

Alberto Burri: The Trauma of Painting

Mila Tenaglia (September 29, 2015)



A hundred years after Alberto Burri's birth and 35 years since his last American exhibition, the Guggenheim Museum of New York pays homage to one of the most influential artists in the 20th century art with a major retrospective.

The Guggenheim's comprehensive retrospective is the first U.S. exhibit dedicated to Italian artist [Alberto Burri](#) [2](1915-1995) in over 35 years. The Umbrian maestro arguably made the largest Italian contribution to the international art scene of the postwar period.

+100 works on display

After two years of intense work and under the guidance of [Emily Braun and Megan Fontanella](#) [3], the Guggenheim has put together a remarkable exhibition that presents American audiences with a nuanced, sometimes contradictory portrait of Burri. Many of the one hundred- plus works on display, his monochrome paintings made from the 1950s to the 1990s, have never left Italy before.



Coming a generation after Lucio Fontana, Burri was a doctor in the Italian army during its campaign in Africa, where he was imprisoned and sent to a prisoner-of-war camp in Texas, an experience that made a profound impact on his artistic output and worldview. Burri would go on to create experimental works with unconventional materials like iron, wood, plastic and tar.

Understanding Alberto Burri's art isn't easy. His unusual and innovative way of painting with an array of materials went beyond the confines of pictorial and classical art, confines which, given his Umbrian roots, nevertheless deeply influenced his work.

Milestones

The Guggenheim retrospective seeks to highlight his poetic investigation of the object-image, which would inspire the [Neo-Dada movement](#) [4], Processual Art and [Arte Povera](#) [5]. Burri's "extra-pictorial" materials were taken from real life to created works like "Gobbi" (hunchbacks), "Catrami" (tars) and the famous series of "Sacchi" (sacks), which incorporated lacerated jute bags. Like all great innovations, Burri's method of cutting and sewing materials to create artistic masterpieces caused shockwaves and scandals. Still today these works remain milestones in the artistic landscape of the second half of the 20th century.

Several of the paintings adorning the Guggenheim's luminous, dizzying spiral ramp, including "Grande Bianco" (1952) and "Grande Bianco" (1956) come from the private collections of the Fondazione Albizzini Collezione Burri, founded by Burri in 1978.

The retrospective follows a timeline that emphasizes the artist's connection to American minimalism, which had an impact on his later works. There will also be a series of public events to celebrate the exhibition, with theater performances, screenings of neorealist cinema and dance performances. The latter will include a 1973 ballet choreographed by Burri's wife, the American ballerina Minsa Craig.

Sponsored by Lavazza

The museum's success would not have been possible without the support of Lavazza, a brand leader in the coffee industry, which recently celebrated its 120th anniversary. Lavazza has been actively involved in other initiatives tied to the Guggenheim. [Ennio Ranaboldo](#) [6], the CEO of Lavazza USA, explained that "the partnership with the Guggenheim is part of the broader conversation that we entertain with New York City, our hometown, its denizens and visitors from all over the planet.

It's not just a matter of supporting a major cultural institution, but, as a company and as a brand, contributing to a certain idea about a good, stimulating life in the city. That idea includes outstanding art – such as is certainly going to be the case with the Alberto Burri show – and great coffee!"

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Links

[1] <http://iitaly.org/files/burrirossogobbo1443562359.jpg>

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alberto_Burri

[3] <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/exhibitions/upcoming/alberto-burri-the-trauma-of-painting>

[4] <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neo-Dada>

[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arte_Povera

[6] <http://www.theatlantic.com/author/ennio-ranaboldo/>

