



GUIDE TO THE EXHIBITION

GREAT STAIRCASE

The Museum opened in 2007 in the building where the painter **Giuseppe Diotti** chose to live in the last years of his life and where he painted his last works. **Born in Casalmaggiore in 1779**, Diotti left the city in 1805 and returned there after more than thirty years spent as director and teacher at the Carrara Academy of Bergamo. **Diotti bought this house in 1837** and entrusted its restructuring to the architect **Fermo Zuccari**, the same who, shortly after, would have taken care of the restructuring in neoclassical style of the nearby Church of St. Stephen. The palace of Casalmaggiore became above all a **home-atelier** where Diotti set up his studio and his rich art collection. **Here he died on January 30, 1846**. The collection was later dispersed and the building was sold by his heirs to be used first as a religious college and then, in the second half of the twentieth century, as the Municipal Library.

The exhibition begins on the second floor with collections ranging from the mid-eighteenth century to the early twentieth

century. Along the **access staircase** there are some big paintings of sacred subject, among which four canvases by **Marcantonio Ghislina**, the most important local painter of the early eighteenth century. On the left of the main door from which you enter the noble part of the palace, you can observe a sixteenth-century painting of *Saints Simone and Judas* of the **Brescia school of Savoldo**.

I - CASALMAGGIORE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The beginning of the exhibition provides useful hints to understand the context in which Giuseppe Diotti was born in 1779. Under the reformist impulses of the Empress of Austria **Maria Theresa** and her son **Joseph II**, Casalmaggiore – elevated in 1754 to the rank of city – lived in the eighteenth century **a new political, social and cultural season** where, next to the strengthening of educational and welfare structures, arts and letters flourished through the ceremonial festivities, the opening of a school of drawing (1768), theater, poetry, antiquarian passions and taste for the ancient.

Protagonists of the new course were the benefactors, the artisans, the poets and other affiliates of the Colonia Arcadica Eridania, such as **Camillo Mantovani** and **Alberto Baccanti**, whose portraits are here placed side by side with those of the sovereigns. An engraving by Marcantonio Dal Re shows an elegant **pontoon bridge** to facilitate access to the city from the Parma side of the river, built in 1760 on the occasion of the royal passages that mobilized the entire city, encouraging its beautification, cultural updating and triggering a process of urban renewal.

Most of the paintings on display in this room belong to the historical picture gallery that the **Conte Busi Onlus Foundation** has loaned to the Museum.

II - GIUSEPPE DIOTTI IN HIS HOUSE

In this small room are located works and relics related to the painter. Closely connected to the place are the **marble bust** (simplified copy of the one wanted by his students at the end of his long teaching at the Carrara Academy of Bergamo), the **silk handkerchief** with the *Carme* that the Community dedicated to him when he decided to come back home, and the project of restructuring of the **facade of the palace**. **Some engraved portraits** attest to the fortune of the artist's image in his time, starting with the most famous portrait painted by one of his last students, Luigi Quarenghi. On the forefront of the Empire style *secrétaire* is the reproduction of a **letter dated 18th August 1841** in which Diotti suggests to Ferrante Aporti the commission of a painting to Quarenghi himself.

III - FRANCESCO CHIOZZI'S SCHOOL OF DRAWING AND DIOTTI'S EARLY TRAINING

With the **foundation in 1768 in Casalmaggiore of a School of Drawing of academic imprint**, alternative to the workshop training, a new artistic season begins, essential to understand the first steps of young Diotti. The initiative was started by the painter **Francesco Antonio Chiozzi** (in the room are exposed his youthful paintings of the prophets, the portraits of benefactors and an academy in sanguine), an artist who had been trained at the Accademia Clementina in Bologna, perfecting himself in Rome (period to which the copy of the Sibilla Persica by Guercino dates back). In the direction of the School, in which worked mainly ornate artists, he was succeeded by the figurist **Paolo Araldi**, of whom Diotti was a pupil from 1790 to 1794. Later, thanks to the economic support of the patron Giovanni Vicenza Ponzzone, Diotti could access the **Academy of Fine Arts in Parma** under the guidance of Gaetano Callani. The abrupt

interruption of studies in 1796, following the occupation of the Napoleonic army, forced the artist to less rewarding activities, such as the realization of signs or, at best, copies of ancient paintings, exercise that nevertheless led him to deepen and mature an interest in the sixteenth-seventeenth-century luminism. Some of Diotti's earliest documented works are exhibited here, including the early *Holy Family with San Luigi Gonzaga* (1795), the **portrait of the patron** and **two copies of paintings by Malosso**.

IV - DIOTTI'S ROMAN BOARDING SCHOOL

In 1804 Diotti was the winner of a **four-year scholarship instituted by the Milanese Academy of Brera**, which allowed him to complete his training in Rome (1805-1809), guided from a distance by Giuseppe Bossi and under the tutelage of the sculptor Antonio Canova. In this room drawings, prints and plaster casts - usually present in the atelier of an early nineteenth-century painter - document some of the **models of ancient and modern classicism** through which the painter could refine the tool of drawing to the benefit of the conceptual and ideational part of the artistic work. Prints taken from Raphael, Domenichino, Poussin, David and Camuccini outline the classicist visual culture with which Diotti was in contact in Rome during the period of the Artistic Retirement. During the Roman years Diotti also became friends with the painter Pelagio Palagi, the sculptor Pompeo Marchesi and the architects Giuseppe Bovara and Giacomo Bianconi. The paintings **Mosè e le Tavole della Legge** (*Moses with the Tables of the Law*) and the **Adorazione dei pastori** (*Adoration of the Shepherds*), loaned to the Museum by the Milanese Academy, are the intermediate and final essays that the painter sent to Brera as proof of the progress he had achieved. At the end of his Roman stay,

through the intercession of Andrea Appiani, Diotti was appointed professor of Painting at the Carrara Academy of Bergamo.

V - DIOTTI'S WORKING METHOD

Giuseppe Diotti's working method, widely tested and closely connected to the practice of his academic teaching, is documented in this room through a **series of studies related to his main works**: from the initial sketch, which constitutes the ideational moment, to the painted model, passing through a series of overall or partial drawings, aimed at deepening single anatomical details, whole figures or drapery, to which he reserved particular attention, mindful of Giuseppe Bossi's teachings. Among the studies of drapery, coming from the collections of the School of Drawing "Bottoli", a few stand out: the one for the mantle of the Virgin for the *Adoration of the Magi* frescoed in Rudiano, the one for the dress of *Isaac* of the painting placed in the Basilica of Alzano Lombardo and the one for the mantle of *The penitent Saint Peter* placed in the Parish of Iseo. From these preparatory studies, the painter then moved on to the execution of full-scale cartoons for frescoes or large altarpieces. On display here is **the cartoon of the *Consegna delle chiavi a San Pietro* (Delivery of the keys to Saint Peter)** for one of the four frescoes created between 1830 and 1834 for the presbytery of the Cathedral of Cremona and reproduced in the series of lithographs in the room. The cartoon has been granted in deposit by the Carrara Academy of Bergamo. Among the drawings, the one for the altarpiece of the Cathedral of Casalmaggiore stands out. In the showcase, a sheet of paper with holes in it documents one of the most common practices for transferring a drawing onto the surface to be painted; that is, the **spolvero technique**.

VI - DIOTTI AND HISTORY PAINTING

In this room, which was the largest of the house, Giuseppe Diotti exhibited his very rich collection of paintings and prints, built up during his years in Bergamo and set up here also for didactic purposes and with the aim of making it available to the public. Unfortunately, it was dispersed by his heirs after his death. Today it is dedicated in particular to Diotti's works of historical subject, starting from the great *Corte di Ludovico il Moro* (*Court of Ludovico Sforza*, 1823) granted on deposit by the Civic Museum of Lodi. It is one of the most important and, at the time, famous works by Giuseppe Diotti and constitutes **a powerful visual-historical archetype of the Italian-Lombard identity of the 19th century**, an identity that found a strong point in the age of Ludovico il Moro and in the extraordinary presence in Milan of **Leonardo da Vinci**, here depicted while showing the Duke and his family the project of the Last Supper. Appreciated for his careful physiognomies, precious colors and display of costumes, Diotti drew on a plurality of iconographic sources, using the advice of his highly cultured friends, some of whom he portrayed in the guise of the historical figures depicted.

A similar procedure, and a similar play of mirrors between the period depicted and the contemporary one, can be seen in the *Giuramento di Pontida* (*Pontida Oath*) a painting of **a medieval and Lombard subject and of evident political significance in an anti-Austrian sense**, which Diotti dealt with at two moments in his career: at the height of his fortune in 1836, with the painting of small dimensions, coming from the collection of the Chiozzi family of Casalmaggiore, then merged in the collections of Brera (here documented by a watercolor aquatint), and with the large canvas made in the last years just in this place, remained unfinished at the death of the artist and today placed

in the **Council Chamber** of the municipal palace of Casalmaggiore. The elaboration of the painting lent itself to many **pictorial studies of heads**, often portraits of friends (the librarian Agostino Salvioni, the pedagogue don Ferrante Aporti and the patriot and bibliophile Anton Enrico Mortara) or of students, made by Diotti himself and by his school, like the ones here exposed.

In this room there are **marble and plaster portraits of Giuseppe Diotti, of the linguist Giovanni Romani, of Pietro Giordani and Giovanni Niccolini**, originals and casts of works by Giovan Battista Comolli, Pietro Civeri and Lorenzo Bartolini and some works by Diotti's students: the most famous, **Giovanni Carnovali, known as Piccio**, and **Luigi Quarenghi** from Casalmaggiore.

VII - COLLECTING BETWEEN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

In this small room there are some paintings coming from the collections of the School of Drawing "Bottoli" and referable to the **local collecting**, mainly oriented towards painters from Parma - such as Ignazio Affanni, Roberto Guastalla and Enrico Sartori - who during the nineteenth century have been a point of reference for the artists from Casale. Next to them there are some paintings of the prestigious **private collection of Pietro Mortara** (distributed also in the following two rooms), granted on loan by the **non-profit Foundation Casa di Riposo Leandra of Canneto sull'Oglio**. The collection includes works of important authors that the industrialist from Canneto has intercepted during the years spent in Milan. Significant is the presence of **works of the first and late Scapigliatura** through authors such as Tranquillo Cremona, Luigi Conconi and Giuseppe Maldarelli. There is also a valuable watercolor by **Gaetano Previati**.

The remarkable *Veduta di città murata* (*View of a walled city*) by **Antonio Marinoni** is the only nineteenth-century example of a public purchase oriented towards landscape painting.

VIII - THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

The transition to the twentieth century is expressed here through the works of the artists who played a role in the **Agricultural and Industrial Exhibition of 1910**: the painter and architect **Tommaso Aroldi** (author of the lithographic poster for the Exposition, master of the group of decorators who were being trained at the "Bottoli" School of Design and who contributed to the renewal of the city's image), the sculptor **Carlo Cerati**, the painters **Alessandro Mina** and **Amedeo Bocchi**, whose large painting *Sull'impalcatura* (*On the scaffolding*, 1906) dominated the Fine Arts Pavilion. The latter painting best synthesizes the achievements of Italian painting of the time, from the scientific study of light and color to the choice of the theme of social involvement (a young apprentice intent on cleaning brushes). Integrated in the permanent collection are some valuable paintings from the Mortara collection already mentioned in the previous room, which can be placed between naturalism and late divisionism, with artists such as **Leonardo Bazzaro**, **Baldassarre Longoni** and **Antonio Pasinetti**. To these are added small Venetian views by **Beppe and Emma Ciardi** and other paintings by artists active between the 19th and 20th centuries, coming from the **De Marchi Equisetto** collection, granted on deposit by the non-profit Foundation Casa di Riposo Leandra of Canneto sull'Oglio. In the showcase, the tondo with the profile of Carlo Cattaneo, a galvanoplast by **Paolo Troubetzkoy**, attests, on the front of the reproducibility of the work of art, a happy confluence of sculptural practice and applied science.

IX - BETWEEN NOVECENTO AND CHIARISMO

In this room are gathered **some works exhibited in 1931 in the Art Exhibition of Casalmaggiore** and then acquired by the Municipal Administration. This and other exhibitions were linked to the cultural promotion of the years of fascism, implemented and organized by a group of university students who involved painters from neighboring provinces. Alongside Casalmaggiore-based artists such as **Goliardo Padova, Mario Beltrami and Aldo Mario Aroldi** (who defined themselves as "The 3 of the Twentieth Century"), **Giuseppe Giacomo Gardani** and **Angelo Ablondi**, we find **Biazzi, Nodari Pesenti and Tegon**. Some works by Beltrami and Padua document the subsequent connection of these two authors with Milanese Chiarismo. These painters had a prominent place in the regional exhibitions of Lombardy in Milan in the Thirties. In the same years, the fortune of the graphic arts involved many local artists, but found its most representative figure in **Aldo Mario Aroldi**, xylographer and illustrator active above all in Milan, whose xylographs, books and work materials are exhibited here. One of his xylographs that portrays Filippo Tommaso Marinetti is here sided by an aerial painting by the futurist **Tullio Crali**, part of the De Marchi-Equisetto collection, while works by Vittori, Tosi, Bernasconi, Gaudenzi and Corradi, as well as the twentieth-century **aluminum bust of Leandra Mortara**, daughter of the collector, by the sculptor Michele Vedani, also come from the Mortara collection.

X/A - THE SECOND POST-WAR PERIOD AND THE THEME OF WORK

In this room, the theme of landscape - which became dominant in local painting in the twentieth century - is presented in various sections. In the first section, it is evident how the end of

the Second World War and the liberation of Italy determined a vital impulse in the artists, which translated into a **strongly expressive painting, with intense and textured colors**, focused on nature and landscape, that locally finds painters as different as Goliardo Padova, Tino Aroldi and Giuseppe Giacomo Gardani. But there is also the critical distance of their positions from the deep transformations in progress, accelerated by the "reconstruction", in particular in *Ruspa in terra di golena* (*Bulldozer in the floodplain land, 1957*) by Goliardo Padova, a work of alarmed denunciation.

In the second section, the theme of landscape meets that of work. In the Fifties and in the early Sixties, ethics and aesthetics of work were part of a cultural climate and an ideology that found expression and visibility in the **Suzzara Award**, in which the painters **Goliardo Padova** and **Tino Aroldi** and the sculptor **Ercole Priori** participated, through themes mainly related to the work on the river or to the presence of the first industries (the sugar refinery). However, among the painters of Casalmaggiore, there is a different focus of the theme, tending to elude the representation of the human figure, focused instead on the signs of anthropization and transformations of the landscape.

X/B - THE PO LANDSCAPE

The theme of water and the representation of the river Po impose itself in painting especially **after the great flood of 1951**, attracting the interest of local painters, also encouraged by the candidature of Casalmaggiore as the seat of a national painting prize on the theme of the Po (in May 1957 the first edition was held), a review that ensures a wider comparison and that sees a painting by **Orfeo Locatelli** from Bergamo awarded. On a local level, the painters **Mario Beltrami** and **Gianfranco Manara** were

particularly sensitive to the theme and, moving from different pictorial experiences, rediscovered a neo-impressionist language. Different is the case of **Tino Aroldi**, for whom counts more the romantic matrix that initially leads him to conceive sky and water in intimate fusion, then gradually to separate the elements catching them almost in a metaphysical vision, at the same time distant and internalized. With Tino Aroldi the study of the river landscape is deepened through research on the characteristic elements (a strip of sand, a patch of willows, a poplar grove in the distance) made with a few essential strokes, through the study of light, local color and the use of increasingly refined tones until the last paintings of 1997, in which a **landscape totally internalized, poised between idea and abstraction** imposes. On a different level, even the sculpture of Ercole Priori, an artist who was a friend and collaborator of Aroldi, while dealing with a social theme – that of the conflict between man and machine – shows a research inclined to the abstraction of forms.

X/C - ROOM WITH A VIEW: THE ARTIST'S ATELIER

With the exception of a *Self-portrait* by **Mario Beltrami** that closes the perspective of the room, the space is dedicated to the painter **Gianfranco Manara** and the **interior of his studio in Milan**. The corner of the studio with the folder of drawings, the presence of the model and the plaster cast are explicit references to a return to the profession through which the painter, a teacher at the Brera School of Craftsmen, stands in open contrast to contemporary artistic currents. But even if this polemical note finds direct expression in Manara's graphic production, his painting is dominated rather by an atmosphere of suspension and expectation which, despite the reassuring style, reveals the artist's restlessness and his anxiety about

death. The theme of **the artist's studio** - which in Manara is often combined with the self-portrait - is one of the strands around which the museological project of the Diotti Museum, set up in the house-atelier in which Giuseppe Diotti created his last works, has developed since the beginning. This theme is made tangible in this room through some tools and materials coming from **Tino Aroldi's studio**, but also three rooms of a wing on the ground floor are dedicated to it. They constitute the **"path of the ateliers"** and contain furniture, tools and materials that belonged to Goliardo Padova (*painter's atelier*), Palmiro Vezzoni (*sacred art atelier*) and Ercole Priori (*sculptor's atelier*).

XI - EXISTENTIAL REALISM AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

This room brings together works from the second half of the twentieth century that share a critical vision and at times a denunciation of reality and the human condition. Some of these works can be traced back to the so-called **Existential Realism**, which developed in the 1950s, when a group of Milanese artists (**Mino Ceretti, Bepi Romagnoni, Giuseppe Guerreschi, Tino Vaglieri, Giuseppe Banchieri, Floriano Bodini and Gianfranco Ferroni**) brought the human figure back to the center of their research, in a period in which, even in Italy, artistic tendencies towards abstraction and informal art dominated. The works of these artists (mostly coming from the collection of the sociologist **Danilo Montaldi** and integrated by further donations of the Cremonese intellectuals Maurizio Coppiardi and Gianfranco Fiameni) are characterized by the adoption of a crude, merciless language, which refers in part to German expressionism, as an instrument of testimony and reaction to the most painful events of those years, such as emigration from the countryside and from the South, the

explosion of urban suburbs, the tragedy of the Marcinelle miners or the Soviet invasion of Hungary. The choices of **Piero Del Giudice**, poet and art scholar, are also in continuity with this openness to "critical" figuration. His collection of paintings and graphics, indicative above all of the occasions of militant criticism aimed at gathering the "moods of Milan", was bequeathed in 2019 to the Museum of his city of origin. Here are documented both the prolific fellowship that Del Giudice entertained with Guerreschi and Vaglieri around the exchange between the image and the poetic word, and the production of his other cherished artists (**Giancarlo Ossola**, **Edmondo Dobrzanski** and **Renzo Ferrari**), which allows us to further broaden the discourse to contemporary times, by relating the same themes (the human condition, the discomfort of civilization, uprooting and the loss of housing, urban conflict and war) to other authors present in the Museum's collections, as well as to the language of photography, through the large panels that separate the various sections. Also noteworthy is an intense nucleus of works by artists from Sarajevo, such as **Mehemed Zaimović** and **Edin Numankadić**, whose "talking" cases are tuned in to the most dramatic aspects of the Balkan war that saw Del Giudice in the forefront, as a journalist and critic, documenting the massacre through the voices of writers, poets and artists.

Finally, the painters **Vittorio Magnani**, **Mario Pozzan** and the sculptor **Vincenzo Balena**, artists who, although not belonging to the group, shared its alarmed awareness of reality and some expressive choices, as well as the younger generations with **Matteo Bergamasco** and **Gianluca Ferrari**, present with a series of digital prints compared to Vaglieri's exercises in violence, dialogue with the historical nucleus of works of Existential Realism.

XII/A - ARCHIVE OF CONTEMPORARY ART

The contemporary collections of the Museum are mostly made up of the works that the Municipality of Casalmaggiore has acquired on the occasion of the exhibitions held from the first half of the 1990s until today. In the first section that concludes the twentieth-century path, two artists of different generations and training, **Elena Mezzadra** and **Marco Nereo Rotelli**, face each other through large pictorial surfaces characterized by a **refined research of space and light**. The paintings of Elena Mezzadra - an artist who has always worked in Milan and whose entire body of graphic work is in the possession of the Museum - are characterized by the intersection of chromatic planes generating a soft geometry, at times plotted with blades of light. In the large painting *Combustione blu* (*Blue combustion*) Rotelli expresses himself through the elaborate stratification of colored glass fibers, crossed by floating signs. The artist, from Casalmaggiore by adoption, is especially known for his large light installations made all over the world, in close connection with the verses of the greatest contemporary poets.

XII/B - ARCHIVE OF THE CONTEMPORARY ART

Between the end of the nineties and the first twenty years of the XXI century, new artistic researches in the Casalmaggiore and Cremona area, not separated from a renewed interest for the material culture and the palethnological roots, have based their different languages on the hybridization of techniques, on the reuse of poor materials, on the expressive resources of the textures of the "lived" surfaces, as in the paintings of **Gianna Zanafredi**, in **Fabrizio Merisi's** greetings and in particular in the reliefs of **Brunivo Buttarelli**, author also of the great sculpture *Primigenius* in wood and iron placed in the atrium of the

Museum and of the sculpture *Appeal to eternity* placed in the garden. No less singular is the artistic research of **Giorgio Tentolini**, where digital technologies are combined with a high level of manual-executive skill, aimed at probing the nature of images and the processes of vision.

In this section there are also works by **Franco Meneguzzo** that explore the resources of seriality and reproducibility of images and a testimony of the "visual music" of **Giuseppe Chiari**, a protagonist of the neo-avant-garde of the Fluxus area.

ARCHIVE OF CONTEMPORARY ART (BOOKSHOP AND DIDACTIC ROOM)

The Bookshop and the Didactic Room are also part of the museum itinerary. In the ticket office, in addition to some works by artists already encountered, such as Elena Mezzadra, Mario Pozzan and Giorgio Tentolini, there is a sculpture by **Italo Lanfredini**, works by **Giuliano Pescaroli**, **Danilo Aroldi**, **Andrea Visioli** and a light box by **Marco Lodola** dedicated to Casalmaggiore's excellence in rowing. In the didactic room there are paintings by **Giancarlo Bargoni**, **Luiso Sturla**, **Peter Casagrande**, **Stefanie Hoellering** and the sculpture by **Sandro Cherchi** that document the exhibition activity carried out in Casalmaggiore by the local delegation of the Association of Friends of Palazzo Te and Mantua's museums, next to other works mainly related to neo-informal art.

Alongside works by artists already encountered, such as Brunivo Buttarelli, Edin Numankadic and Renzo Ferrari, works by **Tiziana Priori**, **Antonella Pizzamiglio**, **Francesco Vitale**, **Giuseppe Pezzani**, **Chiara Federici** and a painting by **Franco Rossari**, the librarian who was the last "inhabitant" of Giuseppe Diotti's house, are exhibited here. Here he had created a space where he painted in his free time, while the reading rooms of the library were the natural exposition place in a singular

setting side by side to the historical heirlooms books, succulent plants and the most varied objects. To Rossari, to whose taste and sensitivity we owe the preservation of many paintings, documents and artifacts, the Museum has dedicated the space for temporary exhibitions, overlooking the garden.

PATH OF THE ATELIERS, ROSSARI SPACE, HISTORICAL PHARMACY

Beyond the Didactic Hall, continuing on the ground floor, you can access the path dedicated to the ateliers of Goliardo Padova, Palmiro Vezzoni and Ercole Priori and, finally, the Rossari Space where temporary exhibitions are held. In a reserved area of the Museum, accessible only on the occasion of guided tours or extraordinary openings, the **historical Pharmacy** of Casalmaggiore has been rearranged, with the intention of keeping together and enhancing the main nucleus of furniture bequeathed to the City of Casalmaggiore in 1936 by the pharmacist Francesco Marcheselli and remained in use in the Pharmacy of Piazza Garibaldi until 2015. In this environment, in a singular fusion of ancient and modern, have been placed a series of **ancient works of sacred art**, including a valuable *ancona* (XV century) perhaps from the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception, and a contemporary fund of **Mail Art** formed in 2015 with postcards made by postal artists from around the world, mainly dedicated to Casalmaggiore and the Diotti Museum.