

# CONCEPTUAL FINE ARTS

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## Comfortably unaffected by trends: an interview with art collector Giuseppe Iannaccone



Scipione, Villa Corsini, 1929, oil on board, cm 36.5 × 29.5.

One of the best qualities of this successful Milanese lawyer and experienced art collector is certainly his cultural awareness. Mr. Iannaccone perfectly knows what he buys and, what counts more, the reason why he hunts for it, which has never been a boyish desire to make easy money. He is clearly driven, on the contrary, by a robust sensitivity for the specific kind of language that only artworks directly representing the human being are able to speak. At this point you may argue that every work of art somehow represents human beings, at least for it is made by/for them. But once you read the following interview you will probably learn that what really makes the difference at the end of the day is again the body information that an artwork brings to the beholder, as well as the one it is able to inspire. Thus an artwork talks in depth about the mankind only when the storytelling eclipses theories and conjectures. Moreover, you will learn that there are many areas of high quality artistic production which are still to be discovered by the international art community. This, we may say, would be a great opportunity for all those avid art buyers who during the last months experienced what Italian art dealer and collector Claudia Gianferrari surely taught to her best client: art takes revenge when betrayed.

Shall we begin with a sentimental note, that is the memory of a person who meant a lot for you as a collector, and who is no longer with us. How would you describe Ms. Gianferrari to those who didn't know her?

*Claudia had two souls. That of a dealer and that of a collector, and both her souls were indeed truthful. She loved art deeply, and despite never forgetting which was her job, she attached great importance to her personal collection too. You would learn a lot by being with her, first of all not letting yourself be influenced by trends in any way. She would move around this world with the only possible radar, that is a true passion for art. There was a strong relationship between us. And I believe she would have said the same about me.*

What is the most beautiful memory you have of her?

*The very first thing that comes to my mind is the book which gathers together the first of my collections, the one dedicated to the Thirties. Claudia was already very ill and she put a great effort to finish her essay. I've been told that in the mornings she wanted to get up from bed at all costs, claiming that she had to complete the piece for me. Sadly the book has been sent for print only after her demise.*

If you had to describe the role she played in Italian art to a foreign collector, what would you say?

*I believe Claudia Gianferrari was a crucial figure during the XX century in Italy, therewith I am not only referring to the so called "Novecento", the group supported by Margherita Sarfatti, which was Claudia's biggest love. She curated many important exhibitions, she supported artists, she defended them. I don't think it's a coincidence that the fall of these artists' economic values coincided with her death. It is a matter of fact that time goes by and therefore taste changes, and it is indeed true that we went through an economic crisis. Yet I don't believe that these factors only are enough to understand the economic collapse faced by artists such as Filippo De Pisis or Mario Sironi. Claudia was a sacred reference point for their legacy, also as with regards to their artworks' authenticity.*

How many artworks have you purchased up to now?

*Since the end of the 1980s, when my job as well as my family finally allowed me to put into practice what I had been studying or reading on magazines, I must have collected around 400 works Between the Italian Thirties and contemporary art. Actually, I can pinpoint a precise date, that is when I purchased "La sirena ferita" di Claudio Bonichi, an artwork from 1987.*

In the introduction to the catalogue of the first part of your collection, it is said that art has been for you a sort of therapy to relieve job stress. At some point someone tells you that it would be healthy to take a day off just for yourself, and so did you, thus leaving room for your passion for

art. Nowadays, after 40 years and almost thirty seasons, does this therapy still work?

*Things have changed a great deal. At the start of my career I was very worried. I was young and my first concern was in fact that of paying my secretary. I didn't have any acquaintance in Milan, or social relation for that matter. To have some clients was to me some kind of miracle. Then clients did arrive, and the real problem, since I never had a master who taught me the job, became the fear of making mistakes. Thus art turned out to be able to ease this anxiety. Today it is no longer like this, but art remains nonetheless a huge passion of mine and equally represents a fundamental part of my nature. I still needs art, and despite I'm not struggling as I was at the beginning of my career, this sort of crutch for my soul even now perfectly performs her task.*

Could we state that art collecting is not addictive?

*States of mind do certainly change, yet art keeps on having the power to carry you away from a world which is not as beautiful as art. Thereby, you recharge your batteries and get fresh energy. To go back to what I mentioned before, if initially art was a response to my need for balance, today it is an aim in life.*

As the person we were talking about at the beginning, so your collection has two souls. However, while it is quite evident what differs the two parts, what connects them might not be so obvious.

*I would say that both of them address to the research of the human being in the realm of art, and I think everyone could acknowledge this. Other collectors, whom I highly respect, like Patrizia Sandretto, Beatrice Trussardi, Miuccia Prada, o Giovanni Giuliani, just to name a few Italian ones, have an understanding of what art is in today's world, and are indeed able to spot the most significant artists therein. However, this is not what I look for. I am rather interested in collecting those artists who place the man at the heart of art, and if possible, recounting this view. It may be regarded as presumptuous, but this is the goal I set for myself as a collector.*

Concerning the two souls of your collection, it appears that the first part focuses on the quest for the masterpiece. However, the closer we get to present-time, with artists more and more focused on series than on the single artworks, this concept starts to be questioned. Does it still make sense then to talk about masterpieces nowadays?

*If, also in today's art, we didn't have at least the hope of purchasing masterpieces, I wouldn't be interested in collecting art any longer. It doesn't matter whether the artist is a world champion or not, but that his/her work is a masterpiece. I am more interested in the masterpiece of a minor artist than in a minor work of a great artist. And, as far as I am concerned, I look for artists whose approach may differ work by work. Of course, you need a lot of patience. Sometimes more than ten years can go back before eventually getting what you want, in the meanwhile prices may even go up.*

What don't you like about non-iconic art, then?

*I can't say that I don't like it, it wouldn't be fair. I don't necessarily have a negative opinion about art that I don't personally collect. On the contrary, I'd love to see it in museums, I inquire into it, I get passionate about understanding it. But I don't bring it home, as I don't find in it any kind of addition to my sensitivity. I think of Fontana, and to the many times I could have acquired one of his works at a very low price in comparison to today's value. I never did it, and not because I was so silly not to realize the prominence of the artist. Simply it wasn't the good deal I was looking for, and I actually never felt like adding Fontana to my collection. I recall when I used to visit art critic Guido Ballo, who from his armchair frequently told me: 'remember, in the XX century history, there's no one else beside Fontana'. And I did agree with him. Yet, for the reasons I mentioned above, I didn't buy his work, and I don't regret it. My story is different.*

Let me sum up your thoughts, and do tell me if I go wrong: you seem to prefer art which talks about mankind even that art which deals with their own theories

about mankind over that art which deals with their own theories.

*Certainly, and I would add that while it is fair to say that I like art regarding human being, it is not true to state that I only like figurative art. Let's refer for instance to an artist that I like very much, the Indian Imran Quereshi, who shows just bloodstains in his works. Could you say they are figurative? What interests me the most is not aesthetics, but a certain type of content.*

Since you are talking about blood, if you had to provide a snapshot of today's art market, how would this image look like?

*I will start by pointing out that, despite I've been buying art all over the world for many years, the art market still encompasses some mysteries. I am aware that contemporary art is influenced to a very large extent by major galleries, which actually have the power to increase the value of the artists they represent. In many instances, if I had to put back on the market the work by an artist I recently acquired, I would probably earn much lower than what I had paid for. Nevertheless, at least from my point of view, and given that no one likes to throw away money, you don't buy art as a form of investment. As I said, I want to find the real masterpiece, and this is why gallerists are necessary. You ought to build with them loyal relationships, also based on the market's rules, so as ultimately they would give you the artwork, rather than to another collector.*

Let me lay out a scenario: on the one hand, European art between the two wars, full of great artists, whose understanding is intimately related to the language spoken in their countries of origin. On the other, contemporary art, which either speaks English or doesn't speak at all.

*I don't conceal that at the beginning, my choices were mainly determined by my financial means and back at that time I couldn't have bought, for example, German artists. Later on, the situation changed, not just from a financial perspective, but also with regards to the time I could commit to art. There I had the opportunity to perform on the international scene, even if, it must be said, I've never given up the Italian Thirties, and I do still collect works when I have the chance. Over the years I grow to love that period of time in a more sophisticated way.*

Yet, the works by artists like Scipione, Guttuso, Antonietta Rapahael, Renato Birolli, or the same de Pisis, have never crossed the Alps. Do you think this may happen in the future?

*First of all you should ask yourself whether they deserve this internationality, and I do believe so. Therefore, I will keep on fighting for this to happen. It is also to be taken into account that these artists lived and worked during a span of time, which was difficult in many ways, not least politics-wise. Many of them were by no means appreciated by the Fascist regime, and at that time this represented a very tough hurdle to overcome. Yet it is often forgotten that many of them, amongst which Scipione, took part to the first edition of Documenta in Kassel, in 1955. After all I believe it is a matter of knowledge more than mere artistic quality. And that is why I am dreaming of setting up an outstanding exhibition abroad, with all that this implies. I think of London, or Paris. I envision comparing Fausto Pirandello, for example, with Lucien Freud. I'm deeply convinced that his extraordinary talent would be eventually acknowledged outside Italy, too.*

Any other upcoming project?

*I don't have anything settled yet, but I am sure of two things. The first one is that I want my collection to remain a unity. The second is my wish for it to be open to the public.*

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