

One Collection, One History

by Loris Manna

One is not born a collector and often does not become one without a little help from fate. This was the case with my collection. In the late 70s I went to a resale market, having decided to sell a few family belongings of nominal value. There I found a dealer who was offering a majolica by Giò Ponti (actually a fake), an Emerenziana su corde. I was enchanted by the elegance, delicacy and gracefulness of that little figurine, which seemed to be in flight. I decided then and there that I wanted to know the story of that marvelous object of art and its creator. Accordingly, I began a period of intense study and painstaking research that led not only to my collecting a great number of majolica, but also to my frequenting Richard-Ginori and its museum for a decade, eventually becoming one of the most highly qualified experts in the field.

Study and passion flowed together, leading to the establishment of one of the major existing collections, and to the writing of a text—*Giò Ponti, The Majolica*—a definitive work that is consistently cited and used as a touchstone on this subject. The passage from an interest in porcelain to Ponti the architect was quick. University courses in art history and time spent with gallery managers, collectors, critics and his family inspired me to create a house that would emanate Ponti's spirit, or rather, a house where everything would be furnished according to his ideal 'style', even if not necessarily using his pieces exclusively. I wanted to concoct a sort of container where the entire spectrum of Ponti's various artistic expressions in lighting and decorative objects would be present, and his approach to interior decoration would be manifest. I would display paintings that were in dialogue with these works, painted by artists I knew to be Ponti's

favorites through having read about them in his writing and above all having seen their works in the pages of *Domus* and *Stile*. Thus began a project lasting several decades. My collection incorporated the unique pieces Ponti produced for the decoration of bourgeois homes of the 30s and 40s in which he designed practically everything, from roof to foundation to interior, as well as his series pieces that have attained the status of design icon.

Most importantly though, the collection bears witness to the relationships Ponti had with artists, entrepreneurs, artisans and skilled workers of every type, highlighting the most significant: first and foremost his profitable and long-lasting relationship with Fontana Arte, but also his association with Cassina, Giordano Chiesa, Piero Fornasetti, Pietro Chiesa, Venini, etc. And so the great multicolor chandelier in blown glass that hung ‘above the head’ of the Milanese architect in his Liguria holiday home—a unique piece produced by Venini, acquired by the family and used as the model for a series that is ongoing—illuminates the dining room and a large rectangular table produced by Fontana Arte. Placed around the table are chairs, prototypes of the Superleggera, now considered a milestone in the history of design. And on one wall, taking part in this ‘conversation’ is a historic masterpiece by Massimo Campigli titled *Ice Cream Parlor*; Campigli’s stunning family portrait which is still in the Ponti home, is enough to remind us that he was the Milanese architect’s favorite artist.

In this room, Ponti’s world is center stage. The colors, brushwork and coarse grain of the canvas, the inevitable déjà vu of Campigli’s

Etruscan world, are mirrored in the delicate, warm chroma of Ponti's Murano blown glass, while everything freezes over and comes to a standstill in the monumental plane of the Ico Parisi table.

As in the other rooms, these are acts in a play created by a director and his best actors, some who are friends, others who are artists, all united by the classical ideal and a mutual respect. The large hall is the main act, divided in two by a perfect wing made from the great Sottsass bookcase that displays twelve majolica works. On the proscenium—formed by a pilaster—there is a lovely chest of drawers by Ponti, designed specifically for the Richter family. And then there are the coffee tables executed by Fontana Arte and Chiesa, a canvas by Carrà from 1929, by De Pisis from 1924, one by Guttuso from 1952, a piazza by De Chirico, a grand bookcase that is a superb example of the Ponti-Fornasetti partnership, along with large yellow 'Dalia' chandeliers and the abat-jour 'Pirellina' from 1936—lighting fixtures executed by Fontana Arte. Similar narratives are repeated in the successive rooms.

Now that the curtain has fallen, the house is empty and the collection dispersed, remaining within me is the memory of an infinite passion, a constant and determined pursuit of knowledge, an enthusiasm without end. The true souls of these objects will never die; they will remain always in my heart and within the walls of my home. But if the flux of life, as Heraclites said, is continuous and eternal, then new interests will come along, new stimuli, new 'worlds.' The vital thing is that the flame of understanding never be extinguished.