

UMBERTO BOTTAZZI (1865 - 1932):



It is difficult to find a field of artistic expression that Umberto Bottazzi has not explored. In thirty years of activity he has been in fact a painter, illustrator, engraver, architect, he has dealt with set-ups, interior decoration and applied art, designing stained glass windows, mosaics, fabrics, embroideries, furniture, wrought irons, tapestries, cushions, tablecloths, ceramic vases.

Like many other protagonists of the Roman scene between the two centuries, Bottazzi also made the teaching of English William Morris his own, who with the Arts and Crafts movement had brought to the fore the aesthetic quality in the applied arts and the beauty of craftsmanship. Together with personalities such as Duilio Cambellotti and Vittorio Grassi he will give life to pivotal experiences in the history of Capitoline modernism, such as the architecture and furniture magazine "La Casa" or the movement for the rebirth of artistic glass, led by the craftsman Cesare Picchiarini. A convinced supporter of the educational function of art, Bottazzi



will also devote himself passionately to teaching from 1922 to 1932, teaching the students of the Margherita di Savoia professional school for women.

Of a reserved nature, the artist will instead develop his pictorial research mostly away from the spotlight of the exhibitions. Only after his death in 1932, in the retrospective organized in Rome in the rooms of Palazzo Doria, over forty paintings will finally be presented to the public.

Trained in the capital as a self-taught person, with the exception of a brief attendance at the Nude school, in his first works from the 1890s, Bottazzi is clearly in tune with the symbolist and pre-Raphaelite figurative culture, with subjects ranging from the fantastic Middle Ages from enigmatic female portraits to spiritualist themes. "A fantastic painter, a painter of chimeras", was defined in 1913 by Giuseppe Zucca in an article in the magazine "Life of art", who also underlined the presence in his works of "a breath of mystery that strikes the imagination and unleashes the fantasy" (Zucca 1913, p. 103). Over the years, his language is increasingly oriented towards the linear preciousness of the Viennese Secession and is enriched with a vast amount of stylistic and iconographic references taken from the painting of the great masters of the past with particular attention to the Spanish seventeenth century, known directly during a trip in Spain. There will also be forays into Divisionism, evident in *La Daughter Carlotta* (1917), and, at the end of the Thirties, the opening towards the suspended atmospheres of Magic Realism, as in *Conversation - The letter* or in *Scenes of Roman life - Fontana delle Tartarughe* (both Rome, Roma Capitale Modern Art Gallery). However, the attention to decorative elements will remain constant, clearly evident in the material rendering of the fabrics and clothing details, and the precious refinement of execution and chromatism, aspects that already reach higher results in works of eclectic inspiration, hermetic and fantastic like the *Court of King Lear*, a mysterious fantasy of Shakespearean characters, or *Circe*, in which secessionist linearism meets the enchanted dimension and the elegance of the déco.

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