



ITINERARIO LIBERTY



Principal Italian Interpreters

In the sphere of the decorative arts, the first approaches to the new style were characterized by the floral theme, not without Renaissance and baroque contamination. One of the first artists to show interest in the tendencies coming from abroad was Augusto Sezanne (1856-1935), who formerly decorated the house of "Canton dei fiori" ("The Canton of flowers") in Bologna with friezes and other elements inspired by the vegetable world in 1893. In 1898 he took part in the foundation of the "Aemilia Ars" society, devoting himself to the realization of glass and painted fabrics, besides interior decoration. Among the promoters of the Italian artistic renewal, Giorgio Ceragioli (1861-1947), painter and illustrator, who produced designs for tapestries, fabrics, jewels, silver, vases and furniture in a refined floral style in which it is difficult to read the French influence, also figures. Elaborate and elegant vine branches began to "flower" even on the railings and balustrades of the new buildings. The most important artist in wrought iron was Alessandro Mazzucotelli (1865-1938) who, working in the whole of Italy, contributed considerably to the diffusion of the new style.

One particularly vivacious and receptive sector was that of the ceramic arts. Great turmoil passed through all the most important manufacturers, who tried to renew their production according to the dictates of the new tendencies. The forms became more sinuous and elegant and in the drawings there was an increase in motifs with flowers and female figures. The results were discordant; some manufacturers, like those of Laveno, concentrated on the quality and marketing of the objects, paying less attention to the artistic aspect while, for example, the firm Richard-Ginori, under the artistic direction of Giulio Richard himself, reached very high-quality standards. Among the most prominent artists we would mention Domenico Baccarini (1882-1907) who succeeded in renewing the secular tradition of the Faience pottery, creating glazed terracotta in which sinuous female forms were alternated with chubby figures of children. The contribution of Giovanni Prini (1877-1958) who worked for a long time in Rome and Tuscany, and realized figures particularly linked to the world of family and childhood, was also important.

However, the most important representative of Italian Liberty was, undoubtedly, the Florentine Galileo Chini (1873-1956). In 1896 he founded his small factory "The Art of Ceramics" where he produced vases in the new forms decorated with fantastical themes derived from the animal and vegetable world, experimenting the technique of metallic shine. After leaving the first factory, he founded the "S. Laurence Furnaces" in 1907 together with his cousin Chino Chini. He continued the experimentation on techniques and materials for the manufacturing of ceramics, amongst which that of gold encrustation, and also began to produce large windows. Chini also took care of the interior decoration of numerous public and private buildings, realizing mosaics and frescos as, for example, those of the Berzieri Spas in Salsomaggiore.

Outstanding personalities animated the sector of interior decoration too. The architect Ernesto Basile (1857-1932) drew up a long association with the furnishing company Golia-Ducrot in Palermo. He created furniture, with the collaboration of Antonio Ugo, characterized by applications in bronze of female or phytomorphic forms. The Venetian store of Vincenzo Cadorin (1854-1925) and his sons did not hesitate in proposing furniture inspired by the new tendencies. Small fantastical figures formed the supporting elements of his small tables and small pieces of furniture in wood. In Milan the ebony artist, Eugenio Quarti, distinguished himself as well as and the eccentric work of Carlo Bugatti (1855-1940). Bugatti was an extremely original artist; for his furniture he derived inspiration from the Orient and from the African world, which was beginning to be known through the colonial experience. He made use of uncommon materials, like parchment and copper and created unusual forms in which he resorts to the motif of the disc and the wheel. The results are eclectic and extravagant pieces of furniture in which the functional aspect is of secondary importance.

At a second moment, next to the floral taste, the influence of the Viennese Secession came forward in a more and more substantial manner. The magazine "The Home, harmony décor and care of the modern

habitation" (Roma, 1908-11) welcomed the secessionist taste with enthusiasm. On its pages projects for furnishing public and private spaces were presented, in which the characterizing elements were simplicity, luminosity and the linear or schematized ornaments. The group of founders was made up, among others, of Umberto Bottazzi, Duilio Cambellotti and Vittorio Grassi. Umberto Bottazzi (1865-1932), besides designing settings, also realized large artistic windows and designs for ceramics made by Richard-Ginori. Duilio Cambellotti (1876-1960) designed and created environments and objects in which the decorative motif is closely linked to the functionality of the object. Vittorio Grassi (1878-1958) drew near to the taste for simple lines, to the unadulterated use of the materials, for which he did not utilize painting and tinting.

The most important centre for glass art was Venice, where Teodoro Wolf Ferrari (1878-1945) who began to experiment new techniques to interpret forms and décor of secessionist inspiration, worked. His work decisively influenced Vittorio Zecchin (1878-1947) who, through the "murrhine" technique and the use of polychrome enamels, created glass in the Klimtian colours and atmosphere. Lastly, among the women who were protagonists of this artistic season we recall Emilia Zampetti-Nava (1883-1970) who transformed the secessionist taste into curtains, fabrics, cushions, blankets and lamp-shades.