabili nel genere che hanno creato e che non si deve imitare».

<sup>31</sup> PAPINI 1933 p. 364: «Se si vuole che i progressi compiuti si consolidino e diano i frutti non soltanto morali ma anche economici che è lecito sperare, bisogna trovare la giusta misura fra l'incoraggiamenti da dare agli artisti creatori richiamandoli ad una disciplina severa e quello da dare alle industrie d'arte per avviarle verso una produzione media eccellente sotto la guida di agguerriti ideatori. / Lo abbiamo detto più volte; lo ripetiamo volentieri: il problema delle arti in Italia ha alla sua base la necessità di sfruttare al massimo l'ingegno e l'ingegnosità degli artisti e degli esecutori, il che significa brutalmente conquistare i mercati del mondo introducendo in Italia un minimo di materia prima ed esportare merce nobilitata dall'intelligenza, dalla perizia tecnica, insomma dal fascino eterno dell'arte» («If you want the progress made to be consolidated and to bear the fruits that we can legitimately hope for, not just moral but also economic, we must find the correct balance between encouraging creative artists by calling them to a strict discipline and encouraging art industries to shift them towards an excellent average production under the guidance of motivated creators. / We have said it several times; we gladly repeat it: the problem of the arts in Italy lies in the need to make the most of the ingeniousness and skill of artists and makers, which means brutally conquering the world markets by introducing a minimum of raw material into Italy and exporting merchandise ennobled by intelligence, technical expertise, in short by the eternal charm of art»).

<sup>32</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 367-368: «Della ceramica avevamo due nobili rappresentanti: la Richard-Giori (con qualche sintomo attuale di decadenza) e la Società Ceramica di Laveno (con qualche preoccupazione commerciale eccessiva). Si sono poi aggiunte alcune buone fabbriche liguri piene di fervore e di coraggio; ora è comparsa in prima linea la Fabbrica Cantagalli che ha preso un nuovo slancio pieno di promesse. Né va trascurata la "Litoceramica Piccinelli" dedicata quasi totalmente al materiale da costruzione ma pronta, come si vede in alcuni saggi di sculture in litoceramica, a produrre oggetti d'arte coi suoi nuovi materiali e con tutta la gamma dei suoi colori d'impasto. Il resto è produzione sporadica e isolata, comprese le nobili maioliche del Melandri che però appaiono come la scelta di pezzi riusciti bene in molti anni di tentativi e ricerche. Per valutare la serietà di una produzione ceramica bisogna domandarsi quanto si debba ai fortunati casi avvenuti nei misteri ardenti della fornace e quanto invece sia prodotto sicuro, riproducibile, controllabile alla luce di un'esperienza tecnica organizzata» («Of ceramics we had two noble representatives: Richard-Ginori (with some current symptoms of decline) and the Società Ceramica di Laveno (with some excessive commercial worries). Then some good Ligurian factories full of fervour and courage were added; now the Cantagalli Factory has appeared on the front lines and has taken on a new momentum full of promise. Nor should we forget the "Litoceramica Piccinelli" dedicated almost entirely to building materials but ready, as can be seen in some examples of litho-ceramic sculptures, to produce art objects with its new materials and with its full range of colours. The rest are sporadic and isolated productions,

By contrast, the journalist and art critic Ugo Ojetti (1871-1946) judged the Faenza master's metallic effects to be the high point of this production, appreciating it in part for its uniqueness:

«Consider for example the Ceramics exhibition, perhaps the best of them all and certainly the best of the last ten years. Those by Melandri of Faenza are all “Unique pieces”, with beautiful glazes and lustres that can be aptly compared, in technical terms, to those of our Renaissance or to Persian and Moorish ceramics»<sup>33</sup>.

The “magic” taking place inside the kiln, sought by the master with inventive stubbornness, was largely responsible for the success of his glazes and lustres. Though he repeated forms and reworked ornamental elements even after many years, the idea of a serial production remained extraneous to Melandri's true values and objectives, as he had long since embarked on a purely artistic path.

Melandri's most enthusiastic supporter was Gio Ponti. As the principal planner of that 5<sup>th</sup> exhibition in Milan, he organized an exceptional event for the occasion, a solo show dedicated to the Faentine master:

«Yet the phenomenon that the Triennale communicates and consecrates in this field [ceramics] is the crucial contribution of artists. For this reason – for the first time – it includes a solo show by one of our great modern ceramicists, Pietro Melandri, whom very few people have hitherto had the opportunity to evaluate and love; I have placed a stupendous work by him at the start of this review that will devote many pages to him»<sup>34</sup>.

The «stupendous work» in question was the *Head of a Woman/Melancholy*, (fig. 15) part of a series that can be rightly considered one of Melandri's greatest sculptural achievements. In these works, the occasionally uneven modelling expertly serves the glassy quality of a coating rich in iridescences and material effects. The series includes the *Mask of the Wind*, which the artist oc-

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including the noble maiolicas of Melandri which, however, appear as a selection of pieces that have succeeded well in many years of attempts and research. To assess the seriousness of a ceramic production, we must ask how much is due to the lucky accidents occurring in the fiery mysteries of the kiln and how much is the safe, reproducible, controllable product of organized technical experience»).

<sup>33</sup> OJETTI 1933: «Si veda ad esempio la mostra della Ceramica, che è forse la migliore di tutte e che certo è la migliore degli ultimi dieci anni. “Pezzi unici” sono tutti quelli del Melandri di Faenza, con vernici e lustri stupendi che possono essere senza disdoro paragonati, come fatto tecnico, a quelli del nostro rinascimento o a quelli persiani e moreschi».

<sup>34</sup> PONTI 1933a, p. 233: «Ma il fenomeno che la Triennale segnala e suggella in questo campo [la ceramica] è il deciso intervento degli artisti: è per questo che essa ha fatto – la prima volta – una mostra personale di un nostro grande moderno ceramista, Pietro Melandri, che fin qui ben pochi hanno saputo valutare ed amare; una sua stupenda opera è stata da me messa in testa a questa rassegna che gli dedicherà molte pagine». Much later, in a letter of 4 January 1978 Ponti himself recalls his first meeting with Melandri at the Monza Biennale in 1930 (from GOLFIERI 1979, p. 27): «Incancellabile è il ricordo del mio primo incontro con Melandri. Io ai primi passi per le Biennali e le Triennali di Milano e lui già grande ceramista... e così nacque un rapporto affettuoso che durò per sempre» («Unforgettable is the memory of my first meeting with Melandri. I was at the beginning of the Milan Biennali and Triennali and he was already a great ceramicist [...] and so was born an affectionate friendship that lasted forever»).



14. Works by Pietro Melandri and Dante Morozzi reproduced in 1933 by Roberto Papini in «Emporium» (PAPINI 1933, p. 369).





16. Works by Pietro Melandri reproduced in 1933 by Gio Ponti in «Domus» (PONTI 1933b, p. 428).

asionally replicated over the years with variations in the modelling and the chromatic nuances (cat. 19).

The solo exhibition at the Milan Triennale of 1933, documenting a decade of production, was accompanied in *Domus* by a true critical consecration with the illustration of fourteen pieces. Though the article is well known, it is worth rereading in full (figs 16-18):

«Starting my review of Italian ceramics at the Triennale in the May issue, I put at the start of my writings the wonderful head – a masterpiece worthy of a museum – of “Melancholy” by Pietro Melandri. The meaning of this gesture was twofold: a tribute to this great Italian artist and a symbolic reflection of the characteristics thanks to which the Ceramics Section at the Triennale flourished. This is a section full of works that are beautiful, interesting, tasteful and imaginative, a section attractive to amateurs, collectors, those fond of embellishing their home with art objects, unique pieces. The characteristics thanks to which this section has flourished are those of the artist’s individual work, with which Italian ceramics will certainly reach greater heights: it was therefore right and dear to me to begin my review by placing Melandri’s masterpiece at its start.

The art of Pietro Melandri, a ceramicist from Faenza, had hitherto been the delight of a few but today, thanks to the 5<sup>th</sup> Triennale, he is also recognized by our audience as a master, artist and great ceramicist.



The works he has assembled at the Triennale belong to the collections of the lawyer Bolognesi of Milan and Dr Lesi of Faenza, very faithful to Melandri, and date from 1923 to 1933. Even in the work of a decade and with the influences of recent times, it is interesting to see Melandri's fidelity to his own self and how his works do not surpass each other *in genre* (as is the case with many other artists), but rather, if anything, *in importance*.

Speaking of Melandri I am also delighted to note some things: first, that he is from Faenza and works in Faenza, and this means something (that is, it is a warning that we Italians must cultivate, educate, never abandon, the men of some of our towns – from Albisola, to Faenza, to Pesaro, to Tuscany, to Bassano, to Pescara – rich in a highly refined instinct for ceramics); second, that he works in maiolica, an Italian earth and art, and brings together in it, as is our nature, the skill of a ceramicist and the virtues of an artist who is a painter and modeller: third, that his glazes, his surfaces, his colours are supremely refined but that this is not a danger as it is for many, because he, as a man and as an artist, has in his temperament fervour, indeed furore, power, violence, formidable instincts. In him a degree of refinement, indeed the constant spirit of art and execution, is so innate as to be achieved by working naturally, it is not that deliberation that weakens those who make finesse a superficial aestheticism, a label, almost a formal act of good manners. He is a true, great artist: the works of great artists always achieve supreme refinement when they start from ready, free, instinctive ways, not fearing even vulgarity. Forces that are all natural, with no thought of whether something that serves art might be vulgar or otherwise.

Now that Italian art is so much in need of masters, Melandri should be called upon to teach. Not to be cheapened or bored by the routines of a school, but to teach in the old way, by continuously creating other great and daring works of art in collaboration with students»<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> PONTI 1933b, pp. 428-431: «Iniziando nel fascicolo di Maggio la mia rassegna delle ceramiche italiane alla Triennale ho posto in capo ai miei scritti la stupenda testa – capolavoro degno di museo – della “Malinconia” di Pietro Melandri. Ciò aveva due significati: un omaggio a questo nostro grande artista, e l’indicazione simbolica dei segni sotto i quali è fiorita la Sezione della ceramica alla Triennale, sezione ricca di opere quanto mai belle, interessanti, piene di gusto e fantasia, sezione attraente per gli amatori, i collezionisti, per quanti amano abbellire la propria casa di oggetti d’arte, di pezzi unici. I segni sotto i quali questa sezione è fiorita sono quelli dell’opera individuale dell’artista, sotto i quali la ceramica italiana raggiungerà certo superiori fortune: giusto e caro mi è stato quindi iniziare la mia rassegna ponendole in testa quel pezzo magistrale di Melandri. / L’arte di Pietro Melandri, ceramista faentino, era stata fin qui la delizia di pochi oggi, attraverso la V Triennale, egli è anche riconosciuto dal pubblico nostro come maestro, artista e ceramista grandissimo. Le opere da lui raccolte alla Triennale appartengono in massima alle collezioni dell’Avvocato Bolognesi di Milano e del Dottor Lesi di Faenza, fedelissimi di Melandri, e vanno dal 1923 al 1933. È interessante vedere, pur attraverso l’opera di un decennio e le suggestioni di questi ultimi tempi, la fedeltà di Melandri al proprio carattere e come le sue opere non si sorpassino l’una con l’altra *nel genere* (come è di tanti altri artisti), ma invece, se mai, *nel valore*. / Mi è poi grato parlando di Melandri di segnalare alcune cose: primo, ch’egli è di terra faentina ed opera a Faenza, e questo vuol dire qualcosa (cioè è un avvertimento che noi italiani dobbiamo coltivare, educare, mai abbandonare, gli uomini di alcune terre nostre – da Albisola, a Faenza, a Pesaro alla Toscana, a Bassano, a Pescara – ricchi di un istinto ceramico elettissimo): secondo, che egli lavora la maiolica, terra e arte italiana, e vi porta insieme, secondo è nostra natura, sapienza di ceramista e virtù d’artista pittore e modellatore: terzo, che i suoi smalti, le sue superfici, i suoi colori sono supremamente raffinati ma che ciò non è un pericolo come per molti, perché lui, l’uomo, l’artista, ha nel suo temperamento fervore, anzi furore, forza, violenza, istinti formidabili: in lui certa raffinatezza, anzi il tenore costante d’arte e d’esecuzione, è così implicita da raggiungere nell’operare naturalmente, non è quel presupposto che indebolisce quanti fan della finezza un estetismo preliminare, un’etichetta, quasi un fatto formale di buona educazione. Egli è un vero, un grande artista: le cose dei grandi artisti raggiungono sempre supreme raffinatezze mentre partono da modi pronti, liberi, istintivi, senza paura anche della volgarità: forze tutte natura, ove non esiste nemmeno la nozione se una cosa, che serve per l’arte, possa o no essere volgare. / Melandri, oggi che tanto bisogno di maestri ha l’arte italiana, dovrebbe essere chiamato a insegnare, ma non ad intristirsi o ad annoiarsi nella *routine* di una scuola, ma ad insegnare all’antica cioè. Creando ininterrottamente, con la collaborazione di allievi, altre ardite grandi opere d’arte».



17. Melandri - 1933. Cerchi e  
piani in ceramica. (Ponti 1933b, p. 429)



17. Melandri - 1933. Cerchi e  
piani in ceramica. (Ponti 1933b, p. 429)

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17. Works by Pietro Melandri reproduced in 1933 by Gio Ponti in «Domus» (PONTI 1933b, p. 429).

Of the many ceramicists and sculptors who participated in the exhibitions, it remains to be asked with whom, aside from Arturo Martini, Melandri could really compare himself in these years. A useful hint comes from the page of *Emporium* of 1933 that we have just mentioned (fig. 14), where his two works are compared to two by the Tuscan sculptor Dante Morozzi (1899-1965), then working for the Cantagalli factory<sup>36</sup> (figs 19-20). The preceding year, at the solo exhibition dedicated to him at the Venice Biennale, a large maiolica sculpture entitled *Inspiration* – a young nude woman sitting and looking up at the sky – was purchased by the Ministry of Antiquities and Fine Arts, which assigned it to the Faenza Museum of Ceramics (where it still remains today, inv. AB4628). The work certainly did not escape Melandri, who must have understood that its composed modelling and technical mastery were in accord with his own ideal of art ceramics – though his research on metallic lustres was driving him towards different shores. The comparison with his *Assumption* (cat. 8) – also of 1932 – must have come spontaneously to Melandri: the affinities in the crackle, or *craquelure*, reserved for just a few parts of the body, do not conceal the divergences, not antithetical but evident. Compared to the austere uniform maiolica of *Inspiration*, Mary's garment covered with a delicate engraved *ramage* shows the ornamental significance that Melandri attributes to ceramic surfaces.

However, to fully grasp the idea of maiolica sculpture that Melandri developed during the 1930s, we must consider its end point, the high relief of *St Sebastian* (1940) (figs 21-22), and compare it with the equally monumental high relief of *Orpheus* (1940) (fig. 23) by Angelo Biancini (1911-1988). In the latter the editor of *Domus* (Ponti) saw «a very important appeal for the presence of ceramic ornament within the great works of the new Italian architecture»<sup>37</sup>. While Biancini's polished forms are overly inhibited by the intense monochrome (green), Melandri's pictorialism confers drama on the figure of the Christian martyr.

## Pietro Melandri and sculptors' models

In keeping with a practice common to many factories of the time, in Faenza and elsewhere, Melandri made numerous pieces using models provided by sculptors. These were then decorated in the master's workshop with flair and seductively singular solutions. This production began in 1919 during the few months working in partnership with Zoli, when he painted some sculptures by his artist friend Francesco Nonni.

The two continued their collaboration with great success, especially in the Focaccia and Melandri years, creating elegant female figurines, dancers, Pierrot clowns and small groups

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<sup>36</sup> In October 1933 Morozzi took over the direction of the Royal School of Art in Cortina d'Ampezzo, remaining there almost uninterruptedly until 1941; from 1932 to 1942, with the exception of the 1938 edition, he was involved in the biennial exhibitions in Venice. On Morozzi, see the entry by Manuel Carrera in IMBELLONE 2017, pp. 46-47.

<sup>37</sup> CERAMICHE 1940, p. 40: «una importantissima candidatura alla presenza dell'ornamento ceramico dentro le grandi opere della nuova architettura italiana».



**UN RITRATTO ITALIANO ALLA TERAPIA**

Pietro Melandri. In alto: due vasi, uno grande, uno piccolo, con decorazioni in bianco e nero. In basso: due piatti, uno grande, uno piccolo, con decorazioni in bianco e nero.

18. Works by Pietro Melandri reproduced in 1933 by Gio Ponti in «Domus» (PONTI 1933b, p. 430).



19. Dante Morozzi, *Female head*. Ceramic exhibited at the 5<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1933 in a contemporary photograph, Milan, Fondazione La Triennale, Archivio Fotografico.



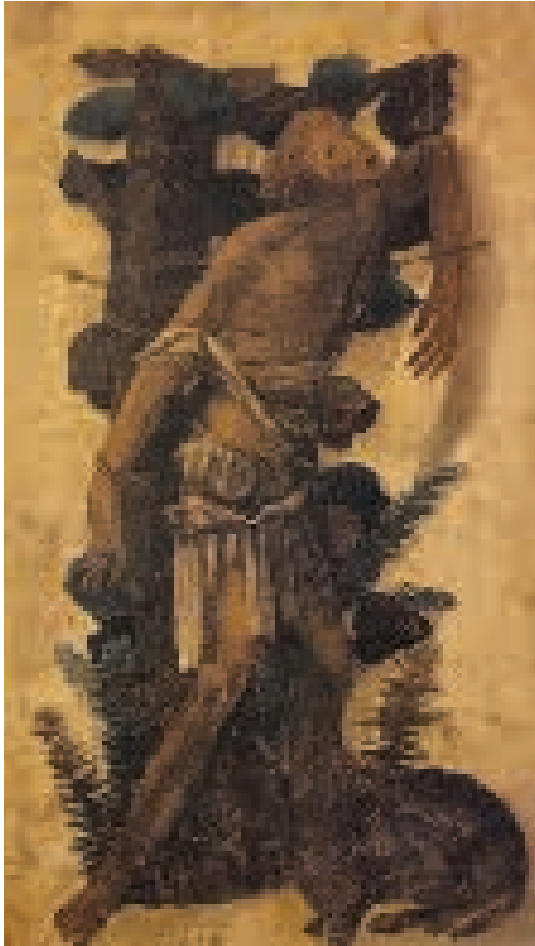
20. Dante Morozzi, *Seated female figure*. Ceramic exhibited at the 5<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1933, in a contemporary photograph, Milan, Fondazione La Triennale, Archivio Fotografico.

that, as Claudia Casali stresses, represent the high point of Italian Art Deco and not only in Faenza<sup>38</sup> (cat. 1). Painting these sculptures, Melandri immersed himself in a challenging dialogue between form and colour, volumes and ornamental motifs, so that Nonni's economical rendering is almost overwhelmed by the variety of Melandri's decorative motifs, from the peacock feathers traditional in Faenza to the Moorish and Japanese east via the patterns of Renaissance textiles.

With respect to Nonni's sculptures, Melandri's work on the models by his friend Ercole Drei<sup>39</sup>, or on the elegant female nudes by Enrico Mazzolani (1876-1968), suggests a very different approach to the relationship between form and colour. While retaining the same ability to enhance the formal qualities of small sculptures, the forms are now immersed in light and space by the pure metallic lustres with their reflective quality.

<sup>38</sup> CASALI 2017, pp. 10-33, on p. 20. In general, on Nonni as sculptor, with a rich repertoire of images, see DIRANI 2005.

<sup>39</sup> See for example *La Commedia* of 1928, reproduced in Gaudenzi 2002, p. 131. On Drei's work, see BERTONI 1986.



21. Pietro Melandri, *St Sebastian*, watercolour on paper, c. 1940 (from Gaudenzi 2002, p. 34).



22. Pietro Melandri, *St Sebastian*, 1940, Laveno Mombello, Museo Internazionale del Design Ceramico.

Over the years, Melandri regularly used some models, altering the chromatic effects and the skilfully created lustres with flair, as in the fully Art Deco *Diana* modelled in 1929 by the Venetian sculptor Carlo Lorenzetti (1858-1945), which remained in production for many years in variants with or without the deer. Melandri translated this figure from the round to relief several times, in ornamental plaques and clipei. The goddess of hunting also appears at the centre of a large charger with Raphaelesque decorations, with the blend of different stylistic elements – classical/Renaissance and modern – typical of some of the pieces of Melandri and Focaccia (cat. 7).

In the 1930s, Melandri also worked on some figurines modelled by Arturo Martini at the Calzi workshop in Faenza between 1916 and 1918, but this was a fairly sporadic production<sup>40</sup>. The

<sup>40</sup> DE LUCA, MAZZARELLA 1987, p. 68 recall two of these small sculptures: the first a lecherous fat woman clutching a goat's fleece to her breast and a pig at her feet; the second, a naked woman clutching the neck of a horse, called «Horse in Love». See also GOLFIERI 1968.



23. Angelo Biancini, *Orpheus*. Ceramic exhibited at the 7<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1940, in a contemporary photograph, Milan, Fondazione La Triennale, Archivio Fotografico. The work is now in Laveno Mombello, Museo Internazionale del Design Ceramico.



24. Pietro Melandri (after a model by Romeo Gregori), *Lovers at Rest*. Ceramic exhibited at the 6<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1936, in a contemporary photograph, Milan, Fondazione La Triennale, Archivio Fotografico.

same is true of the decorative sculptures executed after ancient models like the *Dancing Faun* from the House of the Faun in Pompeii, or after Renaissance works (cat. 41). At this time, Melandri's collaborations with other artists, especially sculptors, were also fairly occasional: we could mention the *Head of a Woman* (1934) after a model by Carlo Corvi (1904-1978) from Parma<sup>41</sup>, and the maiolica versions of the *Lovers at Rest* by Romeo Gregori (1900-1940) from Carrara, presented at the Triennale of 1936<sup>42</sup> (fig. 24) or his group with *Two Running Horses* (1940)<sup>43</sup>. In any case, such relationships helped to nurture in Melandri a partly sculptural conception of ceramics that, as we will see, achieved its height of expressiveness in the 1950s.

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<sup>41</sup> The work is reproduced in *PRODUZIONI* 1934, p. 35. With the maiolica sculpture *The Soldier's Mother*, made with the Faenza ceramicist Emilio Casadio, Corvi won the Faenza Prize at the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Ceramics Competition in 1941.

<sup>42</sup> The model was initially designed by Gregori for the Cooperativa artieri alabastro of Volterra (Volterra alabaster craftsmen's cooperative), in collaboration with the Ente Nazionale Artigianato e Piccole Industrie (ENAPI, National Authority for Craftworking and Small Industry), to be made of alabaster (FRANCO 2002, p. 86)

<sup>43</sup> Reproduced in *ITALIANI* 1940, p. 83.

25. Pietro Melandri,  
*Orpheus enchanting  
the animals* (47,5  
x 40 cm), 1938 c.,  
Private collection.



### «wisdom of a ceramicist and virtue of an artist, painter and modeller»

Melandri did not shy away from modelling himself, starting from elegant, medium-sized decorative panels such as the splendid *Orpheus enchanting the animals* (fig. 25), immersed in lush foliage, to small sculptures, such as for instance the *Bathers* (fig. 27), embellished with gold highlights in the third fire. These sometimes resemble *divertissements*, like the sofa-shaped box (figs 26), the neo-Rococo frames (figs 34, 50) or the *Little Horse*, tirelessly varied in the almost child-like motifs applied in relief to the coat: a trinket successfully kept in production for a few decades together with the *Triumphant Horse* (sent to the Paris exhibition of 1937), the *Seated Fawn* and the *Nativity Scenes* (cat. 14) so appreciated by Gio Ponti<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> PRESEPI 1939.



26. Pietro Melandri, *Sofa-shaped box* (12 x 22 x 10 cm), 1950-1955 c., Brun Fine Art.

It is then in the small relief “cages” - unique pieces - in which Melandri encloses mythological figures (*Leda and the Swan*; figs 51-52 and cat. 23), stories from the Gospel (*Annunciation*, *Nativity*, *Flight into Egypt*), but also gilded vessels and birds with magically iridescent plumage (figs 28, 30-31), that we encounter some of the master’s most poetic inventions. Although indebted for the idea to those small “theaters” modelled by Arturo Martini in around 1929-30 at the ILCA (Industria Ligure Ceramiche Artistiche) in Nervi (fig. 29), Melandri’s are distinguished first and foremost by their chromatic qualities, possible only to a great ceramicist.

However, it is in the sculptures on mythological subjects – from *Orpheus* and *Neptune* (fig. 32 and cats 11, 43) to the *Nereid on a Hippocamp* (cat. 15) – that Melandri’s creative liberty enters into a closer dialogue with monumental sculpture. Here the teachings of Arturo Martini and more generally the draw of certain economical modules of 1920s monumental sculpture, evident for example in the *Neptune with the lobster on his head* (cat. 43), are transfigured by the chromatic iridescences.

A case apart was Melandri’s collaboration with Giò Ponti, who provided his ceramicist friend with ideas for little sculptures and vases, together with a constant and appreciative encouragement that became increasingly enthusiastic over the years: «Melandri, a ceramicist whom I admire, a man dear to me, an artist whom I would like the Italians to know better and to appreciate, a man whom



27. Pietro Melandri, *Bathers* (13 x 18 x 10 cm), 1935-1940 c., Brun Fine Art.

I encourage and help (as best I can) to do ever better: a temperament that I hold up as a creator of great things, of things for architecture as well as little vases and statuettes»<sup>45</sup>.

From the group of *Bicycling Angels* to the charming *Woman at the Balcony* (cat. 22), conceived by Ponti and modelled by Melandri himself, we come to the small flasks with a rectangular body that, as in a display case, hold standing or reclining women (cat. 21). These are among the most successful outcomes of this collaboration and present the architect's name next to that of the ceramicist: «Dear Ponti, in recent days I have finished some pieces based on your drawings that as I have already told you I was unable to finish for the Triennale. This winter I am supposed to exhibit

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<sup>45</sup> PONTI 1942: «Melandri, ceramista che ammiro, uomo che mi è caro, artista che vorrei che gli italiani meglio conoscessero e apprezzassero, uomo che incito ed aiuto (come posso) a far sempre meglio: temperamento che addito come realizzatore di grandi cose, di cose per l'architettura oltre che di piccoli vasi e statuette».



28. Pietro Melandri, *Sailing ship* (20 x 23 cm), 1950 c., Brun Fine Art.

29. Arturo Martini, *The visit to the Prisoner* (22,3 x 28,5 cm), 1929-1930, Private collection.



30. Pietro Melandri, *Little bird on a branch* (19,5 x 22 cm), 1940 c., Private collection.

31. Pietro Melandri, *Little bird on a branch* (19 x 22 cm), 1940 c., Private collection.



32. Photograph of Pietro Melandri's works exhibited in 1937 in Faenza, at the «7<sup>th</sup> Faenza Week. 27 June-11 July 1937. Artistic craft competitions, Ceramics section, Prize of 700 lire», Faenza, Biblioteca Comunale, Archivio fotografico, inv. 565. Neptune is visible on the left-hand base and Orpheus on the top step of the central display.

at the Angelicum. What would you say if I were to present them at that show? Naturally, as we have agreed, with your name alongside mine»<sup>46</sup>.

In the 1950s, Ponti's suggestions gave rise to the *Young Ladies* in sumptuous 19<sup>th</sup>-century garments (fig. 33) and the *Warrior* figurines. The style of Melandri's ornamental sculptures evolves, over the years, in coherent dialogue with the remainder of his ceramic production. Even when the modernist style gives way to angular figures with slender and nervy limbs, the abstraction is never absolute. From the 1950s, the anatomy of the bodies seems to follow in the footsteps of contemporary sculpture, pursuing a clear line that runs from the famous models by Henry Moore (1898-1986) to the works of Luciano Minguzzi (1911-2004), whom Melandri probably met in person when the Bolognese sculptor was on the judging panel for the fifth edition of the Faenza Prize in 1946.

<sup>46</sup> Melandri's letter to Ponti of 25 October 1951 is quoted in BERTONI 2012, p. 138: «Caro Ponti, in questi giorni ho finito alcuni pezzi tratti da disegni tuoi che come già ti dissi non mi fu possibile finire per la Triennale. Questo inverno – dovei – esporre all'Angelicum. Che ne diresti se li esponessi in questa mostra? Naturalmente come d'accordo col nome tuo accanto al mio».



33. Pietro Melandri, *Lady in crinoline* (h 33 cm), 1955-65 c., Brun Fine Art



34. Pietro Melandri, *Neo-Rococo frame* (29,5 x 20,5 cm), 1955-60 c., Brun Fine Art

It is worth remembering here that for the decoration of the Grand Hotel Duomo in Milan, designed by Melchiorre Bega (1898-1976) and Aldo Avati (1885-1971) in 1950, unique ceramic pieces were commissioned from Melandri and Fausto Melotti (1901-1986) and that Minguzzi made «the screen with gold low reliefs»<sup>47</sup>. As we will see shortly, it was with Bega and not – as we might expect – with Ponti that Melandri collaborated most successfully on the decoration of public interiors.

### Ceramic ornament and new Italian architecture

In 1936, Papini revised the judgment that he had expressed a few years earlier, in 1933, on Melandri's work, doubting that his works were the «safe, reproducible, controllable product of organized technical experience»<sup>48</sup>. In *Perseus and Medusa*, the monumental sculpture that the master exhibited at the 6<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale (figs 35-38), the critic now saw an extremely promising example with which to begin to construct the hoped-for collaborative relationship among architects, sculptors and ceramists:

<sup>47</sup> PONTI 1950, p. 25.

<sup>48</sup> Above note 32.

«This year, Melandri's Faenza kilns have achieved excellent results, especially in the sculptural decoration of a wall, among the most interesting and most lively and successful experiments at the Triennale, susceptible of great developments if architects, sculptors, ceramists look carefully at this imaginative and balanced composition of shapes and colours. Since it is not inappropriate, in this context, to note that sculpture, with the exception of two excellent works, "Year fourteen" by Arturo Martini and "The glass makers" by Napoleone Martinuzzi, has lacked the imaginative fervour and the truly decorative spirit that justifies its presence and function in an exhibition like this. Melandri has understood this better than anyone»<sup>49</sup>.

Melandri has spread the mythological story over the wall, breaking it into small narrative sections and isolated figures, while maintaining harmony thanks to a chromatic preciousness that could not escape a highly astute critic like Giulio Carlo Argan (1909-1992). In a long article dedicated to the Triennale he also reproduces the entire wall and three details<sup>50</sup>.

«In ceramics, too, the devoted love of precious materials is a positive reaction to the illustrative schemes of the past; while this direction is already evident in the attenuation of the illustrative features of the ceramics of Albissola, the most clear-cut artistic result is in the ceramics of the Faentine Melandri, who reveals himself, in all his works, to be an artist of the highest calibre. In the backdrop of the gallery of decorative and industrial arts, Melandri recovers, with fully modern values, an archaic sense of pictorial polychrome and chromatic modelling, he defines the subtle boundary by which a given form can be justified only by a given colour. The colour thus takes on the density of the modelling, while signalling with its metallic iridescences the stretching and expansion of the surfaces. This complex and multiple equation entails a need to isolate the forms, letting them emerge from the background without narrative correlations, to avoid disturbing that mysterious and intimate opening of the forms into colour: this is true of those animals hit by the white lava of the background as they run, putting an end to their life and magically transforming them into precious matter. Although Melandri sometimes, as in an Annunciation and in some statuettes, abandons himself too impetuously to the joy of vitrifying enamels with iridescent flows of incandescent metals, still full of fire, in his vases he succeeds in subtly modulating the form, dilating it to give the colour ampler and more comprehensive contours, snatching it from the schematic rules of symmetry to find a more intimate, unmistakable expressive value in a deeper fusing of form and colour»<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> PAPINI 1936, p. 76: «Le fornaci faentine di Melandri danno quest'anno ottima prova specialmente nella decorazione plastica d'una parete, che è fra le più interessanti e più vive esperienze riuscite nella Triennale, suscettibile di grande sviluppo se architetti, scultori, ceramisti guarderanno attentamente questa fantasiosa ed equilibrata composizione di forme e colori. Poiché non sarà inopportuno, a questo proposito, notare come la scultura, salvo due opere egregie, "Anno decimoquarto" di Arturo Martini e "Gli artigiani del vetro" di Napoleone Martinuzzi, ha mancato di quel fervore immaginativo e di quello spirito veramente decorativo che giustifica la sua presenza e funzione in una mostra come questa. E Melandri ha capito ciò più di tutti».

<sup>50</sup> ARGAN 1936, pp. 210-211.

<sup>51</sup> *Ivi*, p. 213: «Anche nella ceramica l'amore devoto alla materia preziosa è una positiva reazione agli schemi illustrativi di un tempo: e se già questo indirizzo si nota nell'attenuarsi dei suggerimenti illustrativi delle ceramiche di Albissola, più preciso risultato artistico è nelle ceramiche del faentino Melandri, che si rivela, in tutte le sue opere, artista di primissimo ordine. Nel fondale della galleria delle arti decorative e industriali, Melandri ritrova, con piena modernità di valori un senso arcaico di policromia pittorica e di modellazione cromatica, definisce il limite sottile sul quale una data forma non si giustifica che per un dato colore; il colore assume così la densità del modellato, pur indicando con le sue iridescenze metalliche il distendersi e il dilatarsi delle superfici. Nasce da questa complessa e molteplice equazione il bisogno di isolare le forme, di farle emergere dal fondo senza correlazioni narrative, per non turbare quel misterioso e intimo aprirsi delle forme in colore: così in quegli animali che la candida lava del fondo ha investito in piena corsa



35. Partial view of the Gallery of decorative and industrial arts at the 6<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1936 with the backdrop wall with Melandri's *Perseus and Medusa*, in a contemporary photograph, Milan, Fondazione La Triennale, Archivio Fotografico.

The Martinian ancestry of these figures is overcome specifically by that «archaic sense of pictorial polychrome and chromatic modelling» captured with precision by Argan, and by the way the figures unfold over the wall in a story of unusual iconography. Medusa almost becomes a bathing woman sitting in the sun who responds to the powerful Perseus armed with a sword with her arms raised in a gesture of surrender. The following year, in 1937, the wall with *Perseus and Medusa* was displayed at the International Exhibition in Paris and earned its author the Official Grand Prize for Sculpture.

The collaboration between ceramicists and architects that Papini called for in 1936 again materialized for Melandri in 1938, when he was summoned by the architect Luigi Piccinato (1899-1983) to contribute to the decoration of the Eliseo theatre in Rome with a work depicting the *Myth*

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arrestandone la vita e trasformandoli per sortilegio in materia preziosa. Anche se talvolta, come in una Annunciazione e in alcune statuette, Melandri si abbandona troppo impetuosamente alla gioia di vetrificare in smalti cangianti colate di metalli incandescenti e ancor pieni di fiamma, nei vasi egli sa modulare sottilmente la forma, dilatarla per dare al colore un più largo e comprensivo contorno, sottrarla alla norma schematica della simmetria per trovare in una più profonda sintesi di forma e colore un più intimo, inconfondibile valore espressivo».



36. Pietro Melandri, *Perseus*, detail of Melandri's *Perseus and Medusa* exhibited in Milan in 1936 and in Paris in 1937, in a contemporary colour photography, Private collection.



37. *Medusa*, detail of Melandri's *Perseus and Medusa* exhibited at the 6<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1936, in a contemporary photograph, Milan, Fondazione La Triennale, Archivio Fotografico.

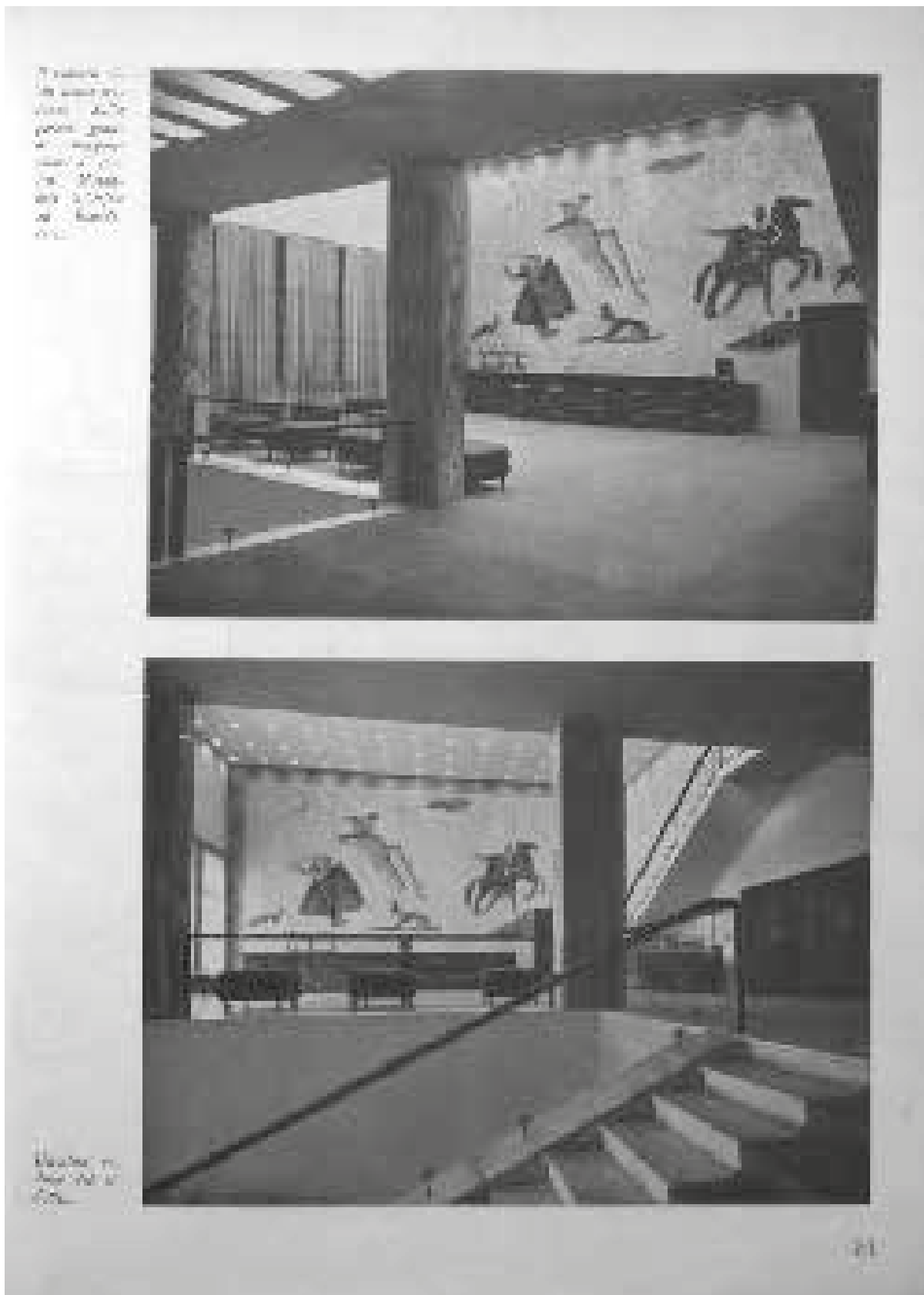


38. *Female figure from the back*, detail of Melandri's *Perseus and Medusa* exhibited at the 6<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1936, in a contemporary photograph, Milan, Fondazione La Triennale, Archivio Fotografico.

of *Orpheus* to be placed in the bar (fig. 39). Piccinato himself indicates the nature of the difficulty posed and suggests the solution:

«The main wall of the bar posed a decorative problem. Here, Pietro Melandri of Faenza composed a scene with figures almost double life size, distributed over the entire surface, representing the myth of Orpheus. Orpheus leaves the Gates of Hell and turns to look at Eurydice, who suddenly falls back again when Orpheus turns, while Cerberus barks and growls to prevent any exit from hell. The figures are composed of pieces of Faenza maiolica glazed at high temperature with metallic reflections: these pieces are held together on an insulating lattice wall plastered with a coarse mix of plaster and sawdust, which provides a very soft foundation».<sup>52</sup>

<sup>52</sup> PICCINATO 1939, p. 159: «Un problema decorativo era rappresentato dalla parete principale del bar: qui, Pietro Melandri, di Faenza, compose una scena con figure quasi il doppio del vero, distribuite sull'intera superficie, a rappresentare il mito di Orfeo. Questi uscito dalla Porta degli Inferi, si volge a guardare Euridice, che improvvisamente, al volgersi di Orfeo, riprecipita, mentre Cerbero latra e ringhia impedendo ogni uscita dall'inferno. Le figure sono composte a pezzi di maiolica faentina verniciata a gran fuoco con riflessi metallici: pezzi che sono poi tenuti insieme su di una parete a graticcio isolante intonacata di gesso e segatura di legno ad impasto grosso, ciò che conferisce al fondo una grande morbidezza».



39. Two views of the bar area of the Eliseo Theatre in Rome with Melandri's ceramics on the back wall depicting the *Myth of Orpheus*, in contemporary photographs reproduced in 1939 by Luigi Piccinato in «Architettura. Rivista del Sindacato Nazionale fascista Architetti» (PICCINATO 1939, p. 151).





40. Pietro Melandri, *Allegory of the Maritime Trade*, 1941, Imola, Cassa di Risparmio.

Already in 1933, however, at the invitation of the aforementioned Melchiorre Bega, Melandri had been involved in the interior decoration of the Motta pastry shop in Piazza Duomo in Milan (a work later destroyed by the war), with a reflective maiolica sculpture depicting a haughty female figure accompanied by a dog<sup>53</sup>.

Melandri's involvement in this field intensified in the 1940s and 1950s, starting with the monumental decoration for the hall of the Cassa di Risparmio di Imola (figs 40-43), which he began to execute in 1941, commissioned by the architect Gian Luigi Poggiali:

«[...] around twenty larger than life size figures, modelled in high relief, in addition to the objects, symbols and decorations that complete the various paintings to create allegories of contemporary life. The architect

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<sup>53</sup> On the shops designed by Bega, especially in the 1930s, see SAVORRA 2017.

41. Pietro Melandri, *Allegory of the Overland Trade*, 1941, Imola, Cassa di Risparmio.



Poggiali clad the whole hall in bright white *bigio* marble and opened up six large doors, three public entrances and another three service and staff entrances [...] At the centre right in front of the entrances stands the dominant figure of Fascism: a young man rising from a brightly coloured drapery and raising an arm in the Roman salute [...] At the sides of this representation, in the other two panels, are the allegories of trade: on the left maritime trade with a winged Mercury making a flying jump amidst fluttering draperies, then a motif of a fishing boat and a very pretty putto carrying a basket of fish in shimmering colours on his head; and on the right overland trade. On the opposite side, in the three panels above the entrance doors, are depicted: at the centre the exaltation of savings, on the left the allegory of the brick industry, on the right the celebration of rural activities»<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> CAMPANA 1941: «[...] una ventina di figure più grandi del vero, modellate a tutto rilievo, oltre gli oggetti, i simboli, le decorazioni che ne completano i vari quadri in funzione delle allegorie della vita di oggi. L'architetto Poggiali rivestendo di marmo bigio ma candidissimo tutto il salone vi apriva sei vaste porte tre per l'ingresso al pubblico ed altre tre per i servizi e gli impiegati [...] Al centro proprio di faccia all'ingresso spicca la figura dominatrice del Fascismo: un



42. Pietro Melandri, *Exaltation of Savings*, 1941, Imola, Cassa di Risparmio.



43. Pietro Melandri, *Allegory of the Brick Industry*, 1941, Imola, Cassa di Risparmio.

If Melandri reached the highest sculptural tension of his career in this cycle, it is in the superabundant cladding of the bar of the Hotel Roma in Bologna of 1959 – now in the International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza –, also refurbished by Bega, that the very shallow relief becomes

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giovane che sorge da panneggi a vivissimi colori ed alza un braccio nel saluto romano [...] Ai lati di tale figurazione, negli altri due riquadri, sono le allegorie del commercio: a sinistra quello marittimo con un Mercurio alato, che balza in volo tra svolazzanti panneggi, poi un motivo di barca peschereccia ed un putto, assai grazioso, che reca in capo un canestro di pesci dalle tinte scintillanti; ed a destra il commercio terrestre. Dalla parte opposta, nei tre riquadri sopra le porte d'ingresso, sono raffigurate: al centro l'esaltazione del risparmio a sinistra l'allegoria dell'industria dei laterizi, a destra la celebrazione delle attività rurali».



44. Pietro Melandri, Detail of the decoration of the bar of the Hotel Roma in Bologna, 1959, Faenza, Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche (MIC).



45. Pietro Melandri, Detail of the decoration of the bar of the Hotel Roma in Bologna, 1959, Faenza, Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche (MIC).

the new protagonist of Melandri's monumental creations (figs 44-45). The design, almost absorbed into the surface of the background, emerges slowly as if by magic thanks to the muted colours and the gold, creating an unexpected vision. Melandri seems to have cast an imaginary net into the sea of his memory, recapturing the themes, signs and forms that had accompanied him for much of his life and recreating them as if sublimated in a dream.

Between these two extremes – the Imola frieze and the Bologna decorations – we see perhaps the most eccentric outcome of Melandri's artistic career: the large panels made as enticing advertising hoardings for the Caffé Irrera in Messina<sup>55</sup> (cat. 24). On an emerald-green background scattered with marks, painted dots and delicate relief ornaments, are figures mainly of young women with unnatural features and even more extravagant garments. For them Melandri no longer drew on his now consolidated repertoire of images, but resorted to Picasso, Cubist still lifes, Modigliani and Matisse. However, he immersed these influences – which in these same years inspired another great ceramicist, Leoncillo Leonardi (1915-1968) – in a dreamlike world that from Alberto Martini (1876-1954) seems to reach Leonor Fini (1907-1996).

### The «new poet of ceramics»

The label «new poet of ceramics», coined early on (1928) by Beltramelli<sup>56</sup>, suggests a way of interpreting Melandri's work truly capable of linking his entire career, as long as we understand it as a poem that follows the rhythms of time and not of fashion.

His works of the 1920s and 30s are compositions whose metre, rhyme and accentuation are forms, designs and colours of more or less pronounced Art Deco ancestry (fig. 46). By contrast, the idiom of the post-war period up to the end of the 60s is both dreamlike and increasingly rich in abstract experimentation (figs 47-49).

Tracking Melandri's work and its critical reception now allows us to examine his creative path with attention to the values of an artist who in his daily work tirelessly reiterated that he was specifically a ceramicist. Melandri himself reminds us of this when discussing the artists who had presented ceramics with him at the 1950 Venice Biennale. In a letter to Ponti he asks his friend – and himself –: «What do you think of the ceramics at Venice? I expected more of everyone. I don't understand the paltriness of Melotti and Fontana and even of Leoncillo. If as you have long promised me you come here, we can discuss this»<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>55</sup> For the bar Melandri also created, using designs by the sculptor from Messina Giuseppe Mazzullo (1913-1988), the wall panel with the *Myth of Orpheus* and the narrative tiles that decorated the front of the long corner counter (RUTA 2017, pp. 129-131).

<sup>56</sup> BELTRAMELLI 1927 (see above note 10), and also BELTRAMELLI 1928: «Così Pietro Melandri, questo nuovo poeta della ceramica, ebbe il suo campo [in Faenza] e creò le cose più belle» («So Pietro Melandri, this new poet of ceramics had his space [in Faenza] and created the most beautiful things»).

<sup>57</sup> Melandri's letter to Ponti of August 1950 is quoted in BERTONI 2012, pp. 137-138: «Che ne dici delle ceramiche di Venezia? Io mi aspettavo di più da tutti. Non capisco la miseria di Melotti e Fontana e mettiamo pure Leoncillo. Se come



46. Pietro Melandri, *Perseus and Medusa* exhibited at the 6<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1936, in a contemporary photograph, Milan, Fondazione La Triennale, Archivio Fotografico.

At the international exhibition in Venice Lucio Fontana (1899-1968), for example, presented a *Christ* and two *Large plates with battles* whose power as «authentic sculpture» was stressed by Attilio Podestà (†1973) in his review of the exhibition: «Of the three leading names [in Italian sculpture of the “middle generation”], Fontana, Mirko and Fazzini, only the former is present at the Biennale and is also present to himself, with pieces of authentic sculpture: though the good Fontana repeats that these ceramics of his are made for fun, since sculpture is now dead, according to the meaning hitherto given to the word»<sup>58</sup>.

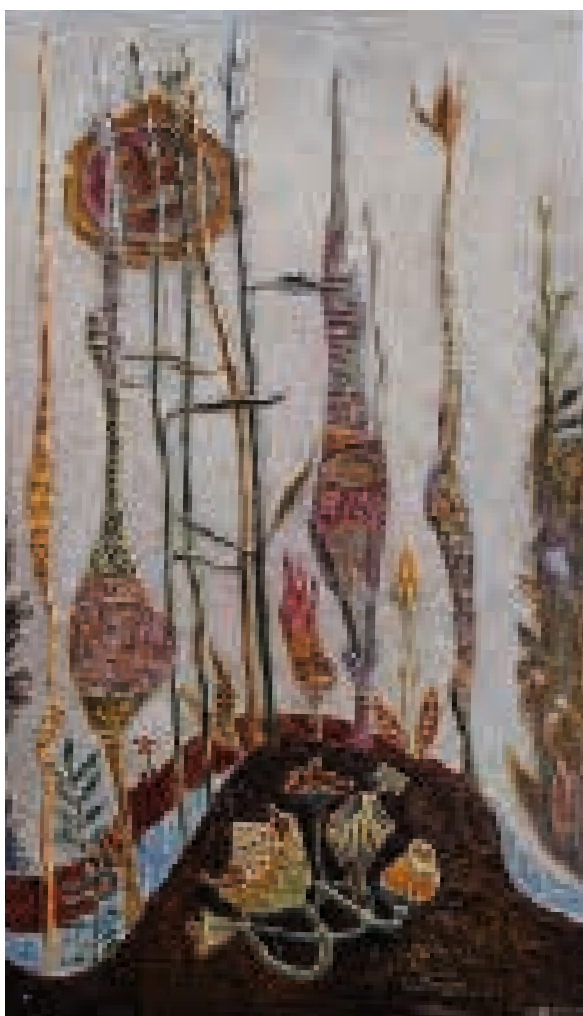
In a mirror-image and inverse perspective with respect to that proposed by Fontana, who had stated «I am a sculptor and not a ceramicist»<sup>59</sup>, and in some ways in greater harmony with the later path of Leoncillo Leonardi (1915-1968), Melandri made ceramic the material that alongside his

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mi prometti da tempo verrai qui ne parleremo». In 1950, Melandri exhibited a purple vase dated 1947 (BIENNALE 1950, p. 178); in 1934 he participated with a *Victory* (BIENNALE 1934, p. 130).

<sup>58</sup> PODESTÀ 1950, p. 123: «Dei tre nomi di punta [della scultura italiana della «generazione di mezzo»], Fontana, Mirko e Fazzini, solo il primo è presente alla Biennale ed è anche a se stesso presente, con pezzi di autentica scultura: malgrado il buon Fontana vada ripetendo che queste sue ceramiche sono fatte per gioco, essendo ormai morta la scultura, secondo il significato che alla parola si è fino ad oggi inteso dare»

<sup>59</sup> FONTANA 1939.



47. Pietro Melandri, *Decorative panel with the Rape of Europa* (23,5 x 37 cm), late 1960's., Brun Fine Art.  
48. Pietro Melandri, *Decorative panel with flowers* (39 x 23 cm), 1960's., Brun Fine Art.  
49. Pietro Melandri, *Decorative panel with a bust in profile* (55 x 43 cm), 1960's., Brun Fine Art.

proud character gave him his true nature as an artist, freeing ceramics itself from its centuries-old inferiority complex with respect to sculpture.

## The Italians must collect pieces by Melandri

«Melandri is the true protagonist of Italian ceramics. In these pages we illustrate his first “postwar collection” which is gradually being enriched with stupendous pieces. The Italians must collect pieces by Melandri. There should be no room suspected of being without a piece by Melandri!»<sup>60</sup>.

The magazine *Stile* is almost categorical in this statement, unattributed – but by its founder and director Giò Ponti – of 1946, endorsing the work of the Faenza ceramicist when he was reorganizing not only his life but also his work, since he had lost his house and workshop to bombing in the disasters of the war (figs 50-53). Starting over was certainly not easy, but the need forced him to confront the dramatically changed world of the postwar period and the most recent artistic trends, Italian and otherwise.

At the time, however, the collecting history of the ceramicist’s work already boasted a certain pedigree, considering that the «large vase with a blue-green and golden-brown reflective glaze», exhibited at the Milan Triennale in 1933, was owned by the Head of Government, Benito Mussolini<sup>61</sup>. For him Melandri had also refurbished the interior of his summer residence near Predappio, the Rocca delle Caminate castle, in 1931.

Tracing those who devotedly collected Melandri’s ceramics, we come to the most private rooms of the Vittoriale degli Italiani. In this villa on the shores of Lake Garda, the poet Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863-1938) lived surrounded by a rich and extravagant collection of art. It included some pieces by Melandri that still survive alongside some of the bowls that the master decorated with the poet’s famous sayings<sup>62</sup>: «Io ho quel che ho donato»; «Ardisco non ordisco»; «Cominus et neminus ferit».

In these bowls, Melandri faithfully reproduced the woodcut inventions made by Adolfo De Carolis (1874-1928), the poet’s favourite painter, for his letterhead. Melandri was not merely in “artistic” harmony with the ornamental style of De Carolis’s carvings, but clearly knew the older master personally: on 17 January 1928 he wrote to him from Rome thanking him for the gift of a woodcut:

«Illustrious Maestro, your beautiful woodcut makes this the first time I have received the gift of one of his works from an artist.

Since your magnanimous gesture certainly arose from a necessity of the spirit, rebelling against the need – more demeaning now than ever – to haggle over the price of one’s creation like the beauty of a fallen woman, and giving it to someone able to appreciate all its indefinable value, I will keep this woodcut in my

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<sup>60</sup> MELANDRI 1946, p. 26: «Melandri è il vero protagonista della ceramica italiana. Illustriamo in queste pagine una sua prima “collezione di dopoguerra” che va arricchendosi di pezzi stupendi. Gli italiani debbono collezionare pezzi di Melandri. Non deve esistere ambiente che si sospetti non abbia un Pezzo di Melandri!».

<sup>61</sup> LANCELOTTI 1934, p. 420.

<sup>62</sup> See Roberto Martorelli in SGARBI, PANZETTA 2015, pp. 132-134.





studio as the rarest thing and as a sign of the most pleasant and flattering honour I could wish for.  
To you, with my best wishes, my sincere thanks  
Your Devoted  
Pietro Melandri»<sup>63</sup>.

D'Annunzio mainly acquired Melandri's ceramics through Dante Bravo (1890-1936), founder of the «Bottega d'arte» gallery in Brescia where the poet bought art and furnishings<sup>64</sup>. In a letter dated 1 September 1929, Bravo informed D'Annunzio – the Commander – about some new ceramics: «Melandri telegraphed me that he had had a good harvest, and indeed I found several beautiful ceramic pieces. Among others, there is a beautiful bowl with your motto “Io ho quel che ho donato”, and he is preparing others, with your aviatory deeds»<sup>65</sup>. Again, on 17 March 1935, for the poet's name day, he sent him «as a modest gift – a recent pottery work by Melandri»<sup>66</sup>, with the hope that it would be appreciated.

Among the first to collect works by Melandri we obviously find a native of Faenza, the surgeon Aldo Lesi (1889-1953), to whom Gaetano Ballardini (1878-1953), founder and director of the International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza, wrote in July 1937 from Paris announcing the master's success at the International Exhibition of Decorative Arts: «Dear Professor, Melandri triumphs. If nothing has changed in the meantime – and I don't think so – it will be the ultimate success. I am delighted for Faenza and for you, as a fervent supporter of our artist»<sup>67</sup>. As hoped, the *Perseus and Medusa* earned its author the First Prize for Sculpture.

Presenting Melandri's exhibition at the 5<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1933, Ponti mentions Lesi and the lawyer Giovanni Bolognesi as the generous collectors who had lent most of the works on display<sup>68</sup>. The number of collectors was still limited, but was expanding thanks to Ponti. In 1949, for example, the architect introduced the ceramicist to Count Raimondo Visconti di Modrone, administrator of the Richard Ginori factory<sup>69</sup>. As a consequence, some of his pieces entered his personal Milanese col-

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<sup>63</sup> «Illustre Maestro, colla sua bella xilografia è la prima volta che ricevo da un artista l'omaggio di una sua opera. / E poiché di certo il suo magnanimo gesto è scaturito da un bisogno dello spirito, che si ribella alla necessità – oggi più che mai avvilente – di dover contrattare il prezzo della propria creazione alla stessa stregua della bellezza di una donna perduta, per farne dono a chi sappia apprezzarne tutto l'indefinibile valore, io terrò questa xilografia nel mio studio come la cosa più rara e come segno del più gradito e lusinghiero onore che potessi desiderare. / A Lei, coi miei auguri, i miei cordiali ringraziamenti / Suo Dev.<sup>mo</sup> / Pietro Melandri» (Rome, Archivi della Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Fondi Storici, Adolfo de Carolis).

<sup>64</sup> Between 1924 and 1935, D'Annunzio purchased several works by Melandri through Bravo (Roberto Martorelli in SGARBI, PANZETTA 2015, pp. 132-133).

<sup>65</sup> From Roberto Martorelli in *Ivi*, p. 133.

<sup>66</sup> From Roberto Martorelli in *Ibidem*.

<sup>67</sup> From GOLFIERI 1979, p. 23: «Caro Professore, Melandri trionfa. Se le cose non saranno cambiate per via – e non credo – sarà il massimo successo. Me ne rallegro per Faenza e con Lei, validissimo animatore del nostro artista».

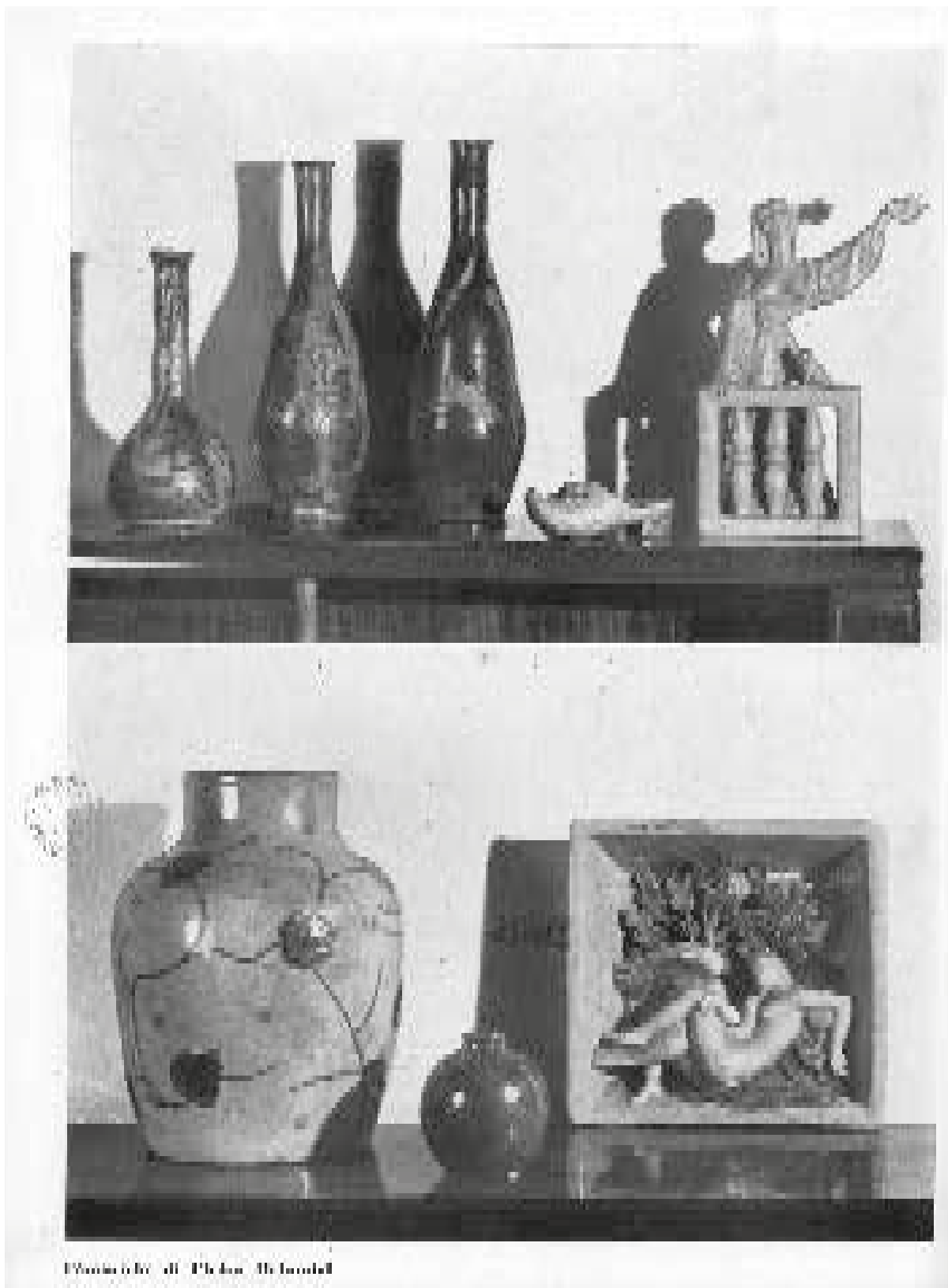
<sup>68</sup> On the collection of Melandri's works that belonged to Giovanni Bolognesi see NESTI 2002.

<sup>69</sup> In 1949, Ponti accompanied Raimondo Visconti di Modrone to Faenza, Imola, Nove and Bassano to visit the best craft workshops and buy pieces for the Museum at Doccia and the Richard Ginori shops in Milan and Rome (RUCCELLAI 2018, p. 50). See also BERTONI 2012 p. 137, which refers to a letter in which Melandri thanks Ponti for introducing him to Visconti.





51. Works by Pietro Melandri in contemporary photographs reproduced in 1946 in «Stile» (MELANDRI 1946, p. 27).



52. Works by Piet Mondrian in contemporary photographs reproduced in 1946 in «Stile» (MELANDRI 1946, p. 28).



53. Works by Pietro Melandri in contemporary photographs reproduced in 1946 in «Stile» (MELANDRI 1946, p. 29).



54. Works by Pietro Melandri belonging to the «V. d. M.» (Visconti di Modrone) collection in a contemporary photograph reproduced in 1950 in «Domus» (TRADIZIONE 1950, p. 30).



55. Pietro Melandri, *Vases and bowl*. Ceramic exhibited at the 11<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1957, in a contemporary photograph, Milan, Fondazione La Triennale, Archivio Fotografico.

lection and were promptly reproduced in the pages of *Domus*, as a “visual commentary” on a curious article entitled «Tradition and taste» (fig. 54). Four «beautiful» pieces of Melandri’s reflective ceramics were presented as testimonies «of a personal taste, and therefore extraneous to evocative taste» with respect to the “exhumations” of the old Nove ceramics proposed by the ceramicist Andrea Parini (1906-1975). Thus, while «the pieces exhumed by Andrea Parini belong to tradition tied to contemporary taste, the pieces by Melandri establish their *own* tradition, and enter our customs as a record of the personality of an artist, more than as a stylistic phenomenon»<sup>70</sup> (fig. 55).

In conclusion, we cannot forget that Ponti himself surrounded himself with pieces by his beloved Melandri and that the images in *Domus* show them in his apartment in Milan and his house in Brianza.<sup>71</sup> Here, from the packed library, we are greeted by one of the most successful inventions among the small sculptures born out of the long partnership between the two, the pretty and somewhat melancholy woman at the balcony: ciao.

<sup>70</sup> TRADIZIONE 1950, p. 30: «i pezzi riesumati da Andrea Parini appartengono alla tradizione riallacciata ad un gusto attuale, i pezzi di Melandri istituiscono una *sua* tradizione, ed entrano nel costume a documento della personalità di un artista, più che non per fenomeno di gusto».

<sup>71</sup> CASA 1950.





CATALOGUE



1.

### A) Butterfly Woman

Polychrome maiolica and gold overglaze, 23 x 26 x 7 cm

Mark to inside: MELANDRI M – Goshawk inside a circle – F / FOCACCIA / FAENZA / MF / ITALY

ca. 1925 – 1931

### B) Empire Style Woman

Polychrome maiolica, 30 x 11 x 7 cm

Mark to inside: FOCACCIA F – Goshawk inside a circle – M / MELANDRI / FAENZA / MF / ITALY

ca. 1925 – 1931

### C) Andalusian Woman

Polychrome maiolica and gold overglaze, 23 x 26 x 7 cm

Mark to interior: MELANDRI M – Goshawk inside a circle – F / FOCACCIA / FAENZA / MF / ITALY

ca. 1925 – 1931

In accordance with a fairly common practice in the art maiolica factories of the time, Melandri also executed sculptural pieces using models supplied by other artists, decorating them with flair in a captivatingly original way. Our artist embarked upon such endeavours already in 1919, during the few months in which he worked in partnership with Paolo Zoli. At this time, he painted a number of sculptures by Francesco Nonni<sup>1</sup>, a highly versatile artist friend who worked as a sculptor, painter and exceptional woodcut printmaker. Nonni was also responsible for the invention of the imaginative *Butterfly Woman* and of the *Empire Style Woman*, to use the title with which they were described and advertised in the illustrated 1925 Focaccia and Melandri catalogue, as well as for the *Andalusian Woman*.

Melandri and Nonni continued their collaboration during the Focaccia and Melandri years (1922-1931) with superlative results. Together they created numerous female figures, dancers, Pierrot clowns and small groups that are among the high points of the Italian Art Deco movement<sup>2</sup>.

Nonni's economically rendered sculptures are overwhelmed by Melandri's application of an inexhaustible variety of decorative motifs. These range from the peacock feather traditional in

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<sup>1</sup> In general on Nonni's sculptures see DIRANI 2005.

<sup>2</sup> As well as by Melandri and Focaccia, and subsequently Melandri alone, the small sculptures created by Nonni were also decorated by other factories and individual decorators from Faenza, starting with Anselmo Bucci, Paolo Zoli's La Faïence and Giuseppe Fiumi's La Nuova Cà Pirota.







Plate 8 from Focaccia and Melandri's 1925 catalogue (a specimen of *Empire Style Woman* and of *Butterfly Woman* are reproduced at numbers 1 and 12).

Faenza to exotic Moorish or Japanese ornaments, without forgetting the patterns of Renaissance textiles. As we see clearly in this *Butterfly Woman*, painting and glazing Nonni's creations presented Melandri with a tricky conflict between form and colour, volume and ornament. Depicted by her creator in a headlong rush, she can truly take flight only thanks to the beauty of Melandri's painted decoration, here consisting of the large flowers on her dress, vaguely 16<sup>th</sup>-century in style, enriched with touches of gold.

Sculptures of this type became instantly popular, as demonstrated by the pressing requests from Walter Toscanini (1898-1971), son of the famous conductor. He sold them in the Bottega di Poesia – in Via Monte Napoleone 14 in Milan – the headquarters of the publishing house and art gallery that he had founded in 1920 with, among others, Count Emanuele Castelbarco (1884-1964), himself a painter<sup>3</sup>.

As we have seen, one example of the *Butterfly Woman* and of the *Empire Style Woman* appear among the art statuettes advertised in the 1925 illustrated catalogue of Focaccia and Melandri, but not in that of two years earlier. It is thus possible that their creation and manufacture should be dated to this period. In any case, the pieces including the *Andalusian Woman* had been created by 1931, when the Melandri and Focaccia company was dissolved.

<sup>3</sup> Some letters of request from Toscani to Nonni of 1921 are reproduced in facsimile form in DIRANI 2005, pp. 10-11, 16-18, 22-23, 26-27.





2.

### Female Figure

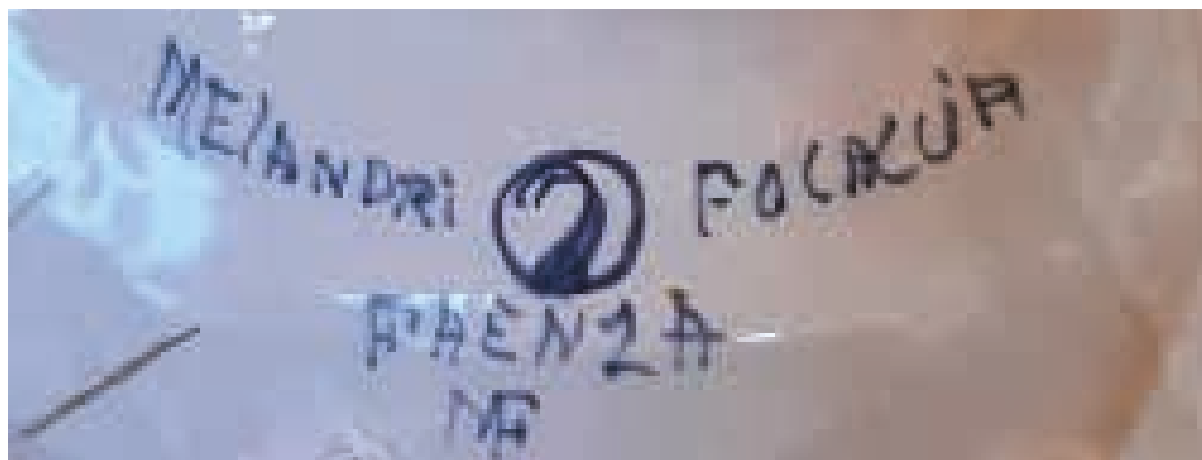
Two-colour maiolica, h 22, Ø 17

Mark to base: MELANDRI – Goshawk in a circle - FOCACCIA / FAENZA / MF  
ca. 1922

This centrepiece consists of an elegant female figurine who with a delicate rotating movement wraps a long drapery around her body that falls to the ground and takes the shape of a plate with a slightly raised edge. When modelling this sculpture, Melandri clearly drew inspiration from some of the works in a pronounced art nouveau style created in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Domenico Baccarini, and in particular those female figures dancing merrily in a ring around the central body of a vase.

Melandri had previously decorated some of the works devised by Baccarini during his brief period of collaboration with Paolo Zoli in 1919-20<sup>1</sup>. He then continued to work independently on this type of ornamental objects, which are completely absent from the earliest (1923) of the catalogues of the Focaccia and Melandri factory. Indeed, the recently established factory immediately moved towards Modernist forms and the Art Deco style proposed by Francesco Nonni (cat. 1).

Nonetheless, our centrepiece is a rare example of a decorative sculpture by the Faenza master, particularly unusual for the absence of metallic lustres. The white ground is scattered with a minute dark blue flower decoration with just a few traces of pink marking the girl's cheeks and lips.



<sup>1</sup> For an example produced by the Zoli-Melandri factory see STEFANELLI TOROSI 1987, p. 22, cat. no. 1.







3.

A) Lidded vase decorated with arabesques and running greyhounds

Polychrome maiolica with metallic lustres and gold overglaze, h 25 x Ø 24 cm

Mark to base: MELANDRI – Goshawk inside a circle - FOCACCIA / FAENZA / MF

ca. 1930

B) Lidded vase decorated with ivy tendrils and leaves

Polychrome maiolica with platinum and gold overglaze, h 26 x Ø 23 cm

Mark to base: FOCACCIA – Goshawk inside a circle - MELANDRI / FAENZA

ca. 1925

These two impressive lidded vases belong to the line of wares described as «new style» that the Focaccia and Melandri art maiolica factory began to make practically from its establishment in 1923. New in their simplified form and above all in their decoration, alien to Faentine tradition and to the more generically Renaissance style, in these vases Melandri has succeeded in independently reinterpreting, in a way that is anything but cloying, the floral ornaments of Art Nouveau still very fashionable during the 1920s.

The globular body of the first vase, whose lid has a pinecone-shaped handle, is subdivided in an orderly way by a web of fine lines running from a flower with three petals to surround panels inside which lithe greyhounds break into an endless run. The intense yellow background is enriched by metallic lustre effects and by minute polychrome and gold floral motifs, rendered with an intensely pictorial touch.

The vase once belonged to the collection of the scholar of maiolica Grazia Biscontini Ugolini<sup>1</sup>.

In the second vase, an exceptionally important model that Melandri exhibited at the Monza Biennale of 1925<sup>2</sup>, the dark blue ground is completely covered with a tiny motif of gold *ramages* with ivy leaves edged in platinum. The imaginative lid handle, made up of curved tendrils and leaves, belongs to the factory's ornamental repertoire and could be adapted to vases with very different decorations<sup>3</sup>.

Some plates and vases, including this one with ivy tendrils and leaves, were reproduced in 1927 in the *Enciclopedia delle moderne arti decorative italiane* together with the quotation of an insightful judgement by the painter and critic from Imola Rezio Buscaroli (1895-1971), according to whom Melandri «[...] has succeeded in quickly imposing his original and forceful personality on the "gildings with fine spirals and piping, the nuances of the green and blue colouring of the motifs,

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<sup>1</sup> Milan, Wannenes, Auction 315, Importanti maioliche e porcellane, 1 July 2020, lot 808.

<sup>2</sup> TERRAROLI 2007, no. 55.

<sup>3</sup> GAUDENZI 2002, p. 87, cat. no. 27.





Works by Petro Melandri. Plate 10 from the third volume of the *Encyclopedia of Modern Italian Decorative Arts* published in 1927 (MARANGONI 1927).

in the drips and oxidations, the reliefs created by colour and substance, the iridescent hues that give his pieces that rich and luxurious feel that apparently aspires to become familiar with the warm atmosphere of drawing rooms and of mahogany or walnut furniture”. In formulating this judgement, Rezio Buscaroli noted with equal acumen that the style of Pietro Melandri is in harmony with the sleek elegance of the ornamental fountains dear to Art Nouveau, tempered by recent research on the exotic, enriched with stylized animals and plants that attain a supremely elegant effect with their sinuous lines, the sober variety of the reflective highlights, the harmonious distribution of the ornamental masses»<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> MARANGONI 1927, p. 58 and Plt. 10: «[...] ha saputo presto imporre la sua originale e vigorosa personalità nelle “dorature a sottili spirali e filetti, nelle sfumature dalla campitura verde e bleu dei motivi, nelle colature ed ossidazioni, nei rilievi a colore ed a corpo, nelle iridazioni che danno alle sue cose quel linguaggio ricco e fastoso che pare aspiri a familiarizzarsi colla calda atmosfera dei salotti e dei mobili in mogano o in noce”. Rezio Buscaroli nel formulare questo suo giudizio verace, ha rilevato con altrettanta acutezza come il gusto di Pietro Melandri simpatizzi con le svelte eleganze delle fonti ornamentali care allo stile floreale corretto con le recenti ricerche di sapore esotico, arricchito da stilizzazioni di animali e di piante le quali raggiungono la suprema eleganza dell’effetto colla flessuosità delle linee, la sobria varietà dei riflessi, la armoniosa distribuzione delle masse ornamentali».



4.

Lidded vase decorated with swallows, vines and bunches of grapes

Maiolica with gold overglaze, h 26 cm

Mark to base: F – Goshawk inside a circle – M / FAENZA / MF

ca. 1925-30

This lidded white vase – an allusion to the traditional Chinese potiche – is wrapped in a vine highlighted in gold with red bunches of grapes that unfolds following a precise modular ratio around panels enclosing swallows. Another vase by Melandri of tapering shape with an identical ornamental motif but without a lid was included in the Focaccia and Melandri sales catalogue of 1923<sup>1</sup> and among the pieces displayed at a group exhibition held in Genova in 1927<sup>2</sup>; it is illustrated in the respective catalogues.

With reference to a pair of potiches resembling ours, but on which the bunches of grapes are in gold rather than red, the invention of the design was attributed without explanation to Giovanni Guerrini<sup>3</sup>. This decoration does not appear among Guerrini's known designs<sup>4</sup>, but the fact that the same decoration with swallows was also used contemporaneously by another important Faentine ceramicist, Riccardo Gatti, leaves the question of its invention open.



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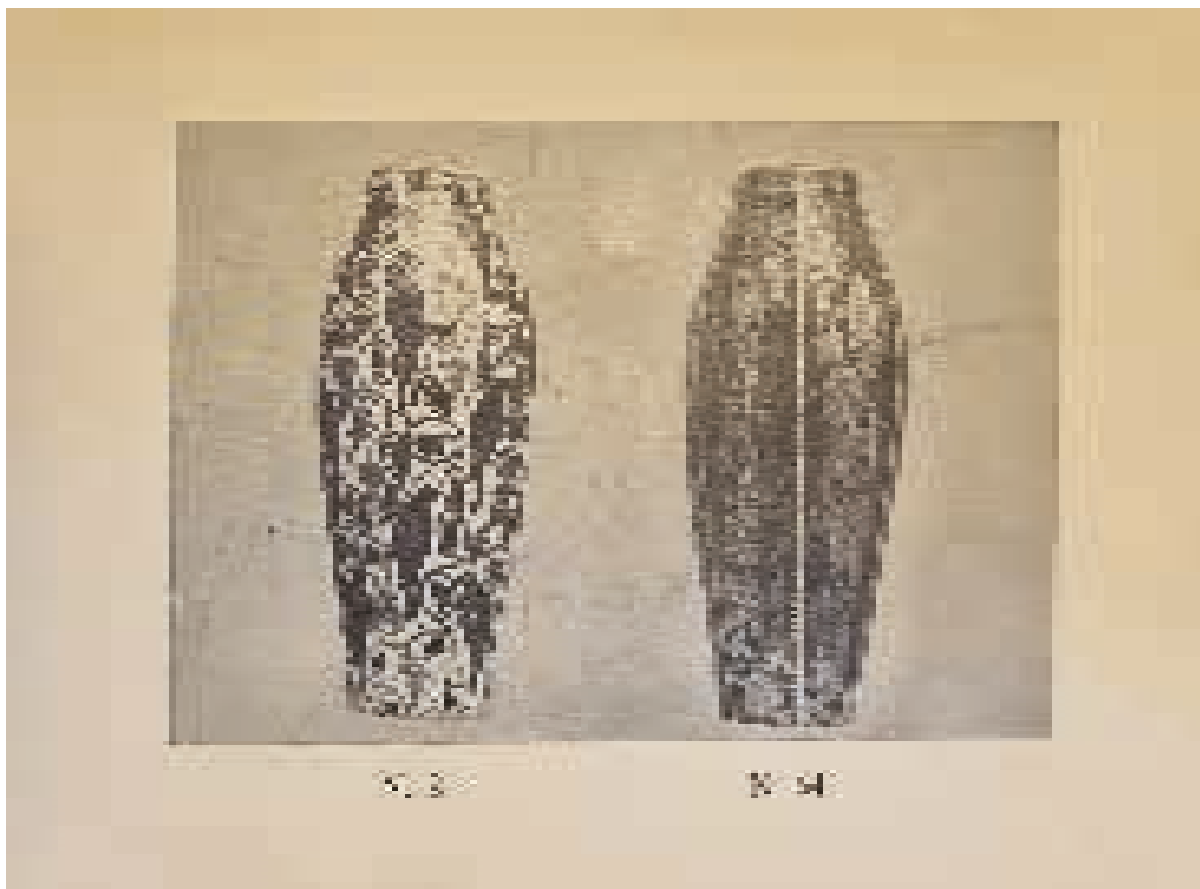
<sup>1</sup> GAUDENZI 2002, p. 281, Fonti d'Archivio 20.

<sup>2</sup> MOSTRA D'ARTE 1927, n. pag.

<sup>3</sup> BOSI 1995, n. pag.

<sup>4</sup> I owe this information to Davide Servadei, heir to the Gatti factory, which in Faenza holds a substantial part of the archive of Guerrini's drawings.





Two vases by Pietro Melandri. Plate from the catalogue of the group exhibition held at the Galleria Vitelli in Genoa in January 1927 (MOSTRA D'ARTE 1927, n. pag.).

The vase was displayed at the 1987 exhibition dedicated to Pietro Melandri at the Roman art gallery Galleria Arco Farnese<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> STEFANELLI TOROSI 1987, p. 24, cat. no. 4.



5.

A) Vase with a decoration of plant tendrils

Polycrome maiolica and gold overglaze, h 37 cm

Mark to base: F – Goshawk inside a circle – M / M

ca. 1925-30

B) Vase decorated with plant motifs

Polycrome maiolica and gold overglaze, h 40.5 cm

Mark to base: M – Goshawk inside a circle – F / FAENZA / MF

ca. 1930

These two large vases are among the most innovative pieces belonging to the “Modernist” production that the Foccaccia and Melandri art maiolica factory began to market almost from its inception in 1923. Their elegant and essential shape is complemented by highly refined decoration with plant motifs that does not, however, present any relationship with Faentine tradition. In both cases, Melandri has also succeeded in decidedly distancing himself from stylistic features that are more markedly art nouveau, creating highly personal tangles of fine lines.

On the first vase, an ethereal leafless vine, dark brown in colour and ending in minute flowers, seems to be attached to the slightly paunchy body of the vase with tiny suckers. The body itself presents an aquamarine metallic lustre with gold veining, while an ornamental motif resembling a double garland of small petals surrounds the short neck. For the quality of its metallic lustre, the chromatic intonation and the ornamental motif around the neck, the vase resembles a specimen in the MIC in Faenza (inv. no. 18835).

The second vase has a white ground and instead presents a rigorous subdivision of the tapering body, created by the rhythmic vertical repetition of a dark brown stalk with gold highlights from which little branches laden with tiny pinkish leaves depart at regular intervals.









6.

A) Large charger with genre scene

Polychrome maiolica, Ø 53 cm

Mark to back: Goshawk in a circle / FAENZA / MELANDRI

ca. 1931-35

B) Large charger with genre scene

Polychrome maiolica, Ø 53 cm

Mark to back: Goshawk in a circle / FAENZA / MELANDRI

ca. 1931-35

As the trademark on the underside indicates, this pair of larger chargers, belonging to a model without a well, is part of Melandri's production after his partnership with Focaccia ended in 1931. Evidently, in the very early 1930s the creation of pieces in «imitation of classical antiquity» had not yet been supplanted by those in the modern style. The ratio of ornamental to figurative parts is nonetheless very different from the earlier examples of this production: here only a narrow portion of the lip is occupied by a golden yellow grotesque motif on a cobalt blue ground identical to that found, for example, in two plates with hunting scenes (cat. 7).

Melandri's sound training as a painter allowed him to master the decoration of maiolica pieces of this type, in which pure genre scenes are set in landscapes still in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century style.

One charger depicts a stretch of seashore overlooked by a fortress and protected on the sea by a circular tower. Some peasants/fishers in the foreground, six men and a woman, chat to one another as one lights a fire beneath a pan and another fishes.

The other charger presents a similar landscape setting. Two seated women and a young man converse as they watch the work of two fishermen who have just drawn up their boat and are emptying the nets.







7.

A) Large charger with Diana the huntress

Polychrome maiolica, Ø 57 cm

Mark to back: goshawk in a circle / FAENZA / MELANDRI

ca. 1931-35

B) Large charger with hunting scene

Polychrome maiolica, Ø 57 cm

Mark to back: goshawk in a circle / FAENZA / MELANDRI

ca. 1931-35

These two large chargers still show the influence of the models executed as «imitations of classical antiquity» created and sold for a considerable time by the Focaccia and Melandri factory and illustrated in the sales catalogues of 1923 and 1925 (p. 27, fig. 7). However, the maker's mark on the back, with only Melandri's name, determines their execution after 1931, by which time the association with Focaccia had ended.

In the relative size of the ornamental and figurative parts, and as we shall see in the style of the figures, these pieces now differ significantly from their predecessors. Only a narrow portion of the lip is adorned with a golden yellow grotesque motif on a cobalt blue background, while the well and most of the plate are illustrated, specifically with a mythologically-inspired hunting scene.

On the first plate a woman armed with a bow and a long arrow or javelin pursues a fleeing antelope, accompanied by two greyhounds in a headlong rush. It is evident from the model on which Melandri based the figure that this is Diana the huntress: a translation into paint of the *Diana the Huntress* modelled in 1929 by the Venetian sculptor Carlo Lorenzetti. The ceramicist from Faenza kept this sculpture in production for many years in the variants with or without the antelope<sup>1</sup>. At the same time, under the artistic directorship of Gio Ponti, the Richard Ginori factory at Doccia also used some models by Lorenzetti for small porcelain sculptures with gold highlights, including a *Running Antelope* and a *Running Deer*.

This was not the only occasion on which Melandri adopted the invention in the round of Lorenzetti's Diana. He also employed it in relief in a series of plaques of varying format and colour, sometimes enriched with legends including the name of the goddess and the motto «A VENATIONE MIHI SALUS»<sup>2</sup>.

To the sculptural model of the goddess Melandri has added a fluttering cloak in the attempt to suggest the idea of running in a figure whose pose appears excessively static.

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<sup>1</sup> GAUDENZI 2002, p. 128, cat. no. 76, gives 1929 as the year when the model was created.

<sup>2</sup> A rectangular plaque and a roundel are reproduced in *Ceramica Antica*, 5 (38), VI, May 1994, p. 59. For another plaque see PESOLA 2012, p. 10.





Pietro Melandri (from a model by Carlo Lorenzetti), *Diana the Huntress* (h. 45 cm), 1930 c., Private collection.

The hunting scene on the second plate is different and complementary to that of the first. Here the fleeing antelope is pursued by a pack of dogs together with a hunting nymph with uncovered breasts and a bare-chested man with a vaguely satyr-like bearded face.

Following his definitive return to Faenza in 1919 and the start of his work as a ceramic artist, Melandri's training as a painter allowed him to excel in the decoration of painted maiolica pieces with narrative scenes, often as in our case set within landscapes still in the late Romantic style. Nonetheless, these two plates present a degree of stylistic friction between landscape and figures: the economical style of Lorenzetti's 1920s invention contrasts with the wholly 19<sup>th</sup>-century manner of the landscape background.



8.

### The Virgin Mary ascending to heaven (Assumption)

Polychrome maiolica and gold overglaze, 120 x 40 x 30 cm

1932

This exceptional sculpture depicting *The Virgin Mary ascending to heaven* was executed by Melandri in 1932 for the Bolognesi family tomb in the monumental cemetery of the Osservanza in Faenza. His client, the lawyer Giovanni Bolognesi, was the most important collector of Melandri's works in the 1920s and 1930s, to the extent that with the Faentine surgeon Aldo Lesi he lent the largest number of pieces for the solo exhibition dedicated to Melandri by Gio Ponti at the 1933 Triennale<sup>1</sup>.

The sacred theme of the Assumption of Mary – presumably requested by the client himself – was conceived by the master around the sole figure of the Virgin ascending to heaven. The statue, originally hung inside an arched niche sufficiently deep to contain it, looked as if it had truly taken miraculous flight from its background of ceramic decorated with leaves and plant motifs cladding the interior of the recess – still *in situ*<sup>2</sup>. The sense of lightness and supernatural ascent were heightened by the insistent torsion of Mary's body – of Mannerist derivation –, with her legs slightly bent, her hands crossed over her chest and downwards gaze with her veiled head turned towards her right.

The gentle expression of the face, an almost perfect oval, the elongated oriental eyes and small mouth form a physiognomy dear to Melandri during the 1930s, that of the famous *Mask of the Wind* but also of the *Modern Venus* (1933; destroyed) for the Pasticceria Motta in Milan and the example in the International Museum of Ceramics of Faenza (1936). However, in the *Assumption* Melandri has not made use of his already celebrated metallic lustres but instead plays on the contrast between the ivory skin of the face, hands and dangling feet and the richness of the fantastical floral motif on Mary's garment, in sgraffito with gold accents.

The strongly emphasized belt, made up of floral plaques in relief reminiscent of some applications that Melandri used to adorn his vases of this period, is only superficially an ornamental element. In fact, this is a reference to the relic of the sacred girdle of the Virgin venerated in Prato cathedral. Already in medieval art it had given rise to the iconography of the Virgin who from heaven passes her girdle to St Thomas, absent at the time of the Assumption, as proof that she was truly living in heaven.

In 1994, the sculpture was presented at the exhibition devoted to the ceramicist by the town of

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<sup>1</sup> PONTI 1933, p. 429. On the Bolognesi collection of Melandri's works see NESTI 2002.

<sup>2</sup> The photograph was reproduced in GAUDENZI 2002, p. 311, Fonti d'Archivio 72. A copy now replaces the sculpture in its original home.





Photograph showing the original setting of the *Virgin Mary Ascending to Heaven* inside the Bolognesi family tomb in the monumental cemetery of Faenza (from GAUDENZI 2002, p. 311).

Faenza; the catalogue accompanying the event reproduces a page from the daily newspaper *L'Avvenire d'Italia* of 6 July 1954, with an article by the painter and art critic from Romagna Anacleto Margotti (1895-1984) entitled *Trionfo di rotte forme al XII Concorso di Faenza*, in which a photograph of the *Assumption* is accompanied by the caption «Praying angel, property of the lawyer Bolognesi»<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> LIVERANI-EMALDI 1994, n. pag., cat. no. 8.



9.

### Large plate with Venus on a Hippocamp

Polychrome lustred maiolica and gold overglaze, Ø 49.5 cm

Mark to underside: goshawk / MELANDRI

1933

This large plate was exhibited at the 5<sup>th</sup> Triennale of 1933 as part of the Faenza master's solo show exceptionally organized by Gio Ponti, largely responsible for this edition of the exhibition – the first to be held not in Monza but in Milan. The black and white photograph of our piece is reproduced in the magazine *Domus* among the illustrations for an article devoted by Ponti himself to the Italian ceramics at the Triennale – but illustrated exclusively with pieces by Melandri (p. 42, fig. 17). Accompanying the photo is a caption that attempts to describe the chromatic richness of the original: «Large plate with a bluish grey background with “Venus on the Hippocamp” in grey, golden yellow and violet – year 1933»<sup>1</sup>.

Ponti, who was heavily involved in publishing, long lamented his inability to present colour images able to do greater justice to the pieces illustrated in *Domus*, the magazine that he founded and directed from 1928 until late 1940. Indeed, the beauty of this plate lies principally in its colouring, in the lustre with which the magical marine iridescence on which the figures float is rendered, in the abstract touches of gold that embellish the fluttering drapery over Venus's shoulders or suggest the hide of the hippocamp.

A drawing published by Gaudenzi and dated to the 1920s<sup>2</sup> seems to be a preparatory sketch for this plate or, perhaps more accurately, for the invention of the subject of Venus riding the hippocamp, which reappears unchanged in Melandri's artistic production of the early 1930s. The same theme is given a markedly graphic Art Deco style interpretation, though the design is virtually identical, at the centre of a plate much smaller than ours<sup>3</sup> and on another charger with a brown and ochre lustre. Our pieces belonged to the collection of works by Melandri assembled by the lawyer Giovanni Bolognesi, perhaps the most important of the 1920s and 1930s<sup>4</sup>. The same compositional invention, this time translated into relief, appears at the centre of a bowl also displayed at the Milan Triennale of 1933 and reproduced in the aforementioned article in *Domus* with the caption: «bowl with an ivory yellow bottom with Venus on a hippocamp in relief in pale ivory and manganese

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<sup>1</sup> PONTI 1933, p. 429: «Grande piatto a fondo grigio bluastrò con “Venene sul cavallo marino” grigio giallo oro viola - anno 1933».

<sup>2</sup> GAUDENZI 2002, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Reproduced in GAUDENZI 2002, p. 109, cat. no. 56.

<sup>4</sup> NESTI 2002, p. 43. The caption accompanying the photographic reproduction of our plate in Aurelio Minghetti's dictionary of ceramicists specifies that the work belonged to Bolognesi (MINGHETTI 1939, p. 283).





Pietro Melandri, *Vase and Plate*. Ceramics exhibited at the 5<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1933, in a contemporary photograph, Milan, Fondazione La Triennale, Archivio Fotografico.

green – 1936»<sup>5</sup> (p. 44, fig. 18). Again in relief, it adorns the body of an elegant abstract vase with slender handles that Melandri had begun to make already in the 1920s and that he continued to develop in the following decade<sup>6</sup>.

This invention of Venus riding the hippocamp could also be translated into three-dimensional forms, as evident from a watercolour drawing by Melandri containing the annotation «ornament with shell and figures»<sup>7</sup>.

As we have said, this plate was formerly in the Bolognesi collection and was first exhibited at the 5<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1933. From 1977, when it was exhibited at the retrospective dedicated to Melandri by the city of Faenza, it was owned by the authoritative scholar of maiolica and collector Grazia Biscontini Ugolini<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> PONTI 1933b, p. 430.

<sup>6</sup> Reproduced in GAUDENZI 2002, p. 125, cat. no. 72.

<sup>7</sup> The drawing is reproduced in NESTI 2002, p. 43, fig. V.

<sup>8</sup> SELEZIONE 1977, n. p., cat. no. 35, Plt. VI. Milan, Wannenes, Auction 315, Importanti maioliche e porcellane, 1 July 2020, lot 801.





Pietro Melandri, *Plate with Venus on a Hippocamp* (Ø 25 cm), 1933 c. (from GAUDENZI 2002, p. 109).



10.

Large bowl with antelopes and waterlily pond

Polychrome maiolica and gold overglaze, Ø 31x h 12.3 cm

Mark to base: MELANDRI

ca. 1940

Unmistakeable in their formal economy, the elegant antelopes with long horns and spotted hide that appear in this bowl are recurrent in Melandri's works from the early 1930s. Three stylized antelopes, painted at regular intervals inside the deep sides of the bowl, lower their heads towards the flat base of the vessel. Here Melandri has depicted a small pond exquisitely populated with flowering waterlilies; almost as if wishing to drink or gaze at themselves in the water, the animals bend towards it with unnatural movements.

Much of the charm and beauty of this work nonetheless lies in its delicate colouring, based on the light and cold ice white of the bowl, barely warmed by the hues of the watery base ranging from dark green to aquamarine. A few touches of light in gold are reserved for the spotted hide and edging on the rim of the bowl itself.







11.

## Orpheus

Glazed maiolica with lustre and gold overglaze, 29 x 23 cm

Mark stamped on the back: MELANDRI

ca. 1934-38

During the 1930s and 40s, the myth of Orpheus, the unfortunate singer in love with the beautiful nymph Eurydice, held a strong fascination for intellectuals and artists. Italian and foreign, they focused their creations on this story in literature, music/dance – Stravinsky-Balanchine – and the figurative arts<sup>1</sup>. To restrict ourselves to Italian sculpture we could mention the *Orpheus* by Antonio Maraini, the singing figure by Libero Andreotti and the various formal and technical interpretations of the theme by Arturo Martino, including some in ceramic. Melandri was not immune to this fascination, presenting the figure of the young lyre-player on bowls, plates and plaques (p. 49, fig. 25), and modelling his features in sculptural creations. These include the sculpture presented as a pair with *Neptune* (p. 54, fig. 32) and elegant table decorations like that reproduced in the magazine *Domus* in December 1934<sup>2</sup>.

Our Orpheus – no other examples of which are known<sup>3</sup> – was created as a precious «ornament» for the home. For the “modern home”, we might say, as interpreted and endorsed by Gio Ponti in the magazines of which he was editor, first *Domus* and later *Stile*, which was never to be without one or two pieces by Melandri<sup>4</sup>.

Kneeling in precarious equilibrium, his torso slightly rotated and his head turned down towards his lyre, Orpheus accompanies himself as he sings and the animals surrounding him – a lion and a fantastical small ungulate – become tame. Still depicted with fully Art Deco attitudes, the nude, almost dislocated body has the immature anatomy of an adolescent and is wrapped in a drapery that unfolds in a sudden flutter behind his shoulders. The richness of the work lies both in this formal complexity and in the metallic lustre – coppery gold that glitters in some places and remains matte in others – that completely covers it. The master’s brush has intervened only to embellish the drapery with a few ornamental motifs suggestive of lace.

The sinuous design of this *Orpheus* has its closest parallels in the *Undine*, «the little tritoness,

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<sup>1</sup> FIORILLO 2009.

<sup>2</sup> CERAMICHE 1934.

<sup>3</sup> A period photograph is reproduced in GAUDENZI 2002, p. 329, Fonti d’Archivio 102.

<sup>4</sup> MELANDRI 1946, p. 26: «Melandri è il vero protagonista della ceramica italiana... Gli italiani debbono collezionare pezzi di Melandri. Non deve esistere ambiente che si sospetti non abbia un Pezzo di Melandri!» («Melandri is the true protagonist of Italian ceramics... The Italians must collect pieces by Melandri. There should be no room suspected of being without a piece by Melandri!»).





Pietro Melandri, *Orpheus*. Ceramic exhibited at the 6<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1936, in a contemporary photograph, Milan, Fondazione La Triennale, Archivio Fotografico.



golden brown with mother of pearl plaques, pearly green seaweed»<sup>5</sup> or with the *Little Mermaid*. The latter was designed for Melandri by the painter and architect from Imola Giovanni Guerrini<sup>6</sup> as a lid handle, but later reworked as a decorative sculpture.<sup>7</sup> It is given graphic expression on numerous occasions, starting with a bowl signed and dated 1934<sup>8</sup>. This allows us to date our «ornament» to around the mid-1930s. The *Orpheus* was displayed in 1977 with a date of 1938-40 at the exhibition dedicated by the city of Faenza to Melandri a year after his death. At the time it was in the collection of Grazia Biscontini Ugolini, a collector and scholar of maiolica, having previously belonged to that of Giovanni Bolognesi<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> A period photograph, accompanied by the aforementioned caption (whose source is not specified) is reproduced in GAUDENZI 2002, p. 324, Fonti d'Archivio 94. For the example with some variants in the Bolognesi collection see NESTI 2002, p. 33, Plt. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Guerrini began his training as an artist at the Faenza school of art, where he met Melandri.

<sup>7</sup> Examples of the *Undine* and the *Little Mermaid* are reproduced in GAUDENZI 2002, p. 143, cat. no. 92 and cat. no. 94.

<sup>8</sup> *Ivi*, p. 132, cat. no. 81. A bowl with the figure of Orpheus outlined in the same way appears in the catalogue that the Ente Nazionale per l'Artigianato e le Piccole Industrie (E.N.A.P.I., National Authority for Craftworking and Small Industry) in Rome devoted in 1938 to the ceramics of Faenza (reproduced in *Ivi*, p. 304, Fonti d'Archivio 63. We see the same design on a plate in the Bolognesi collection (NESTI 2002, p. 42, Plt. 11) and again on a tile and in a decorative sculpture both dated 1942 (GAUDENZI 2002, p. 161, cat. no. 120 and p. 163, cat. no. 122).

<sup>9</sup> SELEZIONE 1977, n.p.n., cat. no. 28. Milan, Wannenes, Auction 315, Importanti maioliche e porcellane, 1 July 2020, lot 807.



Pietro Melandri, *Little Mermaid* (from a model by Giovanni Guerrini). Ceramic exhibited at the 6<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1933, in a contemporary photograph, Milan, Fondazione La Triennale, Archivio Fotografico.





12.

**Nude Woman with Nest and Baby Birds**

Polychrome maiolica and metallic lustres, 33 x 27 x 13 cm

Mark and date on the edge of the base: MELANDRI 1939

Mark beneath the base: MELANDRI

1939

**A**mong the sculptures that Melandri designed and modelled himself, this work expresses the master's formal style of the 1930s, inspired by the movements and rhythms of modernism. At the same time, the elongated and pliable rendering of the almost disarticulated anatomy distinguishes it from the pieces he created starting from models provided to him by other sculptors, particularly Francesco Nonni but also Carlo Lorenzetti and Giovanni Guerrini.

At a superficial glance, we could identify the naked girl as a bather, a theme fairly popular among the artists of the time, given the drapery falling from her shoulders that at the front barely covers her right arm. However, the fact that she holds a nest containing a baby bird in one hand and another bird in the other confers upon her the appearance of a vaguely allegorical image. Moving forwards with a dancing step, the gesture of the outstretched arms and the inclination of the head give the girl a levity that, combined with the chromatic qualities of Melandri's coloured glazes, make this sculpture something more precious than a mere delicate "knick-knack".





13.

A) *Girl at the balcony*

Polychrome lustred maiolica, 96 x 85 x 8 cm

1940

B) *King on horseback with a flower in his right hand*

Polychrome lustred maiolica, 96 x 96 x 12 cm

Mark and date in the lower left-hand corner: MELANDRI 1940

These two important sculptural reliefs were first exhibited at the 7<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1940. In them Melandri stages with a flair that we might describe as theatrical a fairy tale whose protagonists are a girl and a king.

In one plaque a pensive girl looks out from the window of a tower, which on closer inspection has been carved from the trunk of a gigantic tree growing on the banks of a little lake, set within a fantastical landscape where large purple tulips grow. In the other, a young and handsome king rides towards the tower holding a flower in his right hand, looking towards the girl.

These two panels are unique pieces, modelled with consummate skill and pierced through in a technique that Melandri rarely adopted elsewhere. They were then finished in an understated palette in green, brown, violet and cream tones, rendered sumptuous by the lustres. The almost opulent cadence of some portions of the modelling, like the tent tangled in the branches of the tree/tower find a counterpart in the refined ornaments of the king's garments and hose.

The two pieces were reproduced in 1940 in the magazine *La Ceramica*<sup>1</sup>, while the following year in *Domus* a photograph of the *King on Horseback* alone was used to illustrate the review by the young painter and ceramicist from Faenza Guerrino Tramonti (1915-1992) of the third edition of the Faenza ceramic competition<sup>2</sup>. Though they do not specifically mention our reliefs, Guerrini's observations accurately capture their spirit and qualities: «Any object, even in sculpture, by Melandri is always full of harmony and above all of a warm poetry that seems to be a gift of nature»<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The photograph is reproduced in GAUDENZI 2002, p. 334, Fonti d'Archivio 112.

<sup>2</sup> TRAMONTI 1941 p. 28 detail 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ivi*, p. 29: «Un suo [di Melandri] oggetto anche di scultura è sempre pieno di armonia e soprattutto di una poesia calda che sembra donata dalla natura».



«Il cavaliere» by Pietro Melandri reproduced in 1941 in «Domus» (TRAMONTI 1941, p. 28).



**MUSECMA DEL 10 CONCORSO NAZIONALE  
DELLA CERAMICA SPARTE A FAENZA**

Il Museo della Ceramica di Faenza ha allestito una mostra di opere di arte applicata, in occasione del 10° Concorso Nazionale della Ceramica Sparte a Faenza. Tra le opere esposte, si segnalano alcune sculture in ceramica, tra cui «Il cavaliere» di Pietro Melandri, che ha ottenuto il primo premio. L'opera è caratterizzata da linee forti e forme audaci, tipiche dello stile del Melandri.









14.

### Nativity scene

Polychrome maiolica and slight lustre effects, h 38, base ca. Ø 22

Mark to edge of the base: MELANDRI

ca. 1939-40

«**W**hat home is without a nativity scene in this month [December]? But how hard it is to find something tasteful! The most conventional of papier mâché pieces inundate shop windows. Here, though, we offer some fine examples: tiles, ceramic groups, an allegorical tent, an animated mountain.

These beautiful nativity scenes by Melandri, a great master of Italian ceramics, demonstrate the heights to which our highly expert craftsmanship can reach when it chooses to live in the modern spiritual climate. These sculptural groups are a manifestation of a very lively expressive taste: at the same time, they are precious gift “objects”»<sup>1</sup>.

These words present some nativity scenes by Melandri, including an example of our piece, in the December 1939 issue of *Domus*. Though the article is not signed, and is thus presumably by the editors, in its title (*I presepi di un maestro della ceramica italiana*) and tone we once again see the considerable effort (and the words) devoted by Gio Ponti to combatting the conventional tastes of the average person as well as his enthusiasm for a favourite ceramicist.

As in some small groups, including nativity scenes, modelled by Arturo Martini in the late 1920s and subsequently executed in maiolica – of which we see an unmistakable reminiscence in our piece – Melandri has also constructed the group of the Nativity with solid simplicity and concision. Around a bare tree Mary sits with the Child in her lap as Joseph, standing behind her, bends forwards slightly to look at the baby. The colour, barely enlivened by slight touches of lustre, is masterfully suited to this sense of genuine and serene austerity: brown and olive green predominate, interrupted only by the blue of the Virgin’s veil, scattered with gold stars, and by the floral motifs on her dress<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> PRESEPI 1939, p. 50. «Quale casa non ha un Presepio, in questo mese [dicembre]? Ma quanto è difficile trovare qualcosa di gusto! La più banale produzione di cartapesta inonda le vetrine. Ma qui offriamo degli ottimi esempi: piastrelle, gruppi ceramici, una tenda allegorica, una montagna animata. / Questi bellissimi presepi di Melandri, un grande maestro della ceramica italiana, dimostrano a quali risultati può giungere il nostro espertissimo artigianato, quando accetta di vivere nello spirituale clima moderno. Questi gruppi plastici sono un segno di vivissimo gusto espressivo: sono, nello stesso tempo, dei preziosi “oggetti” da regalo».

<sup>2</sup> This Nativity scene model remained in production for many decades; an example in very muted tones can be seen in GAUDENZI 2002, p. 234, cat. no. 206.







Pietro Melandri - Nativity - Ceramic

## I PRESEPI DI UN MAESTRO DELLA CERAMICA ITALIANA

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È così il Melandri.

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Nativity Scenes by Pietro Melandri reproduced in 1939 in «Domus» (PRESEPI 1939, p. 50).



*Nativity Scene* by Pietro Melandri reproduced in 1939 in «Domus» (PRESEPI 1939, p. 51).



15.

### Nereid on a Hippocamp

Polychrome lustrated maiolica and gold overglaze, 57 x 13 h 36

Mark to back of the base: MELANDRI

ca. 1942-1950

Our sculpture is a reworking of the *Hippocamp and Shells* that earned Melandri the prize for a «figured centrepiece» in 1942 at the 4<sup>th</sup> national ceramic competition in Faenza<sup>1</sup>. This more complex variant, executed at virtually the same time as that presented at the competition, as proved by an example signed and dated 1942<sup>2</sup>, sees the addition on the back of the hippocamp of a girl with a sort of long veil falling from her head to her feet. Rendered as a cascade of scales or a kind of iridescent marine encrustation, the veil contrasts for its greater profusion of aquamarine highlights with the iridescent metallic quality of the figures, created with a masterful golden lustre with touches of gold overglaze. The base of the statuette with the waves, very different from the shell-encrusted base of the piece presented for the Faenza exhibition, is instead painted in a dark blueish colour with reflective accents.

Melandri developed the theme of the Nereid/Venus riding the hippocamp in the early 1930s (cat. 9), but only here does he seem to have translated it into a three-dimensional sculpture, moving away from the more pronounced Art Deco style of the preceding decade. The stylistic rendering of our work is more personal, with elongated and almost spindly forms, as immediately noted in 1942 concerning the winning piece at the Faenza competition: «Pietro Melandri from Faenza has won the prize for a centrepiece with his Hippocamp and Shells, in which the material tends to be arranged with greater expressive freedom»<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Reproduced in M. R. 1942, p. 500.

<sup>2</sup> Reproduced in GAUDENZI 2002, p. 160, cat. no. 119.

<sup>3</sup> M. R. 1942, p. 502: «Il faentino Pietro Melandri ha vinto con *Cavallo marino e conchiglie*, in cui la materia tende a disporsi con maggiore libertà espressiva, il premio per un centro da tavola».







16.

Two-handled vase with a seabed decoration

Maiolica with metallic lustres, h 26.5 cm

Mark to base: MELANDRI

ca. 1935

This amphora-shaped vase with its accentuated spherical belly resting on a large foot and two slender S-shaped handles, is decorated with one of the subjects most dear and personal to Melandri: the “seabed” present in his production at least from the mid-1920s. In this context, one of the most precocious and extraordinary examples is the «Large decorative vase with two handles with gilded reliefs, a decoration with fish and a seabed, with metallic reflections» reproduced in the 1925 sales catalogue of the Focaccia and Melandri company<sup>1</sup>. The use of the “seabed” decoration on both vases and ornamental plates intensifies in the following decade and continues for a long time, as demonstrated by this piece. For the pictorial qualities of the decoration our vase should be dated to the 1930s.

Fish swim among a few coral branches and marine vegetation around the belly of the vase whilst a starfish stands out on the foot.

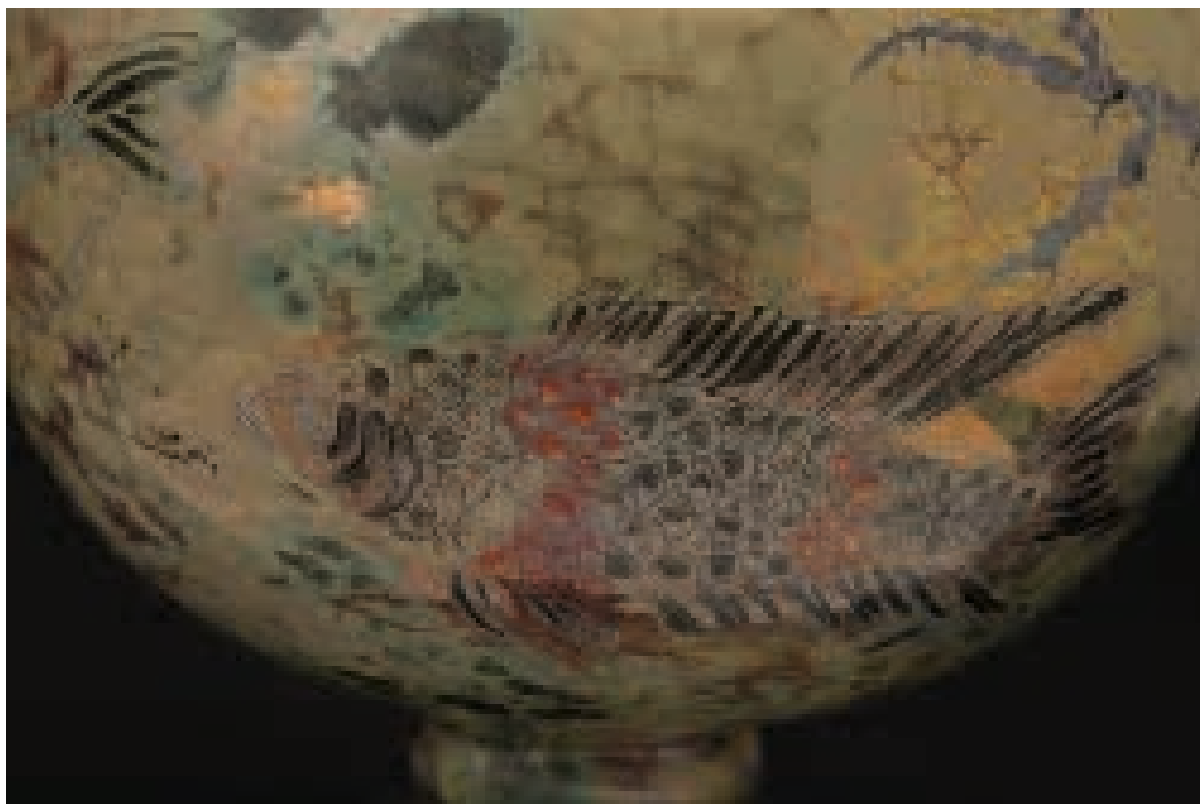
This vase is an exemplary illustration of Melandri’s unparalleled ability to create sumptuous iridescent metallic effects, a skill for which he was appreciated from the early days of the Focaccia and Melandri factory and that, as already noted in 1925, «give the sensation of mysterious and precious metals»<sup>2</sup>. In this piece the metallic lustre combines with the delicate colouring, in hues of violet, and a striking crackled effect, the *crackle* that Melandri reserved exclusively for a handful of his most important pieces.



<sup>1</sup> GAUDENZI 2002, p. 292, Fonti d'Archivio 42.

<sup>2</sup> ROSSI 1925, p. 64: «danno la sensazione di misteriosi e preziosi metalli».







17.

A) Vase with a seabed decoration

Polychrome lustred maiolica, h. 22.5

Mark to base: MELANDRI

ca. 1935

B) Vase with a seabed decoration

Polychrome lustred maiolica, h. 22.5

Mark to base: MELANDRI

ca. 1935

This rare pair of large vases with a globular body and short neck are decorated with one of Melandri's favourite themes, the seabed, which had already appeared in numerous variants from the mid-1920s onwards (p. 30, fig. 10). However, since the two vases are marked with Melandri's name only they should be dated to some point in the following decade, after the collaboration with Focaccia had ended in 1931. The fish highlighted in gold, exuberant seaweed and starfish float in a sea extraordinarily rich in metallic iridescences and oxidations, obtained thanks to the unsurpassable technical mastery for which the Faenza master was widely acknowledged. In 1933, for example, the critic Ugo Ojetti spoke of «beautiful glazes and lustres that can be aptly compared, in technical terms, to those of our Renaissance or to Persian and Moorish ceramics»<sup>1</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> OJETTI 1933: «[...] vernici e lustri stupendi che possono essere senza disdoro paragonati, come fatto tecnico, a quelli del nostro rinascimento o a quelli persiani e moreschi».







18.

### St George on horseback killing the dragon

Polychrome lustred maiolica, 80 x 65 cm

ca. 1948-55

This large relief, without a frame and pierced through, depicts the holy knight George in the act of killing the dragon. The piece was created as a wall decoration and is completed by a radiate Sun disc intended to be hung in the vicinity of the main group.

Melandri interpreted the same subject on several occasions at the centre of bowls, in small reliefs and in the large decorative column (1957-58) in the Barbisio clothing store in the centre of Palermo<sup>1</sup>. However, only in our case was *St George on horseback killing the dragon* treated in maiolica in this eminently sculptural and monumental way. The large lunette in high relief on the same subject, owned by the Cassa di Risparmio di Forlì<sup>2</sup>, is in plain terracotta and lacks the polychrome glaze<sup>3</sup>.

Melandri used the same model in 1956 to make the panel (72 x 106.5 cm) for the entrance hall of the Hotel Bauer in Venice<sup>4</sup>. In the latter, though, the figures of the knight and the dragon were placed against a background containing references to the city of Venice: a ship and the clock tower in St Mark's square surmounted by the bell with the two Moors.

The relief consists of two parts joined together: the armour-clad bust of the saint with arms raised grasping his lance and the group with the horse looming over the dragon with its long rolled up tail. Melandri must also have ascribed iconographical importance – indecipherable to us – to the *Sun*, as he also included it in the Venetian panel and that in Palermo.

In the modelling, the choice of colours and the metallic sheen reserved principally for the horse, this relief still resembles the two panels with the *Girl (princess) at the balcony* and the *King on horseback with a flower in his right hand* (cat. 13). It can thus be plausibly dated to around the end of the 1940s or early 1950s and in any case before the relief for the Hotel Bauer.

The piece's belonging to the collection of one of the branches of the Ferniani family, famous for having founded in Faenza in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the ceramics factory of the same name, which remained active until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>1</sup> On this shop, now home to the Estee Lauder store, and its decoration see CAPOFERRO – ERBACCI – DE CARA – SCOGNAMIGLIO – SOLAROL 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Today Banco Gruppo BPM.

<sup>3</sup> Reproduced in GAUDENZI 2002, *Fonti d'Archivio* 141, p. 347.

<sup>4</sup> Artcurial auction held in Venice in the rooms of the Hotel Bauer on 14 April 2022, lot 36. The work is signed on the bottom right. For the same hotel Melandri also made a relief depicting the Lion of St Mark.





Pietro Melandri, *St George on Horseback Killing the Dragon*, 1956, Private collection (formerly Venice, Hotel Bauer).



Pietro Melandri, *St George on Horseback Killing the Dragon*, 1957-58, Palermo, former Barbisio store (now Estée Lauder store).







19.

### Mask of the Wind

Glazed maiolica, h 35 cm (with the base 57 cm)

Marked twice to the back: MELANDRI and apple; MELANDRI

ca. 1950

**K**nown as the *Mask of the Wind*, this is one of the most famous sculptures created by Melandri during the 1930s, a deservedly popular invention that its author reworked and replicated over time in different pieces. He recalled it as late as 1957-59, including it, this time in low relief, in the imaginative maiolica fairytale/dream decorating the bar of the Roma hotel in Bologna that can now be admired in the International Museum of Ceramics (MIC) in Faenza (pp. 65-66, figs 44-45).

One example of this head was reproduced in 1938 in the catalogue that the Ente Nazionale per l'Artigianato e le Piccole Industrie (E.N.A.P.I., the National Authority for Craftworking and Small Industry) in Rome devoted in that year to ceramics from Faenza. The price list for the works – published separately – provides the title and price: «The wind, with pedestal, 39 x 32 cm, 600,00 lire»<sup>1</sup>. The catalogue illustrates as many as twenty-two pieces by Melandri, including the *Head of Medusa*, *Head of a Satyr*, *Siren* and *Cassandra*, which with the *Wind* make up the most important and stylistically coherent group of sculptures created by the ceramicist, reinterpreting the portrait head format in an entirely personal manner.

Some of these heads inspired by mythological figures or evoking states of mind, like *Melancholy*, had been exhibited at the solo show dedicated to him by Gio Ponti at the 5<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale of 1933 in a move that went against convention (pp. 36-37, figs 14-16). However, those heads did not include the *Mask of the Wind*, which may therefore have been modelled between 1933 and 1938. The known examples, starting from that in the MIC in Faenza, are rendered unique by their colouring, always different, and by the surface texture, at times porous or pitted, at others smooth and polished. For the quality of the modelling, the colouring of the head and the absence of metallic lustres our piece is comparable to that in the museum collection<sup>2</sup>, which can presumably be dated to the 1950s.

Works such as the *Mask of the Wind*, created in complete autonomy after his experience at the Melandri and Focaccia factory had come to an end, show the master's renewed creativity, decidedly artistic in its orientation. The ceramicist from Faenza was certainly not unique in tackling the genre of the head during the 1930s, but he alone approached it as a true ceramicist. His are not portrait heads with added colour, as is true of those presented at the 1933 Triennale by major artists

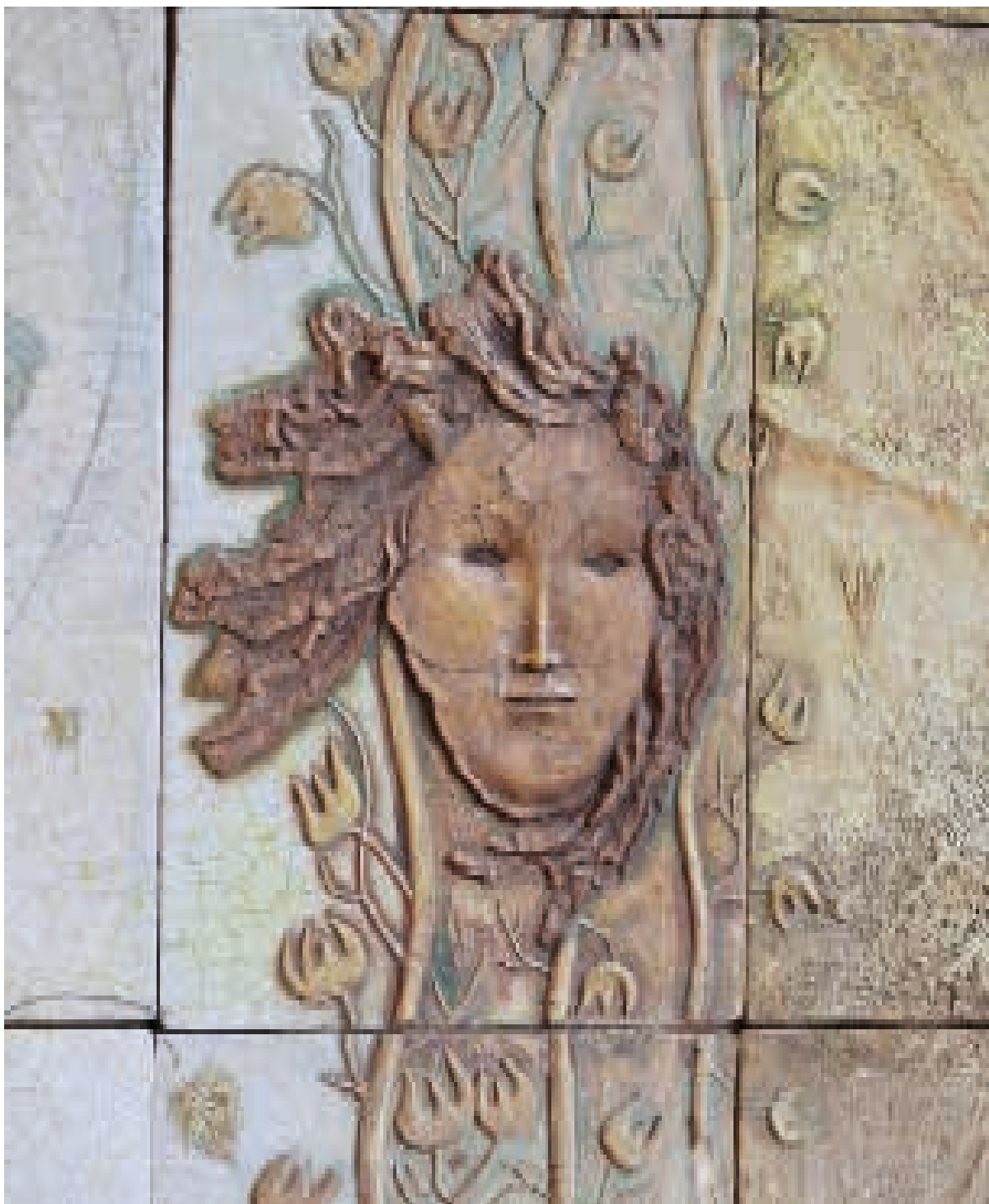
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<sup>1</sup> Reproduced in GAUDENZI 2002, p. 302, Fonti d'archivio 59, which also provides the quotation from the price list.

<sup>2</sup> Reproduced in GAUDENZI 2007, pp. 122-123 and 147, dated to the 1950s-60s.







Pietro Melandri, detail of the decoration of the bar of the Hotel Roma in Bologna, 1959, Faenza, Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche (MIC).

such as Emanuele Rambaldi (1903-1968) or Dante Morozzi (1899-1965) (p. 45, fig. 19). Instead, these are abstract physiognomies in which Melandri interprets the formal values of the Novecento movement with archaic or subtly oriental undertones.

20.

Bowl with *Deus Sol invictus*

Painted and glazed maiolica, Ø 35 cm

Mark to back: MELANDRI / M in a circle / FAENZA

ca. 1950-55

At the centre of this large bowl, painted with pictorial immediacy, is the head of a young man turned slightly to the left, with wide-open eyes and full lips. Six red rays depart from his thick curly hair that allow us to interpret the figure as *Helios*, in the Roman imperial iconography of *Deus Sol invictus*. Though this is not a direct citation, Melandri must have remembered ancient depictions, common on both coins and mosaics.

The decision to use a metallic lustre for this bowl in imitation of the gleam of gold is thus not simply an indication of the ceramicist's technical skill, but serves to identify the subject of the vessel itself, suggesting the idea of a classical *clipeus* or an enlarged gold coin.

An almost identical tondo to ours, which differs for the number of rays surrounding the head of the god, is reproduced in Gaudenzi with a date in the 1950s that is also plausible for our piece<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Gaudenzi 2002, p. 263, cat. no. 241.



21.

### Pair of perfume flasks

Polychrome lusted maiolica, 13.5x10.4 cm

Mark to base: MELANDRI – PONTI / FAENZA

ca. 1946-1951

**T**hese two flasks have a rectangular base and are similar in their measurements and in the iridescent blue and yellow colouring. However, they differ in the female figure – a bather – modelled and inserted into a rectangular cavity – a sort of protective shelter – created in the body of the vessel. In one case the niche develops horizontally and contains a reclining nude; in the other the little window extends in the opposite direction and holds a standing nude woman with crossed legs, wrapping a drapery around her hips. The neck of the bottles is adorned with a pleated flounce in yellow, the same colour as the female figures.

The model for these bottles was “gifted” by Gio Ponti to his ceramicist friend in accordance with a practice by then established between the two, with the architect suggesting ideas for small sculptures and vases. In a text of 1941 we already find an indication of the assistance that Ponti gave to perhaps his favourite ceramicist: «Melandri, a ceramicist whom I admire, a man dear to me, an artist whom I would like the Italians to know better and to appreciate, a man whom I encourage and help (as best I can) to do ever better: a temperament that I hold up as a creator of great things, of things for architecture as well as little vases and statuettes»<sup>1</sup>.

A pair of bottles similar to ours, but without the pleated flounce around the neck, were exhibited by Melandri in 1947 at the 8<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale.

Specifically, in these works which are among the most intimate and successful to result from this collaboration, Ponti’s name is placed next to that of Melandri in the joint signature on the base. In this context, in a letter to the architect of October 1951, Melandri wrote: «Dear Ponti, in recent days I have finished some pieces based on your drawings that as I have already told you I was unable to finish for the Triennale. This winter I am supposed to exhibit at the Angelicum. What would you say if I were to present them at that show? Naturally, as we have agreed, with your name alongside mine»<sup>2</sup>.

A preparatory study for one of the flasks – that with the reclining nude – can be found in an album by Ponti devoted to «Studies for liquor bottles and perfume flasks» of 1946, in which the

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<sup>1</sup> PONTI 1942, p. 65: «Melandri, ceramista che ammiro, uomo che mi è caro, artista che vorrei che gli italiani meglio conoscessero e apprezzassero, uomo che incito ed aiuto (come posso) a far sempre meglio: temperamento che addito come realizzatore di grandi cose, di cose per l’architettura oltre che di piccoli vasi e statuette».

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Melandri to Ponti of 25 October 1951, quoted in BERTONI 2012, p. 138: «Caro Ponti, in questi giorni ho finito alcuni pezzi tratti da disegni tuoi che come già ti dissi non mi fu possibile finire per la Triennale. Questo inverno – dovrei – esporre all’Angelicum. Che ne diresti se li esponessi in questa mostra? Naturalmente come d’accordo col nome tuo accanto al mio».





Gio Ponti, Page from a watercolour album with «*Studies for liquor bottles and perfume bottles*», 1946 (from BERTONI 2012, p. 147).

architect mainly develops the idea of the flounce decorating and wrapping around bottles of different shapes<sup>3</sup>. In executing the flasks, Melandri also adopted the chromatic suggestions proposed in the watercolour, in which Ponti attempted to suggest the iridescence of the lustre glazes of which Melandri was an unrivalled master.

The elegant and ironic flounce or crinoline motif was not entrusted by its creator exclusively to Melandri, but was also made available to other factories, including the Venini glass factory<sup>4</sup>. Ponti had also studied the “flounces” which in our flasks only adorn the short neck in other

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<sup>3</sup> The drawings, in a private collection, are reproduced in *Ivi*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>4</sup> DEBONI 2007, II, n. 123.





Gio Ponti and Pietro Melandri,  
*Pair of perfume flasks*. Ceramics  
exhibited at the 8<sup>th</sup> Milan  
Triennale in 1947, in a  
contemporary photograph,  
Milan, Fondazione La Triennale,  
Archivio Fotografico.



drawings of 1946 for a «Flounced table service. Tribute to Maria Giulia Carrega Paternò»<sup>5</sup>, the founder of the Ferlaro ceramics factory on the estate of the same name in the Apennine mountains outside Parma.

Our two flasks can presumably be dated to between 1946 and the early 1950s, when Melandri resumed his artistic activity after the bombings of 1944 that had destroyed his house and workshop.

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<sup>5</sup> BERTONI 2012, p. 148.

22.

Woman at the Balcony (Farewell)

Polychrome maiolica, 15.5 x 17 x 9 cm

Mark to base: MELANDRI / FAENZA

ca. 1955-60

Intending once again to support the artist for whom he felt such profound esteem, in 1946 Gio Ponti devoted space to Melandri's most recent creations in the pages of *Stile*, the magazine that he had initially founded with the name *Lo stile nella casa e nell'arredamento* (1941-43), after leaving the editorial board of *Domus*. The photographs were accompanied by a short but unequivocal statement: «Melandri is the true protagonist of Italian ceramics. In these pages we illustrate his first “postwar collection” which is gradually being enriched with stupendous pieces. The Italians must collect pieces by Melandri. There should be no room suspected of being without a piece by Melandri!»<sup>1</sup>

This first «postwar collection» includes an example of *Woman at the Balcony (Farewell)* (p. 76, fig. 52), the dreamy girl in a 19<sup>th</sup>-century dress who leans against a balustrade (of a balcony?), stretching out her left hand and waving with a handkerchief in her hand. The invention of this little sculpture, so full of delicate nostalgia in suggesting a farewell between lovers, is the work of Gio Ponti: it is one of those “gifts” that the Milanese architect sent his ceramicist friend in the immediate postwar period, when the latter was forced to completely reorganize his work after the bombings of Faenza had destroyed his home, his workshop and his kilns<sup>2</sup>.

Among Melandri's small ornamental sculptures, *Woman at the Balcony* is certainly one of the best known, and from the late 1940s onwards remained continuously in production. However, each individual piece is different, and not only for the chosen colour scheme – in our case light yellow for the figure and light blue for the flowers adorning her dress – but above all in the modelling. Comparing our piece with that published in 1946, for example, we are struck by the addition of the poke bonnet, the typical 19<sup>th</sup>-century hat with the brim shading the face, held in place by a ribbon tied in a large bow beneath the chin. Sometimes the variants also concern other parts of the clothing, enriched with decorations modelled on each occasion, or in the other accessory features, like the replacement of the faithful lapdog on the balustrade with a shawl<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> MELANDRI 1946, p. 26: «Melandri è il vero protagonista della ceramica italiana. Illustriamo in queste pagine una sua prima “collezione di dopoguerra” che va arricchendosi di pezzi stupendi. Gli italiani debbono collezionare pezzi di Melandri. Non deve esistere ambiente che si sospetti non abbia un Pezzo di Melandri!»

<sup>2</sup> On the relationship between Ponti and Melandri see BERTONI 2012.

<sup>3</sup> The example reproduced in GAUDENZI 2002, p. 187, cat. no. 150 presents this variant.







23.

Table with a maiolica tile depicting Leda and the Swan

Polychrome maiolica, 20 x 23 cm

Mark to back: MELANDRI / M in a circle FAENZA

Manufacturing: Vittorio Bega e Figli, Bologna

ca. 1946-48

In his collaborations with some important Italian architects, Pietro Melandri also lent his hand to initiatives other than large-scale interior decoration projects and became involved in the execution of pieces destined to adorn furniture. For example, a piece of bar furniture designed by Carlo Enrico Rava (1903-1986) with maiolica inserts by Melandri was displayed at the 7<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale of 1940<sup>1</sup>. Regarding this aspect of his production, we could also mention the piece of furniture executed in 1962 for the office of the head of a school in Faenza, now the «E. Fermi» state industrial and craftworking college<sup>2</sup>.

Our small sitting room table was designed by Melchiorre Bega and made by «Vittorio Bega e Figli» (which at the time had a factory and offices in Via Mazzini 82 in Bologna). It presents a tile – a unique piece – set into the centre of the shaped top, made of maiolica with a relief inspired by Greek mythology depicting *Leda and the Swan*. Small “insets” like this one, in which Melandri enclosed not only mythological figures or stories from the Gospels (the *Annunciation*, *Nativity* and *Flight into Egypt*) but also gilded boats and little birds with magically iridescent plumage (pp. 52-53, figs 28, 30-31), are among his most poetic inventions. Though indebted for the idea to those modelled by Arturo Martini in around 1929-30 at ILCA (Industria Ligure Ceramiche Artistiche) in Nervi (p. 52, fig. 29), they depart from these for their chromatic qualities, achievable only by a great ceramicist.

Tiles with *Leda and the Swan* resembling ours but with variations in the sensual embrace between the mythological queen of Sparta and the swan, as well as in the background vegetation and the folds of the drapery on which the figure reclines, were reproduced in 1946 in *Stile* (pp. 75-76, figs 51-52). They are among the finest examples of the new works leaving Melandri’s kiln, reborn after its destruction by wartime bombing in 1943.

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<sup>1</sup> Mentioned in DE LUCA – MAZZARELLA 1987, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> ERANI 1999.







24.

A) Seated woman surrounded by a Baroque frame

Panel made up of relief tiles of different shapes in polychrome and partially lustred maiolica, 330 x 122 cm.

1953

B) Female figure [Daphne]

Panel made up of relief tiles of different shapes in polychrome and partially lustred maiolica, 330 x 120 cm.

1953

C) Male figure? [Winter]

Panel made up of relief tiles of different shapes in polychrome and partially lustred maiolica, 331 x 121 cm.

1953

D) Running male figure [Perseus]

Panel made up of relief tiles of different shapes in polychrome and partially lustred maiolica, 328 x 121 cm.

Mark to right-hand side towards the right half: MELANDRI

1953

E) Female figure [Autumn]

Panel made up of relief tiles of different shapes in polychrome and partially lustred maiolica, 330 x 136 cm.

1953

F) Female figure [Calliope]

Panel made up of relief tiles of different shapes in polychrome and partially lustred maiolica, 329 x 100 cm.

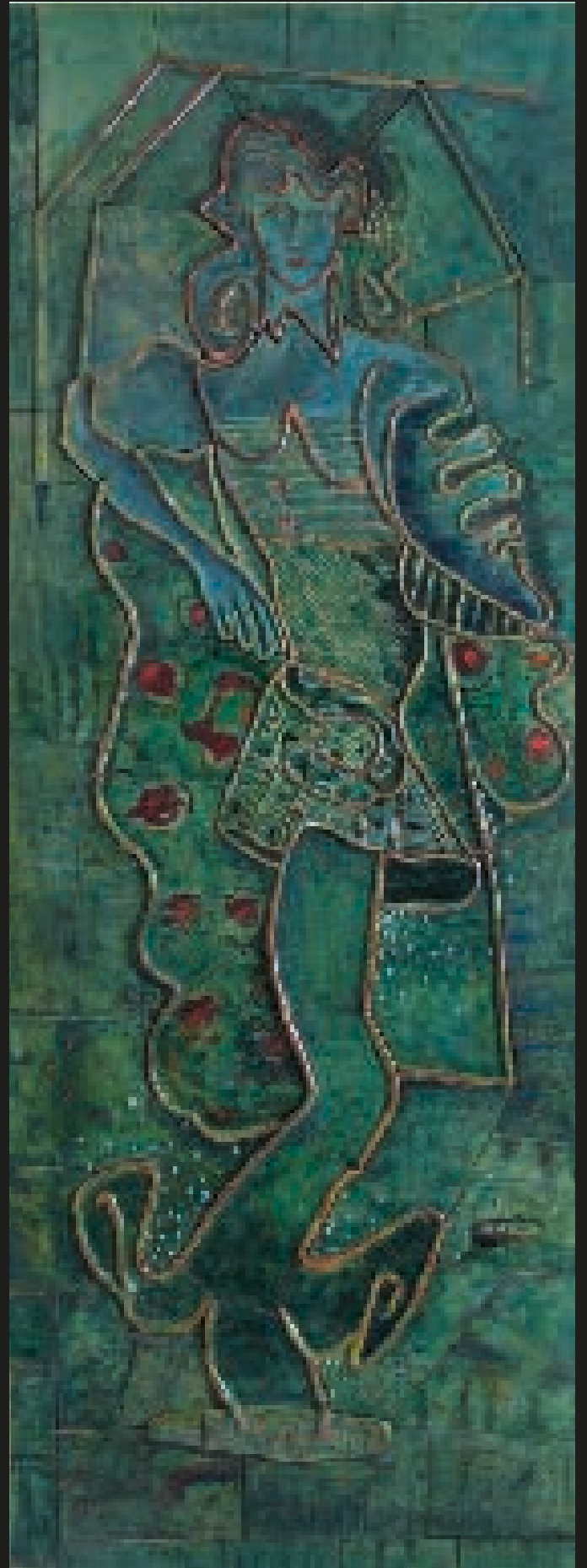
Mark to bottom right on the foot: P. MELANDRI

1953

G) Female figure [Summer]

Panel made up of relief tiles of different shapes in polychrome and partially lustred maiolica, 330 x 120 cm.

1953



#### H) Rooster on a round table [Morning breakfast]

Panel made up of relief tiles of different shapes in polychrome and partially lustred maiolica, 311 x 142 cm.

1953

These eight panels, of extraordinary quality and size, belong to a set of fifteen executed by Melandri in 1953 to decorate the Caffè Irrera in Piazza Cairoli in Messina, then undergoing a radical refurbishment at the hands of the architect Filippo Rovigo (1909–1984), originally from the province of Messina.

Already in the early postwar period, this elegant meeting place had hosted one of the salons most frequented by local intellectuals and cultural figures visiting the Sicilian city. It was the most recent home of a historic family business established in 1897 and reborn a first time after the devastating earthquake of 1908 (from 1925 the café was known as *Ritrovo Irrera*) and a second time after the Allied bombing of 1944<sup>1</sup>.

Ceramics had been increasingly in demand and widely used from the 1930s to decorate public interiors and were also given ample space in Rovigo's design for the renovated spaces of this bar in Messina. It faced onto the corner of the Piazza and Viale San Martino with a sort of enormous, uninterrupted window. The reinforced concrete pilasters forming the skeleton of the building were clad in Melandri's colourful panels, especially on the side facing the exterior. Like enticing advertising hoardings, they could thus be admired by passers-by as well. For the bar Melandri also executed the wall panel with the *Myth of Orpheus*, designed by the sculptor from Messina Giuseppe Mazzullo (1913-1988), and the narrative tiles adorning the front of the long L-shaped counter<sup>2</sup>.

Each of the panels is made up of numerous irregularly shaped components. On them the master modelled the reliefs directly, defining the shape of the figures with a spindly outline – a red cord – resembling a pen and ink drawing in its continuous flow. One of Melandri's collaborators on this project, Benita Tampieri, still recalls how those clay outlines were executed using a mechanical instrument traditionally employed by ceramicists to make dish handles<sup>3</sup>. All the workers employed in Melandri's workshop at the time were involved in the various phases of this project, from the firing of the individual tiles to their polychrome decoration and glazing, to their assembly, a total commitment that lasted three months. Again according to the direct testimony of Benita Tampieri, they were all rewarded with two days off and she personally received a special gift: a dress<sup>4</sup>.

The intense, brightly coloured emerald-green background shared by all the panels was sprin-

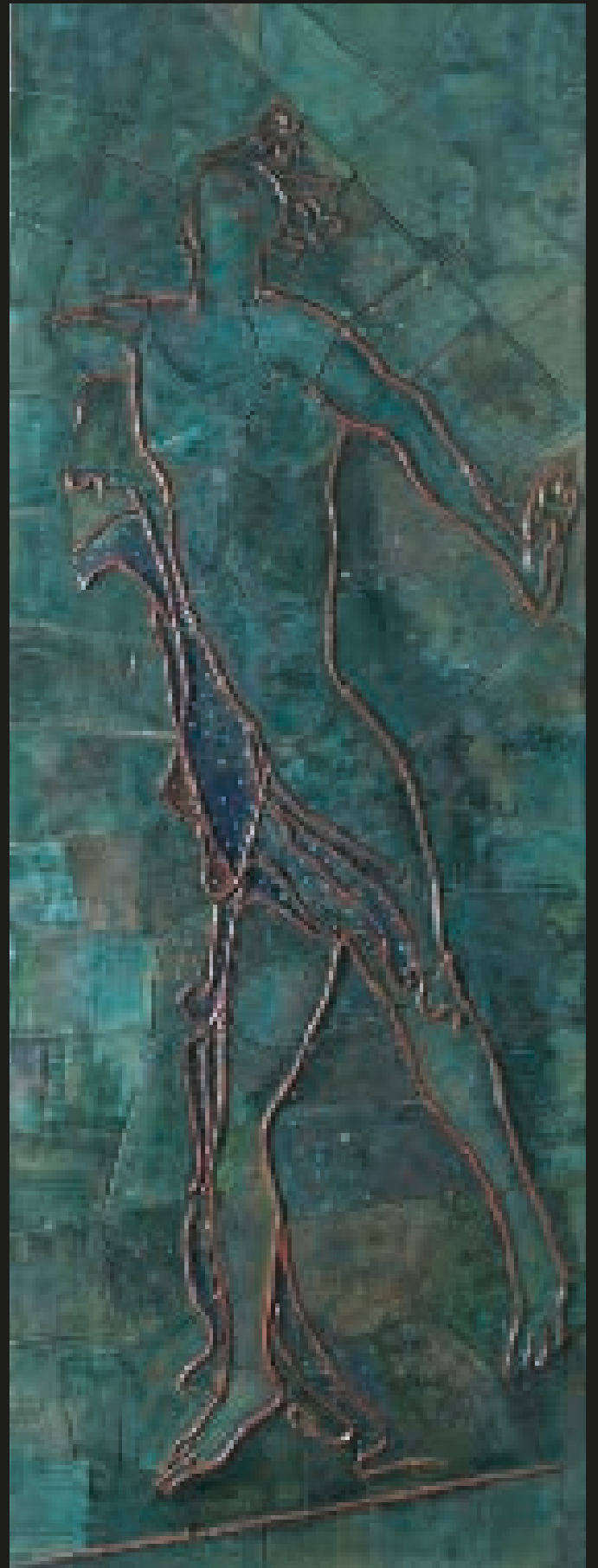
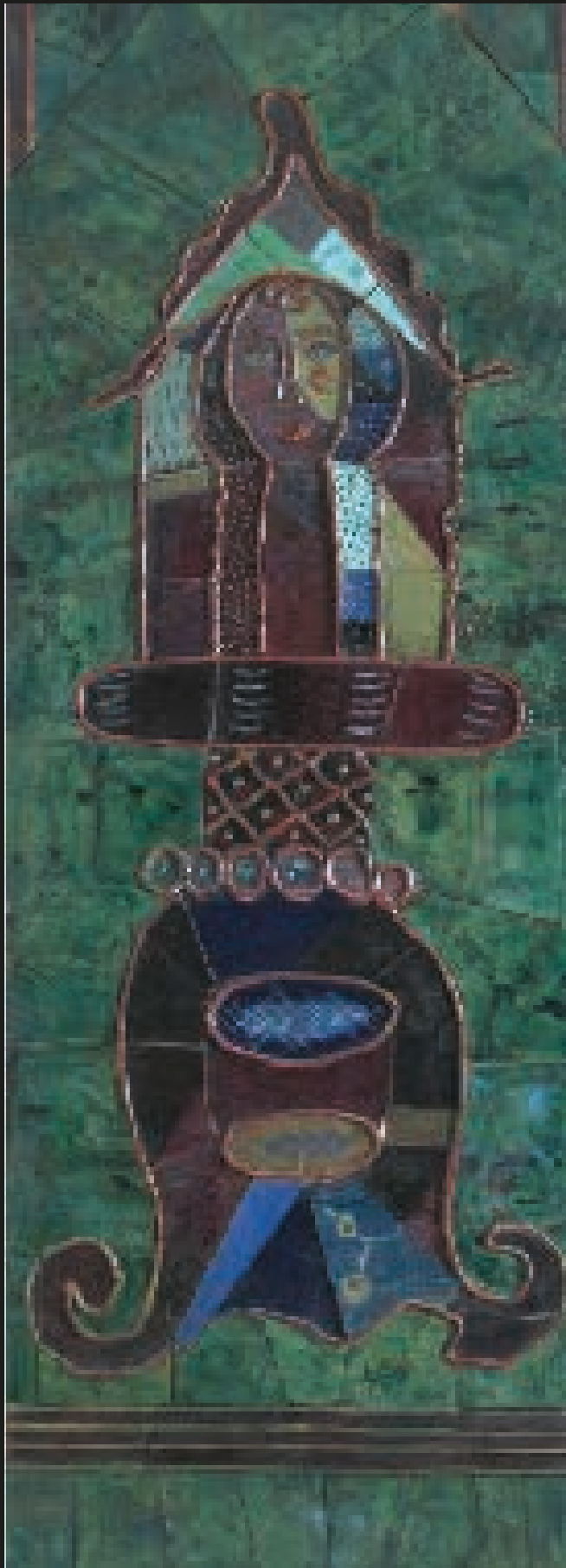
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<sup>1</sup> In general on the history of the Irrera company and its various homes up to that refurbished by Rovigo and decorated by Melandri see: RUTA 2017.

<sup>2</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 129-131.

<sup>3</sup> ERBACCI 2017, p. 141.

<sup>4</sup> RUTA 2017, p. 132.

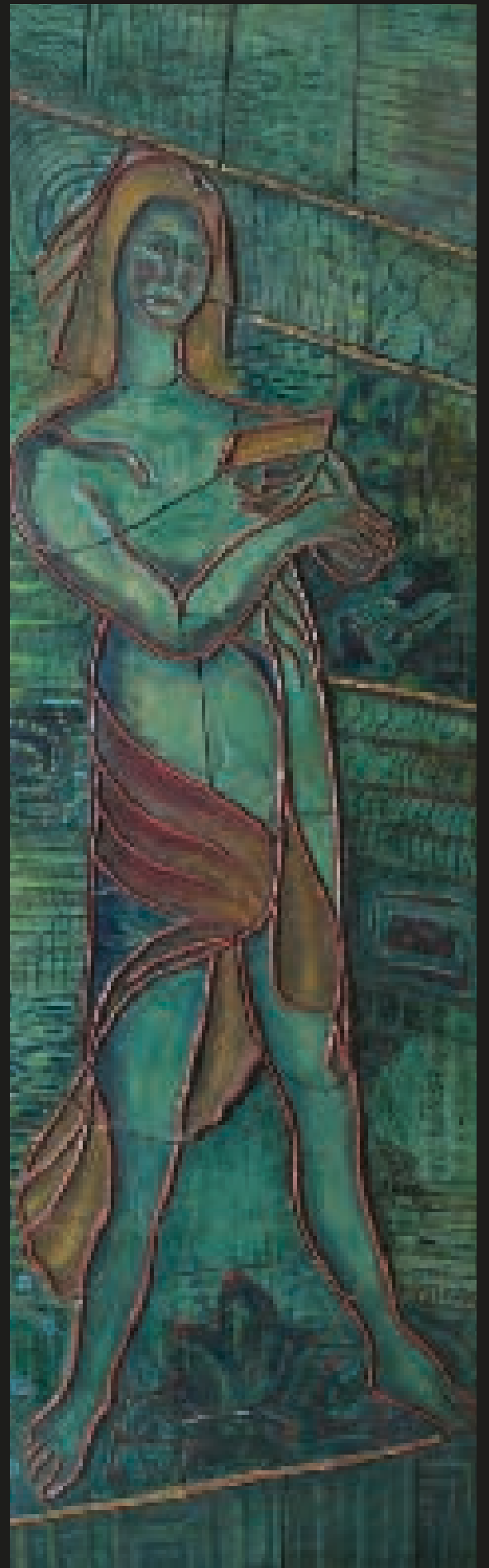




Photograph (pre 1977) of the exterior of Caffè Irrera in Piazza Cairolì in Messina (from RUTA 2017, p. 125).

kled with countless painted marks and dots – mainly in violet and dark blue, but also light blue and orange – and lively ornamental motifs in relief that render the surfaces of what seem to be exaggeratedly large cloisonné enamels more precious and changeable.

As with the technique of execution, in the subjects too the decoration for the Caffè Irrera is the most eccentric of those destined by Melandri for a work of architecture: the master created some unprecedented figures, mainly young women with elongated proportions, unnatural features and above all the most eccentric possible garments. Strangely, he did not draw on his personal and by now consolidated repertoire of images as he did, by contrast, in the splendid wall decoration of the bar of the Roma hotel in Bologna (now in the International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza; Cobianchi figs 44-45), but instead made reference to contemporary art. The rooster (H) is an obvious allusion to a famous invention by Picasso (above all the 1938 drawing held at the MOMA in New York) and the circular bar table on which the animal stands erect inevitably calls to mind – albeit generically – the Cubist still lifes. In the sinuous girl (G) whose breasts are visible beneath her light garment, the necklace around the elongated neck and the face enclosed in a perfect oval we see, more than a reference to Modigliani, a tribute to the precise and sinuous forms of Matisse, above all in his drawings. However, Melandri submerges this Cubist inspiration – which in the same years was key to the ceramic production of Leoncillo Leonardi – in a visionary and magical world that runs from Alberto Martini to Leonor Fini, as evidenced by the *Woman in Profile with*



*Mask*, almost an umpteenth portrait of the famous marquise Casati. Nor does he neglect classical models or Baroque art: in the agile running male figure (D) we may see a mirror-image reminiscence of Bernini's Apollo pursuing Daphne.

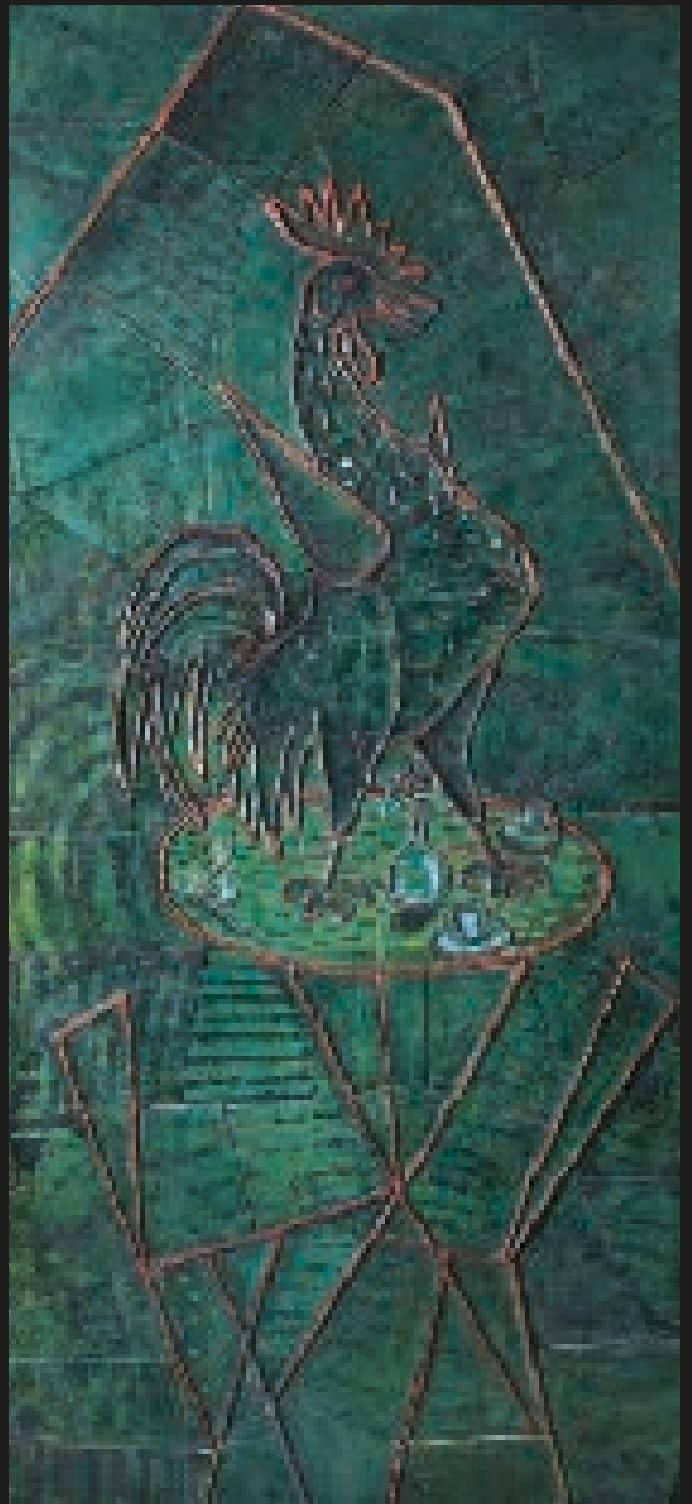
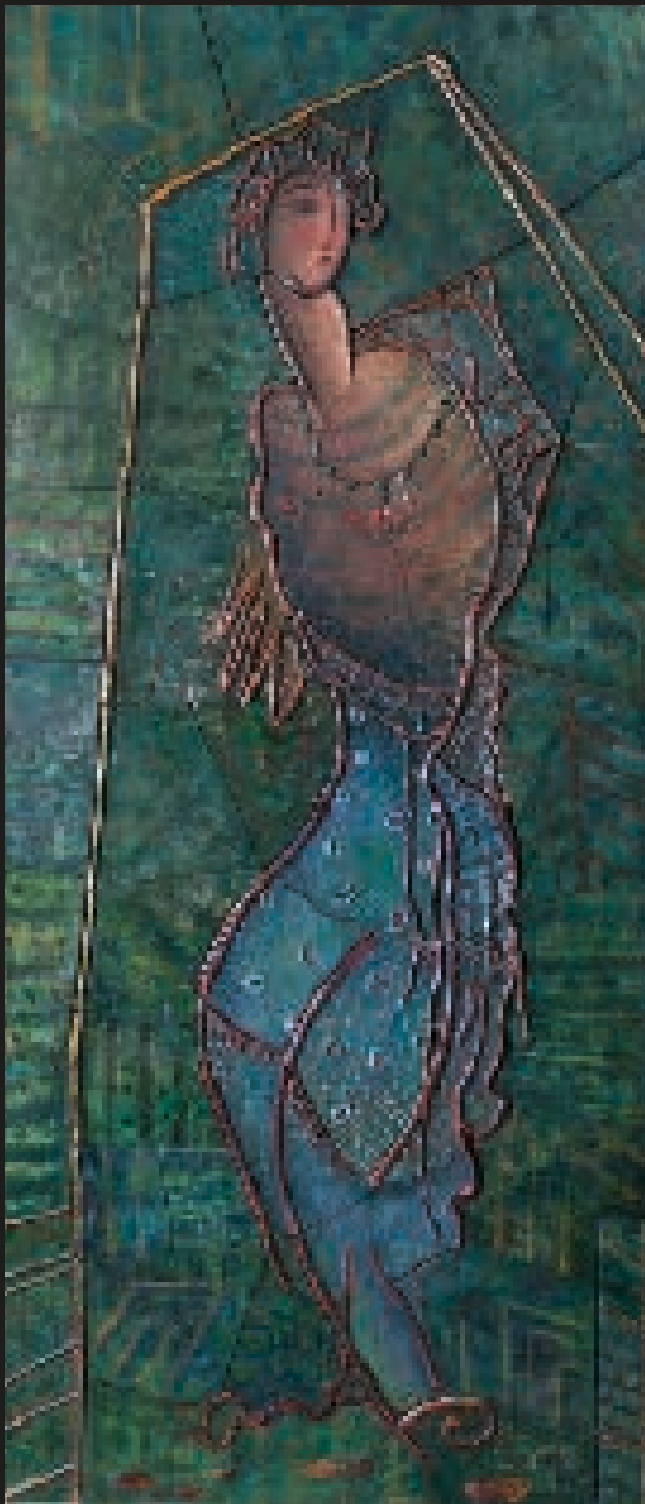
The iconography of these mysterious figures, mainly women, nonetheless remains unknown and, though evocative, the identifications proposed by Giovanni Erbacci (maintained here in square brackets) remain arbitrary<sup>5</sup>. If we wished to seek an equally compelling parallel we might think of an imaginary parade of guests at a great costume ball, like that which had filled the society pages a few years earlier, accompanied by photographs: *Le bal Oriental* organized on 3 September 1951 by Charles de Beistegui at Palazzo Labia in Venice.

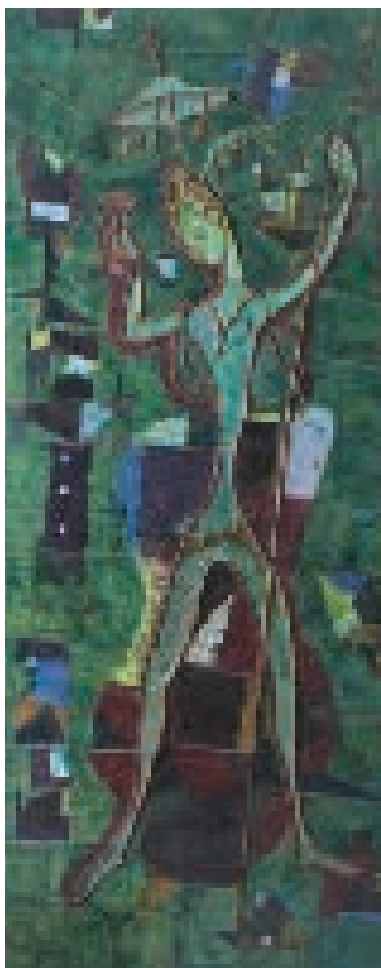
When the bar closed in 1977 the panels were dismantled and in 2012 twelve of them appeared on the art market. To this group, which also included *Woman with hat and flowery dress* [Spring], *Figure in profile with mask and objects in the background* [Character from *commedia dell'arte*], *Woman with small umbrella*, *Woman in profile with mask*, *Woman with hat* – all now in private collections in Faenza – we can now add the *Seated woman surrounded by a Baroque frame* (A). Of the fifteen panels executed by Melandri, two still remain to be traced.

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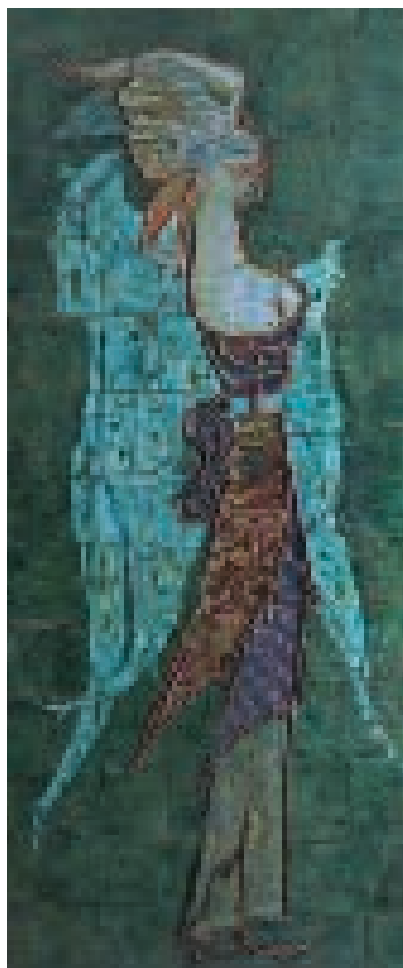
<sup>5</sup> ERBACCI 2017.



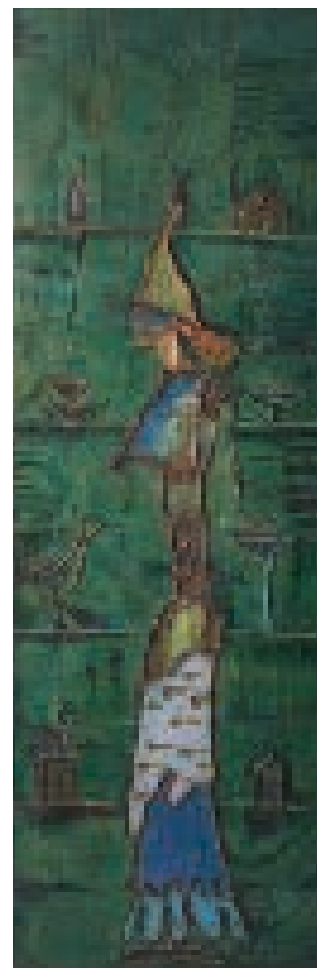




Pietro Melandri, *Woman with small umbrella*, 1953, Private collection.



Pietro Melandri, *Woman in profile with mask*, 1953, Private collection.

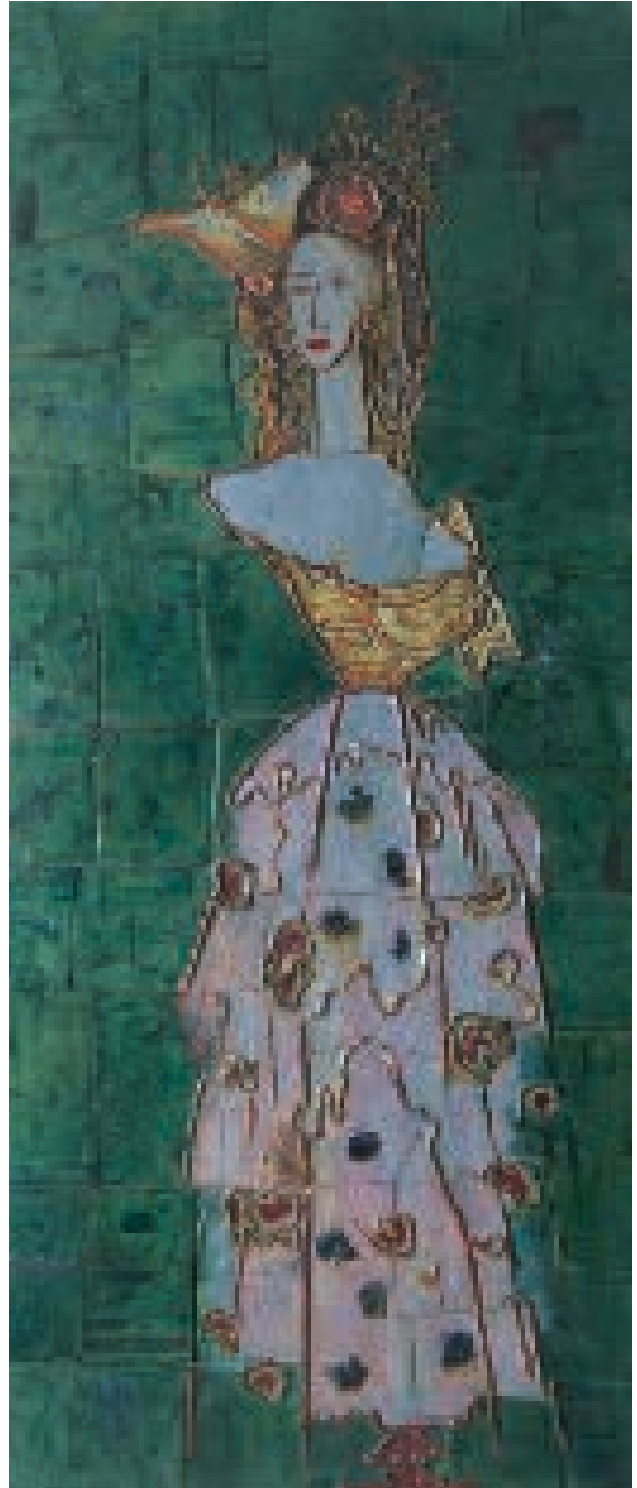


Pietro Melandri, *Figure in profile with mask and objects in the background*, 1953, Private collection.





Pietro Melandri, *Woman with hat*, 1953, Private collection.



Pietro Melandri, *Woman with hat and flowery dress*, 1953, Private collection.





25.

Table with a central column in maiolica

Polychrome maiolica, h. 78 cm

Manufacturing: Vittorio Bega Arredamenti Bologna

ca. 1956

During the 1950s, Melandri's collaboration with Melchiorre Bega continued within the more modern production of «Vittorio Bega Arredamenti», the family business taken over by the architect and his brothers (cat. 23). The circular dining room table, dated ca. 1956, is an example of a popular model produced by the company with numerous variants in the top and the foot. In our case, the top has at its centre a *verre églomisé* signed by the artist Angelo Bragalini (1913-1994), while the base consists of a slightly truncated conical column in polychrome maiolica by Melandri, decorated with abstract motifs.

Columnar supports of this type are recurrent in Melandri's production; examples include the bases of the counter of the former Barbisio clothing store (1957-58) in the centre of Palermo, still *in situ*<sup>1</sup>.

The table is accompanied by a declaration of authenticity by the Bega heirs.

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<sup>1</sup> On this shop, now home to the Estée Lauder store, and its decoration see CAPOFERRO, ERBACCI, DE CARA, SCOGNAMIGLIO, SOLAROL 2017. The period photograph of another pair of cylindrical table supports is reproduced in GAUDENZI 2002, p. 332, Fonti d'Archivio 108.







26.

Disc called «The Sun»

Polycrome maiolica, Ø 45 cm

Mark to back: MELANDRI

ca. 1950-55

This large circular plaque depicts a fantastical mask known as «The Sun»<sup>1</sup>. Added to the modelling of the nose and mouth, and the deep circular cavities of the eyes, are a few elements in relief that make the expression particularly lively, almost smiling. Characterized principally by the intense red colour of the background glaze, the *Sun* is enlivened by the light blue eyes surrounded by a sunburst in yellow tones. The same tones are used to paint the sunburst that runs along the circumference of the plaque and the parts in relief.

This is a purely ornamental work – with a depression on the back allowing it to be hung on a wall – not unusual in the production of Melandri's workshop during the 1950s, when the artist enjoyed considerable fame and devoted himself to creating large-scale decorative programmes for interiors. Not coincidentally, as previously noted by Gaudenzi, a *Sun* medallion similar to ours, but with rays, appears in the large frieze for the interior of the headquarters of the Cassa di Risparmio di Reggio Calabria, executed between 1956 and 1958<sup>2</sup>.

This *Sun* belonged to the Faenza collection of one of the branches of the Ferniani family, which founded the ceramic factory of the same name in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century; it remained active until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>1</sup> This title is given to an example similar to ours, reproduced in PIETRO MELANDRI B 1995, n. pag. Another example is reproduced in GAUDENZI 2002, p. 208 cat. no. 177.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem.*



27.

A) Vase in the form of a siren

Polychrome lusted maiolica with relief decoration, h 27 cm

Mark to base: P. MELANDRI

ca. 1950-1955

B) Vase in the form of a siren

Polychrome lusted maiolica with relief decoration, h 27 cm

Mark to base: MELANDRI FAENZA / M in a circular and square cartouche

ca. 1950-1955

The invention of this fantastical vase with a body in the shape of a siren with an arched tail, resting on a truncated cone foot, is traditionally believed to be the product of Gio Ponti's creative mind, however, there are no real indications to assume this. No doubt the Milanese architect instead gave some other models (see here the two perfume flasks, cat. 21) to his favourite ceramicist at a difficult time. This was the immediate post-war period, when Melandri was reorganizing his work after the bombings had destroyed his house, workshop and kilns.

In 1946, the master's new creations were presented enthusiastically in *Stile*, the magazine founded by Ponti in 1941 following his departure from *Domus*: «Melandri is the true protagonist of Italian ceramics. In these pages we illustrate his first "postwar collection" which is gradually being enriched with stupendous pieces. The Italians must collect pieces by Melandri. There should be no room suspected of being without a piece by Melandri!».<sup>1</sup>

This new start was certainly not easy for Melandri and forced him to confront the dramatically altered world of the postwar period. On the one hand he sought a dialogue with the abstract forms of the most recent ceramic production – an example being the Neo-Cubist works of Leoncillo Leonardi – while on the other he experimented with innovative technical solutions, particularly in the use of reliefs and increasingly textured surfaces.

The *Siren Vase* was extremely popular and Melandri continued to produce it for over a decade, with variations in colour and especially in the ever-different relief motifs. As demonstrated by these two pieces, they reflect the master's stylistic evolution. In one case (A) the bright colour, based prevalently on aquamarine and dark blue hues, is accompanied by reliefs bounding geometrical shapes and cavities, while in the other (B) the gilded encrustations on the bright red background suggest the elements of a seabed and insects.

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<sup>1</sup> MELANDRI 1946, p. 26: «Melandri è il vero protagonista della ceramica italiana. Illustriamo in queste pagine una sua prima "collezione di dopoguerra" che va arricchendosi di pezzi stupendi. Gli italiani debbono collezionare pezzi di Melandri. Non deve esistere ambiente che si sospetti non abbia un Pezzo di Melandri!».







28.

Vase

Polychrome maiolica decorated in relief, h 40 cm

Mark to base: MELANDRI / FAENZA

ca. 1952

This vase effectively encapsulates some of the stylistic developments (formal and chromatic) of Melandri's production during the 1950s. Specifically, his research on metallic lustres, here based on the aquamarine tones of the ground and the silver of the reliefs, has been enriched by the use of synthetic pigments allowing for surprisingly luminous effects.

The relief decoration, now characteristic of the Faenza workshop's production, forms an ornamental band of stylized floral motifs running around the belly of the vase, otherwise dotted all over with small drops.

An old label still stuck to the bottom of the vase documents its belonging to the Galleria d'Arte Totti, then located in Via Camperio 10 in Milan. In 1952 Melandri had exhibited in this Milanese gallery together with the ceramicist Ugo Lucerni (1900-1989). Our vase must have been exhibited at that very exhibition. Significantly, during the 1950s the Galleria Totti was the only gallery in Italy specializing in art ceramics.





29.

A) Vase

Lustred maiolica with relief decoration, h 20 x 22 x 17 cm

Mark to base: MELANDRI / M in a circle / FAENZA

ca. 1955

B) Vase

Lustred maiolica with relief decoration, h 23 x 23 x 16 cm

Mark to base: MELANDRI / M in a circle / FAENZA

ca. 1955

**T**hese two singular mould-made vases, with their astounding red glaze, so peculiar as to be named “Melandri red”, differ slightly for the length of the neck, slightly greater in one case (B). Both also share the same very tangible relief motif on their two sides, golden yellow in colour and inspired by plant elements that seem to create a capital letter M in their strongly mirror-image form.

During the 1950s this particular M-shaped arabesque (Melandri’s initial?) increased the already rich repertoire of ornaments used by the master. We find it, for example, in a decorative panel dated 1954<sup>1</sup> and in some of the large plates adorned with “grotesque” reliefs made at this time (cat. 30).

At least another two examples dated 1955 are known and two in the Andrea Banzola collection<sup>2</sup>. Sometimes this type of ovoid vase was also embellished in relief with motifs other than ours, prevalently of floral type<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> PIETRO MELANDRI 1996, n. pag.

<sup>2</sup> GAUDENZI 2002, p. 197, cat. no. 165: “Pair of vases with reliefs, marked: “MELANDRI / 1955”, h. cm 21.5 x 23.5 x 17 – Bologna, C. Bonetti collection”. GAUDENZI 2017, illustrated on p. 110 and cat. nos 77 and 78 on p. 144. The example reproduced in PIETRO MELANDRI 1996, n. pag., may be one of the two in the Banzola collection.

<sup>3</sup> GAUDENZI 2002, p. 196, cat. no. 164 and for another example, p. 343, Fonti d’archivio 132.







30.

Large oval plate decorated with “grotesque” motifs

Polychrome maiolica, 55 x 66 x 11 cm

Mark and date on the front: P . MELANDRI . FAENZA . 1968 . AINED . MSAS.

Mark to back: MELANDRI / and pomegranate

1968

From the mid-1950s and throughout the following decade, a significant part of Melandri's production was characterized by decorative motifs that among other things contained elements who seems to have been inspired by Renaissance grotesques. However, Melandri's “grotesques” have undergone such a metamorphosis with respect to their reference models that they appear completely new and peculiar to his production.

The exuberant relief decoration of this large oval plate, a brilliant red in colour, develops almost symmetrically around a clipeus with a profile portrait, flanked on the right by a mermaid and on the left by a lithe feline with a little umbrella. In the medallion Melandri once again makes recourse to the Renaissance art of which he was fond, citing one of the versions of Pisanello's medal with the profile portrait of the Marquess of Ferrara Lionello d'Este facing left; like the earlier master he inserts his own signature, the date and the enigmatic legend AINED . MSAS into the edge. By contrast, the lower half of the plate is occupied by a sort of theatrical mask with large eyes, consisting of a fantastical plant with a thistle flower. In its oval shape, undulating edge and decoration, this plate is identical to a green one that was exhibited at the Faenza show of 1996<sup>1</sup>. However, on closer inspection the relief already appears in a circular *Plate* with a gold ground dated 1961, though the latter has the portrait of a woman in the medal<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> PIETRO MELANDRI 1996, n. pag.

<sup>2</sup> Reproduced in GAUDENZI 2002, p. 242, cat. no. 214.







31.

A) Vase

Polychrome maiolica decorated in relief, h 37 cm

Mark to base: MELANDRI / FAENZA / and an apple (?)

ca. 1960-65

B) Vase

Polychrome maiolica decorated in relief, h 37 cm

Mark to base: MELANDRI / M in a circle and square

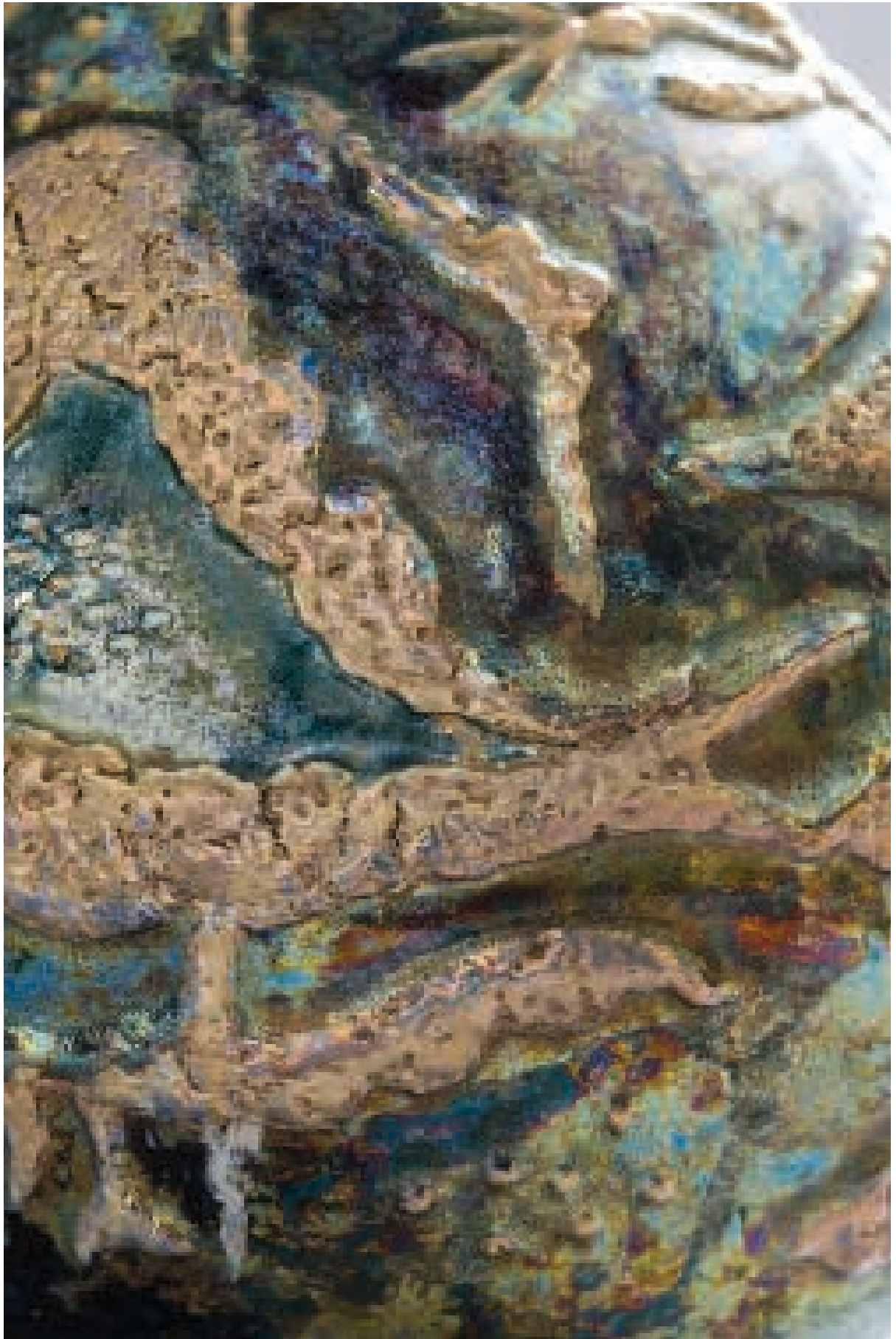
ca. 1960-65

**T**hese large globular vases with a short wide neck are entirely decorated in relief with stylized floral motifs. On vase A one of the flowers transforms into a small female face. The works effectively capture the ornamental opulence – sometimes making an almost excessive use of gold – of the pieces produced by Melandri's workshop during the 1960s. This is accompanied by increasingly brilliant metallic lustre effects, obtained thanks to the use of modern synthetic pigments. During this period Melandri abandoned the traditional reflective glazes obtained with a muffle kiln in favour of lustres created with the new glazes applied using a brush.









32.

A) Flower

Polychrome lustred maiolica, h. 34.5  
ca. 1955-60

B) Flower

Polychrome lustred maiolica, h. 38  
Mark to base: MELANDRI  
ca. 1955-60

This very rare and unusual pair of ornaments are modelled in the form of stems with branches bent downwards and blossoming into a flower with a few petals. They represent a sculptural development of the theme of stylised flowers favoured by Melandri from the mid-1950s, with countless variations, in particular in the relief decoration of vases and bowls (cats 33-34). The brown colouring, which emphasises the dry and woody character of the branches, in this case without leaves, is brightened here and there by streaks and flecks of turquoise. The stem rises from an oval base, as if growing on a small clod of earth, in one case with a pod-like decoration around the edge. This is a further detail that not only recurs in the decoration with fantastical plants of many bowls and plates (cats 34A, 35A), but also in a detail of the superabundant and imaginative cladding of the bar of the Hotel Roma in Bologna of 1959, now in the International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza.







Pietro Melandri, Detail of the decoration of the bar of the Hotel Roma in Bologna, 1959, Faenza, Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche (MIC).



Sculpture in the form of a flower and vase by Pietro Melandri in a 1950s photograph (GAUDENZI 2002, p. 354).



33.

A) Bowl with fantastical flowers in a vase

Polycrome lustred maiolica and gold overglaze, Ø 30 cm

Mark to back: P. MELANDRI / and apple

ca. 1955/60

B) Bowl with fantastical flowers in a vase

Polycrome lustred maiolica and gold overglaze, Ø 30 cm

Mark to back: P. MELANDRI / and apple

ca. 1955/60

These two large bowls present a similar – though mirror-image – relief decoration consisting of a vase with stylized leaves, flowers and fruit – thistles and pomegranates. Melandri developed such deformations of natural elements in many of his creations during the late 1950s. Bowls of this type thus belong to the most typical production of his workshop, in which the same figurative elements were nonetheless constantly renewed by the chromatic variety of the glazes and the always unusual decorative solutions.

In this context, the recollections of a “woman worker”, Marisa Moroni, are significant: «I began to work with Melandri in September 1945, immediately after the end of the war [...] To begin with there were just three of us girls, but we soon doubled in number. I preferred to make the relief decoration, following the Master’s precise instructions; as an inspiration he provided some little drawings of his or illustrations from books: however, he left us a degree of freedom of interpretation, but admonishing us not to go too far»<sup>1</sup>.

In the bowl with a dark ground, for example, the flower that seems to turn into a pomegranate contains bright red seeds on a dark blue background. It thus stands out against the generally autumnal colouring of the work, illuminated by the gleams of the minute gold lustre decoration embellishing the leaves and the vase. By contrast, the other bowl is characterized entirely by pale hues: the light blue of the background and the creamy white of the vase and the flowers, once again scattered with delicate gold ornaments.

Both bowls belonged to the Faenza collection of one of the branches of the Ferniani family, which founded the ceramic factory of the same name in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century; it remained active until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>1</sup> LIVERANI-EMALDI 1994, n. pag.: «Ho cominciato a lavorare con Melandri nel settembre del 1945, appena finita la guerra [...] All’inizio eravamo solamente in tre ragazze, che presto raddoppiarono di numero. Io facevo di preferenza la decorazione a rilievo, sotto le precise indicazioni del Maestro, che forniva, come sputo, alcuni suoi piccoli disegni o illustrazioni da libri; lasciava tuttavia una certa libertà di interpretazione, raccomandando però di non strafare».







34.

A) Bowl with a fantastical plant

Polychrome lustred maiolica and gold overglaze, Ø 25 cm

Mark to back: P. MELANDRI / M inside and apple

ca. 1955-60

B) Bowl with a fantastical plant

Polychrome lustred maiolica, Ø 25 cm

Mark to back: P. MELANDRI / and apple

ca. 1955-60

At their centre these two bowls present a similar relief decoration consisting of a stylized plant with fantastical leaves and flowers, a product of the increasingly ingenious deformation applied by Melandri to natural forms starting from the 1950s.

The design of the sinuous campanula standing out against the bright red ground of the first bowl reappears in mirror image in another piece of identical size but with a light blue ground<sup>1</sup>. This allows us to ideally enter Melandri's workshop to better appreciate its technical refinements. The traditional use of a drawing or tracing is merely the inspiration for a direct – and thus unique – modelling of the relief decoration, which represents one of the most characteristic features of the works of these years.

Similar ornamental motifs were nonetheless transformed by the variety of colours and by the always unusual rendering of the glazes and lustres, clearly evident in the effect of liquid suspension of the violet colour that seems to float on the bottom of the second bowl.

Both bowls belonged to the Faenza collection of one of the branches of the Ferniani family, which founded the ceramic factory of the same name in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century; it remained active until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>1</sup> Reproduced in STEFANELLI TOROSSO 1987, p. 60, cat. no. 47.







35.

A) Bowl with fantastical plant (pomegranate)

Polycrome and lustred maiolica, Ø 25 cm

Mark to back: P. MELANDI / and apple

ca. 1955-60

B) Plate with fantastical plant

Polycrome and lustred maiolica, Ø 32 cm

Mark to back: P. MELANDRI / and apple

ca. 1955-60

**T**his bowl and this plate present a similar relief composition at the centre, with a slender stylized plant sprouting from the ground and ending in an inflorescence, in one case apparently a pomegranate with seeds inside and in the other a campanula flower with long stamens.

During the 1950s, Melandri aimed in decorative objects of this type for a concise rendering of natural forms, more rigid and geometrical in the bowl and more sinuous in the plate. Varied in their colouring, the effects of the lustres and the gold overglaze decorations, they represented a distinctive and popular product of his workshop.

The two pieces share the light green colouring of the background, on which the decorations in a darker colour create an unusual effect of teeming and grainy matter.

Both bowls belonged to the Faenza collection of one of the branches of the Ferniani family, which founded the ceramic factory of the same name in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century; it remained active until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.







36.

Vase with a tauromachy scene

Polychrome maiolica with a matte glaze decorated in relief, metallic lustres and gold overglaze, h 37 cm

Mark to base: P. MELANDRI

ca. 1955-1960

This amphora-shaped vase, cast from a mould, presents a vaguely classical story on the body, centred around a scene of tauromachy. Alongside the bull attacked by two hunters armed with lances, it includes a cow with long horns suckling a calf and a naked girl, seated on the ground in a bather-like pose with one leg raised. The relief is in the most up-to-date graphic style of the 1920s, decidedly Art Deco in both the arched male bodies and in the full volumes of the female nude. These stylistic features are explained by the fact that the ceramicist translated into relief a drawing by the painter and architect from Imola Giovanni Guerrini (1887-1972). The latter had trained as an artist at the School of Arts and Crafts in Faenza directed by the painter Antonio Berti. Like Melandri he had frequented the so-called “Baccarini Salon” before embarking upon a successful career; he taught at the Fine Arts Academies of Ravenna and Perugia, was director from 1927 of the National Authority for Craftworking and Small Industry (Ente Nazionale Artigianato e Piccole Industrie, ENAPI) and director between 1961 and 1966 of the new State Art Institute for Mosaics in Ravenna.

A considerable number of known examples of this model exist, though they frequently vary both in the colouring and in the form and decoration of the neck and foot. We must thus assume that it was particularly important to Melandri – perhaps because of his friendship with Guerrini – who kept it in production for practically the entirety of his long career.

The fact that the example formerly in the Bolognesi collection in Milan appears to have entered the collection in 1930 gives us reason to believe that the model was devised during the final years of Focaccia and Melandri’s activity<sup>1</sup>; Giovanni Bolognesi purchased the works directly from the master as he preferred novelties.

In the other known examples, the wide-mouthed neck is cut a short distance from the shoulder<sup>2</sup> or elongated and tapered with a relief decoration of lozenges<sup>3</sup>. However, in our piece the broad, long, slightly flaring neck is decorated with a band of stylized fish and two rectangular panels containing little narrative scenes in an archaic style, separated by superimposed lithe figures of running horses and greyhounds. The animals and figures in the two narrative panels, executed in relief with

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<sup>1</sup> On this example NESTI 2002, pp. 44-45. An example dated to the early 1930s is reproduced in Rosso 1983, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> An example is in GAUDENZI 2002, p. 114, cat. no. 62.

<sup>3</sup> An example is in TERRAROLI 2007, p. 159, cat. no. 61. Two examples that can be dated to the 1960s can be found in the Andrea Banzola collection (GAUDENZI 2017, p. 147, cat. nos 94 and 95).



a method that Melandri used with increasing frequency during the 1950s, contrast stylistically with the modelling of the tauromachy. The latter presents a geometrical simplification of the forms fully in keeping with the stylistic idiom adopted by the master at this time.

Also unusual is the polychromy of the piece. Compared to the older examples, often made with monochrome glazes or lustres, it seeks a metallic effect: the main figures are highlighted with silvery tones, bronze-like burnishing and gold, throwing them out against the reddish background embellished with a dusting of gold overglaze.

Under the base of the vase is still pasted an old (20<sup>th</sup>-century) partially worn label with legible inventory number «5 ...», relating to the piece's belonging to the collection of one of the branches of the Ferniani family, famous for having founded in Faenza in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the ceramics factory of the same name, which remained active until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.







37.

A) Long-necked flask-shaped vase

Maiolica with metallic lustre and relief decoration, h 43 cm

Mark to base: P. MELANDRI / and apple with the letter M at the centre

ca. 1955-65

B) Handled baluster jug

Maiolica with metallic lustre and relief decoration, h 43 cm

Mark to base: P. MELANDRI / and apple

ca. 1955-65

These two vases belong to the production most typical of Melandri's factory between the 1950s and 60s, with a profusion of ornamental motifs in relief. Though inspired by nature, these ornaments become increasingly fantastical and free, reaching levels of abstraction that come close to science fiction. Specifically, the reliefs on both vases represent the same two reptiles repeated in an identical manner: the first resembles a lizard with an elongated body and seven little legs, while the other has a wider shape and only two legs<sup>1</sup>. The decoration is enriched by landscapes barely suggested by highly simplified plants and flowers, scattered stars and leaves. Nonetheless, Melandri focuses his attention principally on the metallic effects, in this case gold (yellow or coppery). From the 1930s, he had made this experimentation the principal feature of his work. Here, though, the glossy areas shade into oxidized zones to create unexpected effects. The jug is also enlivened on the inside by a brilliant red glaze.

An old (20<sup>th</sup>-century) label is stuck to the underside of both vases with the numbers «53» and «55» respectively. These belong to an inventory of the Faenza collection of one of the branches of the Ferniani family – famous for the ceramic factory of the same name active from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – from which they come.

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<sup>1</sup> Another example of the flask-shaped vase, with variants in the reliefs decorating the long neck, is reproduced in GAUDENZI 2002, p. 224, cat. no. 191.







38.

A) Baluster vase with multilobed mouth

Maiolica with metallic lustre and relief decoration, h 48 cm

Mark to foot: MELANDRI / M in a square

ca. 1955-65

B) Baluster vase with multilobed mouth

Maiolica with metallic lustre and relief decoration, h 41 cm

Mark to base: MELANDRI

ca. 1955-65

**L**ike those with lizards (cat. 37), these two vases with a multilobed mouth also stand out mainly for the metallic effects of their glazed surface and for the relief decoration. In both cases, the relief is mainly of graphic type, with fine lines or clumps of teeming matter.

In the light blue vase with gold reflections (A) the numerous marks create highly abstract forms while maintaining clear allusions to the vegetable – flowers in a vase – and animal worlds.

In the brown-copper vase with green oxidations (B), by contrast, fine vertical lines divide up the body, running from the clump of golden matter congealed around the neck and pooling at the foot. Between them are small reliefs in an archaic style: a double comb, two berries, a radiate circle (a mirror?). Unlike the blue and gold vase, which is the same colour inside, the interior of the copper vase is enriched by a red glaze.

An old label (20<sup>th</sup>-century) is stuck to the underside of vase B with the inventory number «40». The piece belonged to the Faenza collection of one of the branches of the Ferniani family, which famously founded the ceramic factory of the same name in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century; it remained active until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.



39.

A) Bowl with a semi-reclining male figure liberating a dove

Polychrome maiolica with relief decoration, Ø 24 cm

Mark to base: MELANDRI / framed M

ca. 1955-65 circa

B) Flat-lipped bowl with a semi-reclining female figure liberating a dove

Polychrome maiolica with relief decoration and gold overglaze, Ø 27 cm

Mark to base: MELANDRI

ca. 1955-65

C) Bowl with flying dove

Polychrome reflective glazed maiolica with relief decoration, Ø 17 cm

Mark to base: MELANDRI / M inside an apple

ca. 1955-65

Stylized in its form, perhaps freely recalling the famous abstract works of the sculptor Henry Moore (1889-1986), the type of human figure decorating these bowls (A-B) was the fruit of Melandri's imagination. It was replicated countless times in his workshop by the able hands of his women collaborators, some of whom specialized in reproducing the designs provided by the master in relief. It is clearly apparent from the relief that the two pieces were not modelled by the same hand.

Though in the first case the figure is male and in the second female, the subject is repeated in an identical fashion: a figure half-reclining on the ground and raising their arm towards the sky to release a dove.

The same dove appears in gold at the centre of the dark blue bowl (C) with a reflective metallic glaze and had also become – perhaps through the famous variants created by Georges Braque – part of Melandri's symbolic imaginary. We find it in the reliefs decorating the bar of the Roma hotel in Bologna executed between 1957 and 1959, and now on display at the International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza, and on numerous plates and bowls resembling ours<sup>1</sup>. The decorative solutions adopted by Melandri are nonetheless always surprising and personal, so that the simplified figure of the bird seems to be dressed in a precious tunic covered in little lozenges – or perhaps chased gold leaf? – in the style of Klimt.

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<sup>1</sup> A similar example is in Gaudenzi 2002, p. 250, cat. no. 224.







40.

Vase with reclining figures

Polychrome maiolica with relief decoration, h 27 x 23 x 19 cm

Mark to base: MELANDRI

ca. 1955-65

For its asymmetrical shape and the type of decoration, this vase with its narrow, elongated neck is typical of the production of Melandri's workshop in the second half of the 1950s and early 1960s<sup>1</sup>. Two reclining nudes stand out on the light ochre globular body, executed in relief in an ivory colour: on one side a woman and on the other a man.

With this stylization of the human figure Melandri demonstrates that he is now up to date on contemporary sculpture, following a line that starts with the models of the more famous Henry Moore (1898-1986) and runs towards the works of the Bolognese Luciano Minguzzi as is apparent from a comparison with his *Two figures* (1950-52) in the Peggy Guggenheim collection in Venice. It is worth remembering that in 1946 Minguzzi had been on the judging panel of the fifth edition of the Premio Faenza, and that during his long career he also worked, albeit occasionally, in ceramic.

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<sup>1</sup> For a similar example, but in red, see Gaudenzi 2017, pp. 108-109, and cat. no. 76 on p. 144. Another vase of the same shape, but with a relief decoration of the "grottesca" type, is published in STEFANELLI TOROSI 1987, pp. 52-54, cat. no. 37.





Luciano Minguzzi, *Two Figures*, 1950-52, Venice, Peggy Guggenheim Collection (from Pirovano 2002, p. 271).



41.

Bust of a woman after Francesco Laurana

Polychrome maiolica, 45 x 42 x 20 cm

Mark on back: MELAMDRI

ca. 1950

The marble original of this Renaissance bust attributable to Francesco Laurana (1430-1502) – a presumed portrait of Ippolita Maria Sforza, wife of the king of Naples Alfonso II – formerly belonged to the collections of the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum (now the Bode Museum) in Berlin. It was seriously damaged in May 1945, during the fire that broke out in one of the storage facilities holding art works evacuated from the museum for security reasons during the Second World War. However, there are numerous plaster casts of the work made from the original in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (those in the Victoria and Alberti Museum in London and the Pushkin Museum in Moscow are among the finest), executed for didactic purposes for the cast collections of museums or for private collectors.

Melandri must have made the mould for this terracotta sculpture from a high-quality plaster model. He then skilfully glazed it with a fine layer of white enamel, leaving the clay beneath perceptible to give the figure the appearance of milky white skin.

Melandri used gold only to decorate the brocade of the garment and the reliefs on the base, showing that he was familiar with the polychromy of the marble original, probably through a photograph, though the plant tendrils of the ceramic piece do not repeat those of the marble.

Adopting a practice well documented in the ceramic workshops of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, at Faenza (consider the production of Achille Farina) and in other Italian cities (like the Florentine Manifattura Cantagalli), the Focaccia and Melandri factory also produced sculptures based on Renaissance works copied using casts of the originals. This is demonstrated, for example, by the white maiolica version of the famous *Bust of the Young St John the*



Pietro Melandri, *Dancing Faun* (from the House of the Faun in Pompeii), (76 x 30 x 24 cm) ca. 1950, Brun Fine Art.



*Baptist*<sup>1</sup>, traditionally attributed to Donatello, the marble original of which has been on display at the Pinacoteca of Faenza since it opened to the public in 1879.

While the presence of Melandri's signature alone indicates that the bust after Laurana was executed after 1931, when the partnership with Focaccia had been dissolved, the quality of the polychromy suggests a date in the early 1950s. At this time Melandri also made sculptures after ancient models, such as the glazed versions with metallic lustres and gold of the *Dancing Faun* from the House of the Faun in Pompei.

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<sup>1</sup> Florence, Pandolfini auction 0168, Design e arti decorative del XX secolo, 15 December 2015, lot 12.



42.

A) *Battle of Lepanto or Siege of the Castle*

Polychrome maiolica, 89 x 125 cm

Mark to lower right: MELANDRI

ca. 1955-60

B) *Battle of Lepanto or Siege of the Castle*

Polychrome maiolica, 57 x 40 cm

Mark in relief to lower right: P. MELANDRI

ca. 1960-65

In this large decorative relief (A) with its daring perspective, Melandri has enjoyed overwhelming the viewer with an imaginative fleet of galleons drawn up along a rocky coast overlooked from the top of a spur by a fortified city with towers. Out of a deep cave along the jagged shoreline, almost like a secret gate of the city above, come knights galloping on their steeds.

The fairytale atmosphere of the scene is heightened by the great variety of little symbols on the sails, the ornaments on the hulls of the ships and on the garments of the knights. However, the relief's truly spectacular aspect is created by the astonishing magnificence of the bright colours, the metallic iridescences and the precious gold details.

A period photograph of an example almost identical to ours, in its size as well, bears the legend «11 November 1954, measurements 100 x 170 cm» on the back<sup>1</sup>. This information is of help in placing the date of our relief in around the mid-1950s. By this time, Melandri had abandoned the traditional reflective glazes obtained with the muffle kiln in favour of lustres created using new enamels that could be applied with a brush.

The popularity of the subject of this relief, known with the title of *Battle of Lepanto* or *Siege of the Castle*, is evidenced by a fair number of panels of varying size executed in the Faentine workshop over at least a decade<sup>2</sup>, among which we can also mention our second piece (B), more concise in the rendering of the forms, lacking many details and rendered in a more sober palette.

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<sup>1</sup> GAUDENZI 2002, p. 354, Fonti d'Archivio 159.

<sup>2</sup> An example measuring 41 x 58 cm is reproduced in GAUDENZI 2002, cat. no. 222, p. 249.











43.

#### A) Neptune

Polychrome glazed maiolica, 79 x 30 x 20 cm

Mark to base: MELANDRI

ca. 1950

#### B) Neptune

Polychrome glazed and lustred maiolica, 76 x 30 x 20 cm

Mark to back: MELANDRI

ca. 1960

The invention of the youthful Neptune standing and grasping his trident and a fish in his right hand, with his left raised aloft and a large crab on his head, dates to the early 1930s, when Melandri began to model and manufacture markedly plastic sculptures of his own invention. As with other works, including some of monumental size – consider the *Perseus and Medusa* of 1936 –, this, too, was a successful invention of which the master was fond. He replicated it on several occasions, changing not only the polychromy but also numerous details of the modelling.

The compositional model, the prototype, is presumably that displayed at the Milan Triennale of 1933 – documented in photographs –, which we also recognize a few years later among the works exhibited by Melandri in 1937 at the «VII settimana Faentina» (p. 54, fig. 32).

The *Neptune* in the photographs looks slightly smaller than our two examples – the base with the waves is lower – but more importantly still lacks the ample seabed dotted with aquatic vegetation and shells that stretches behind the young god of the sea. This is a variant of the *Neptune* presumably created by Melandri after the war; unlike the older pieces it presupposed a placement against a wall rather than free-standing in space<sup>1</sup>. An example of the type with the seabed, dated to the 1940s, is a good illustration of the liberties taken by the master with his own models: this figure has a turtle on his head instead of a crab<sup>2</sup>.

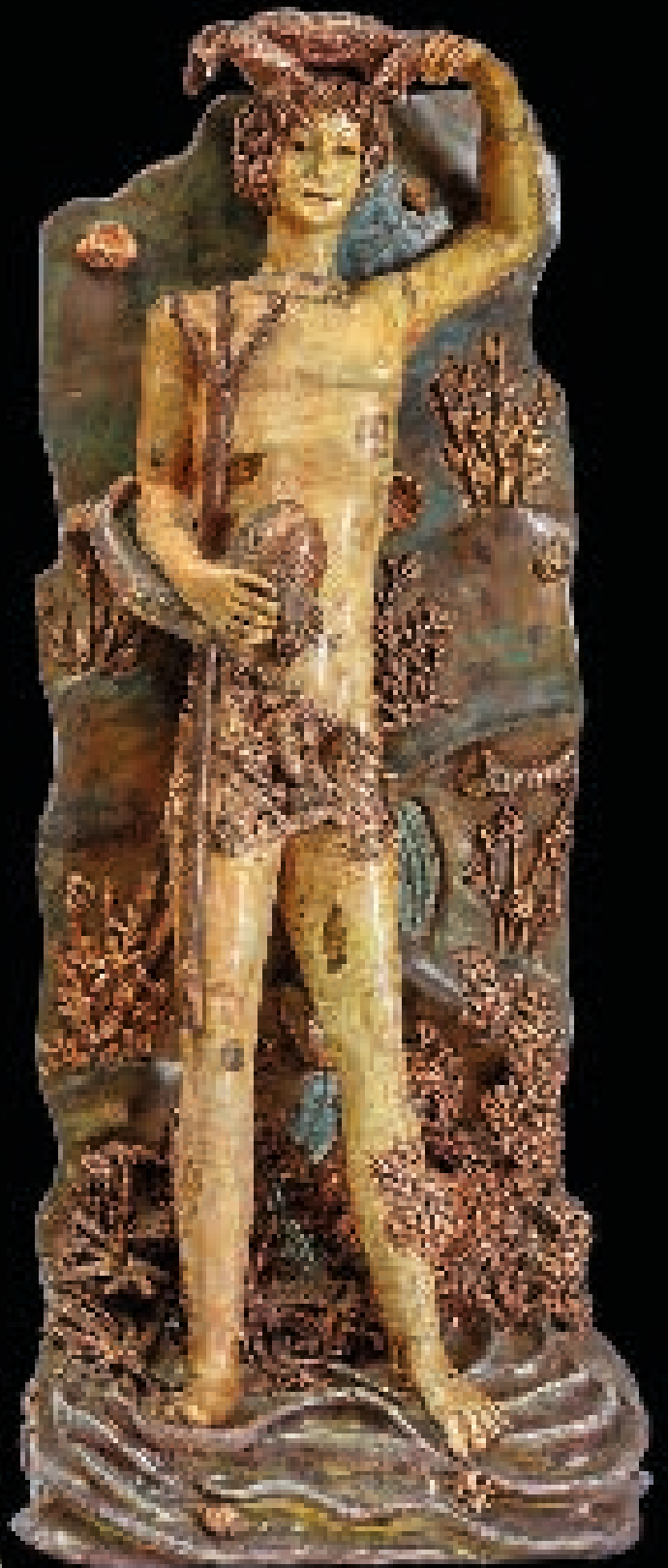
In the *Neptune* we can identify references to a certain type of monumental sculpture, to the paradigms and formal solutions of the Novecento movement, also appropriated by sculptors by the 1930s<sup>3</sup>. Melandri attentively observes these, but responds to them with dreamy, absent-minded and

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<sup>1</sup> An example is in Villa Necchi Campiglio in Milan. For another example of similar size to ours, but with variations, see PESOLA 2012, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> GIUBILEI-TERRAROLI 2013, p. 379, entry 281 signed S. C.

<sup>3</sup> In 1934 Palma Bucarelli concluded the entry on the Novecento movement in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* as follows: «Oggi, allargate ancora le file, il Novecento ha esteso la sua azione alla scultura, all'architettura, alla musica, cerca insomma d'identificarsi in ogni campo con l'idea "sulla quale deve sorgere la personalità stilistica e spirituale della nostra arte", e i suoi adepti si definiscono come i primitivi di una nuova sensibilità» («Today, having increased its adherents, the Novecento movement has extended its field of action to sculpture, architecture and music. In short, it seeks to









Pietro Melandri, *Neptune*. Ceramic exhibited at the 5<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale in 1933, in a contemporary photograph, Milan, Fondazione La Triennale, Archivio Fotografico.

perhaps ironic cadences – the crab on the head – devoid of any rhetorical flourishes. Nothing could be further from classical sculpture, which represents Neptune as a mature man, bearded and muscular, than this slender adolescent with barely suggested muscles and an orientaling face.

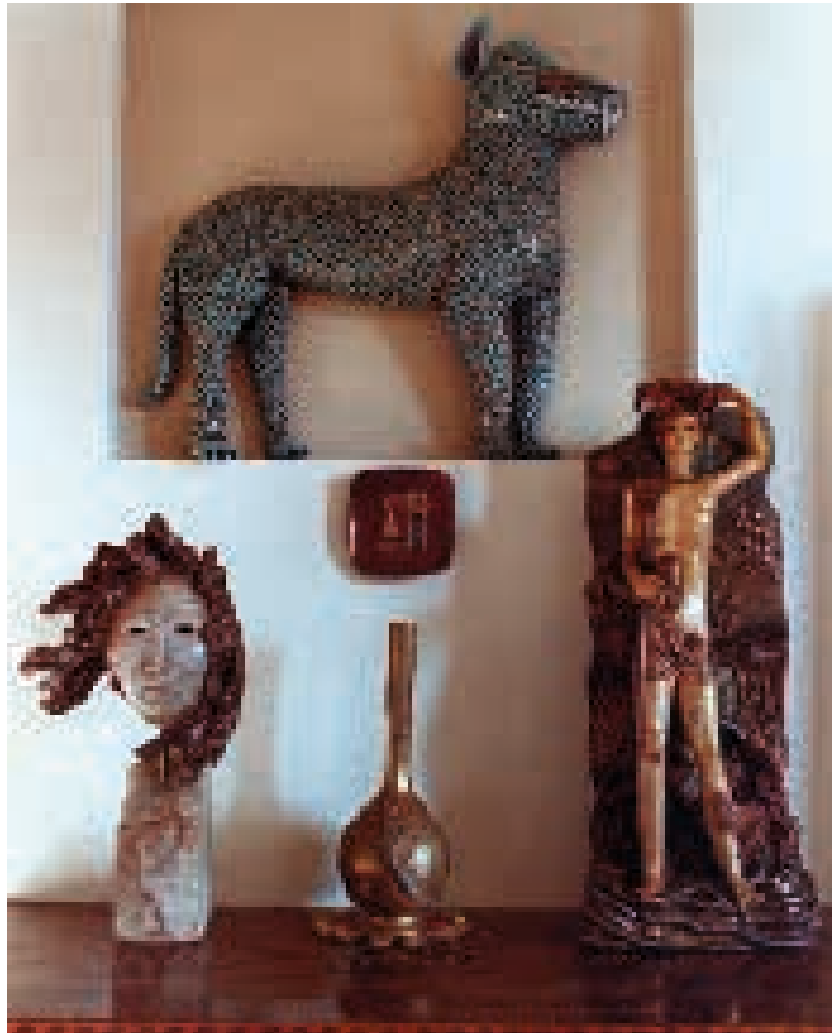
Though based on a shared model, the two examples of the Neptune presented here differ significantly in their modelling, from the waves making up the base to the position and form of the hand holding the fish, the marine encrustation of the band wrapping the hips of the slender figure and above all the seabed. The difference lies less in the arrangement and quantity of shells, seaweed and barnacles – far more exuberant in example B – than in the very structure of the seabed: the undulating folds of one piece (B) have given way to geometrical scales in the other (A).

Equally masterful, with all their considerable differences, are the colour choices and the originality of the metallic lustres, of which Melandri was an acknowledged master, key in these works

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identify itself in every field with the idea “on which the stylistic and spiritual character of our art must be founded” and its followers describe themselves as the pioneers of a new sensibility»); BUCARELLI 1934, p. 87.

Some works by Pietro Melandri as they were exhibited in the Ferniani collection in Faenza, in a photograph from the 1980s, Private collection. One can recognise the *Mask of the Wind* (cat. 19) and the *Long-necked flask-shaped vase* (cat. 37A).



to suggesting the effect of wet and shiny surfaces. The warmer amber tones of the one piece, more swamplike than marine, shift radically towards blueish gleams, slightly oxidized aluminium and mother of pearl iridescences in the other.

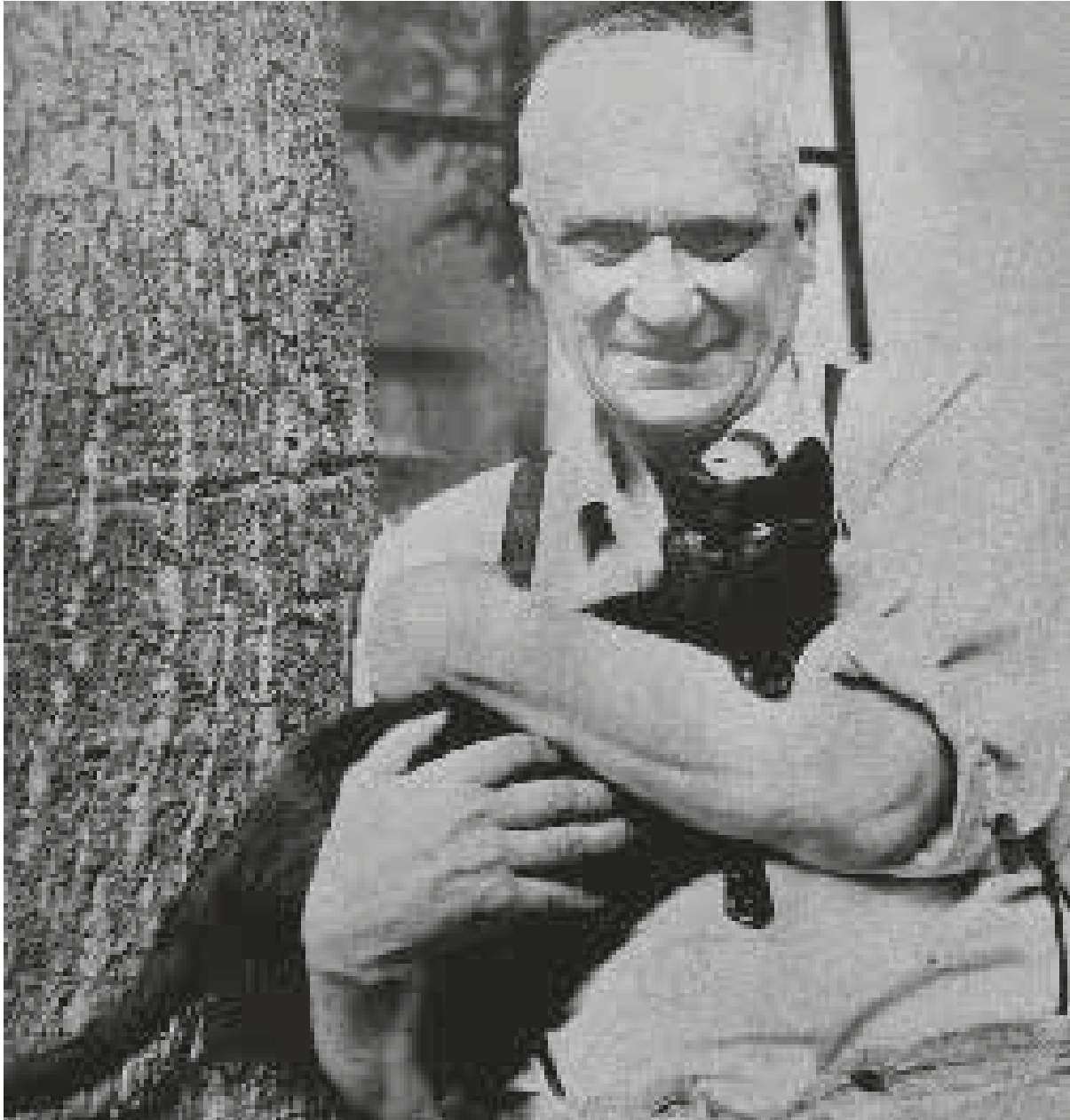
Though it is impossible to pinpoint the date of either piece, the differences in the modelling and above all in the chromatic effects and rendering of the surfaces suggest that they were created some time apart: piece “B” in the very early 1950s and the other about a decade later. *Neptune* “B”, formerly in the Ferniani collection in Faenza, was reproduced by Emanuele Gaudenzi among Melandri’s works of the 1950s and 60s<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> GAUDENZI 2002, p. 258, cat. no. 235.







Photographic portrait of Pietro Melandri with a cat, 1950s (from LIVERANI, EMALDI 1994).

## Biographical note\*

1885 Pietro Melandri was born in Faenza to Colomba Grilli and Agostino Melandri.

1897-1905 He was apprenticed to the Faenza ceramics workshop of the brothers Venturino and Virginio Minardi.

1906-1907 He was in Turin for military service. He then went to Milan where he attended evening courses at the Brera Academy and worked as a set designer.

1908 He exhibited five paintings at the 1st Mostra Biennale Romagnola, organised in Faenza on the occasion of the Esposizione Torricelliana.

1909-1916. He continued to live and work as a set designer in Milan.

1916-1918 Melandri was enlisted in the Bersaglieri. Taken prisoner at Caporetto, he was deported to a prison camp on the Hungarian border, where he remained for thirteen months.

1919 Back in Faenza, he founded the «La Faïence» factory with Paolo Zoli. He began collaborating with the sculptor Francesco Nonni, who produced small maiolica models for the new factory.

1920 He broke off his collaboration with Zoli to start his own manufacture.

1922 Together with the Ravenna industrialist Umberto Focaccia, who provided the capital and work space in the former Minardi factory, Melandri founded the new company «Focaccia and Melandri», of which he became director.

1924: He participated in the Pesaro Ceramics Exhibition, winning a gold medal. He was also awarded a gold medal at the 1st Biennial of Decorative Art in Florence.

1925 He exhibited his works at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Biennale of Decorative Arts in Monza.

1926 He exhibited his works at the Paris Decorative Arts Exhibition, winning a prize.

1927 He exhibited his works at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Biennale of Decorative Arts in Monza and held a personal exhibition of paintings and ceramics organized by the cultural association «Cenacolo Francesco Francia» in Bologna.

1927 He exhibited at the Galleria Vitelli in Genoa, in a group show alongside the painters Antonio Traverso and Carmine Giardiello.

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\* This biographical summary is mainly based on DE LUCA, MAZZARELLA 1987; GAUDENZI 2002; FANTI 2009.



Photographic portrait of Pietro Melandri at work, 1954 c. (from MAZZOLANI 1954)

1928 He exhibited at the Galleria Micheli in Milan, in a group show in the company of the painters Domenico Abate Cristaldi and Achille Cavalieri and the sculptor Franco Baggigia. He won the gold medal at the Pesaro Quadrennial Exhibition of Ceramics.

1930 Melandri participated in the decorative arts exhibition in Monza (from this edition triennial and no longer biennial), and met the architect Gio Ponti.

1931 The Focaccia and Melandri factory was closed. Melandri continued to work independently in part of the same premises. During this period, he devoted himself to decorating the interior of the castle known as Rocca delle Caminate in the Province of Forlì, destined to become the summer residence of the head of government Benito Mussolini.

1932 Melandri moved his business to a new workshop in Via Salvolini, where he also had his own home and would remain for the rest of his life.

1933 Melandri's collaboration with the architect Melchiorre Bega began with the creation of *Woman with a Little Dog and a Hedge* known as the *Venere moderna*, for the Motta confectionery in Milan's Piazza Duomo. An anthological exhibition is dedicated to him at the 5<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale (the former Monza Triennale, which from that year onwards will be held in Milan).

1934 Exhibits a ceramic piece entitled *La Vittoria* at the Venice Biennale.

Pietro Melandri, photograph published in the catalogue of the group exhibition held at the Galleria Vitelli in Genoa in January 1927 (MOSTRA D'ARTE 1927).



1935-1937 he executed the maiolica decoration for the tomb of Luisa Spagnoli, an Italian entrepreneur and co-founder of the Perugina chocolate company.

1936 He exhibited his large wall decoration depicting *Perseus and Medusa* at the 6<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale.

1937 He exhibited his *Perseus and Medusa* again this year at the Decorative Arts Exhibition in Paris, the work won Melandri the Official Grand Prix for sculpture. On 6 October he married Antonietta Fossa.

1938 With a black vase decorated with a rose, he wins first prize at the 1st Ceramic Competition organised by the Museo Internazionale della Ceramica in Faenza. He made a large wall decoration for the bar of the Eliseo cinema in Rome, commissioned by the architect Luigi Piccinato, depicting the *Myth of Orpheus*.

1941 At the invitation of the architect Gian Luigi Poggiali, he executes the reliefs that decorate the main hall of the Cassa di Risparmio at Imola.

1944 (May) in the Allied bombing of Faenza, Melandri's house and workshop in via Salvolini are almost entirely destroyed

1945 The house and workshop are rebuilt and Melandri is able to resume his activity.

1948 He executed the high relief decoration for the Metropolitan Cinema in Bologna, reworking the *Perseus and Medusa* of 1936.

1948-1952 Melandri completes one of his masterpieces, the large decoration for the bar of the Hotel Roma in Bologna.

1950 Still in collaboration with the architect Bega, he created the ceramic panels for the Zanarini pastry shop in Bologna. In that year, Melandri also participated in the Venice Biennale with a violet vase (otherwise known as the «Enchanted Garden»), but dated 1947.

1952 To complete the interiors created by Bega for the Banca Popolare di Faenza, Melandri executes the maiolica covering of a pillar.

1953 He executed a group of fifteen large decorative panels for the Caffè Irrera in Piazza Cairoli in Messina, renovated at that time by the architect Filippo Rovigo from the province of Messina.

1954 A personal exhibition is dedicated to Melandri at the 10<sup>th</sup> Milan Triennale. In the same year, a personal exhibition was dedicated to him in Faenza on the occasion of the 12<sup>th</sup> Ceramics Competition.

1955-1956 In collaboration with the architect Bega participates in the decoration of the Grand Hotel Bauer in Venice, producing two reliefs: *St. George defeating the dragon* and the *Lion of St. Mark*. He created in maiolica the monument to the Fallen for Freedom placed in the Osservanza cemetery in Faenza.

1957 Executed the majolica relief frieze for the Cassa di Risparmio at Reggio Calabria.

1957-1958 He realised the large decorative column in the Barbisio clothing shop in the centre of Palermo.

1961 Melandri is appointed Commendatore of the Italian Republic by the Head of State.

1962 He was awarded the gold medal at the International Exhibition of Contemporary Ceramics in Prague.

1976 Melandri died in Faenza on 25 October.

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