



PAVING THE WAY TO NEW ART

The collection built by Achille Maramotti during his lifetime never ceases to expand. **Alexandra Owens** considers the fashion magnate's legacy.



(Above) Anselm Kiefer's *Buch (The Secret Life of Plants)*, 2002, in Collezione Maramotti's permanent collection.

(Opposite) A view of the 2015 group show *Industriale Immaginario*: Carl Ostendarp's painting *Constancy to an Ideal Object*, 1991, and Kaarina Kaikkonen's *From Generation to Generation*, 2001, with men's jackets.

Whether in art or fashion, Achille Maramotti (1927–2005), founder of the upmarket ready-to-wear company Max Mara, preferred to follow his own vision rather than passing trends. His appreciation for aesthetics and admiration of other creative souls made him a passionate collector of post-war and contemporary art. His success allowed him to approach collecting as he did his business, building something beautiful to share with the widest possible audience. Collezione Maramotti, housed in the former Max Mara headquarters in Reggio Emilia – a town in the northern Italian province of Emilia-Romagna, away from the country's art and fashion capitals – manifests the entrepreneur-collector's philosophy. Now celebrating its tenth anniversary, the collection counts more than 1,000 works dating from 1945 to the present, about 200 of which are on display, and, according to its founder's wishes, does not charge admission.

"The idea was simple," says Collezione Maramotti director Marina Dacci: "To share the emotional and

conceptual richness that art can offer, both as a look at our current time and as a foreshadowing of the future." That intention shines through the collection's core holdings – Arte Povera, Transavanguardia, Art Informel, New Geometry and Neo-Expressionism – which all belong to periods of daring experimentation and bold individuality. Now firmly established in the canon of 20th-century art, these movements were at the vanguard when Maramotti began collecting in the mid-1960s, a decade or so after he started his business.

"Maramotti's interest was to acquire the works of artists who, although not yet famous and established on the market, were developing and innovative," Dacci explains. His first acquisition was an early painting by Alberto Burri, who would build his career around unorthodox collage techniques and materials. Similarly, most other names in the collection – no matter how boldface – are represented by pieces from the beginning of their careers or from particularly exploratory phases. Purchasing what he found compelling, Maramotti was initially drawn to Burri and other Italian artists such as Piero Manzoni and Lucio Fontana, both of

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GABRIELE MICALIZZI/CEISURA, COURTESY COLLEZIONE MARAMOTTI, REGGIO EMILIA

“ONE OF OUR MOST IMPORTANT ACTIVITIES IS COMMISSIONING PROJECTS FROM ARTISTS OF INTEREST,” SAYS COLLEZIONE MARAMOTTI DIRECTOR MARINA DACCI.



whom were radically reconceptualising monochrome painting. Over the years, the collector expanded outside his native country into contemporary American and international art, discovering creators who embodied the same pioneering spirit, including Cy Twombly, Anselm Kiefer, Francis Bacon and Gerhard Richter.

As his holdings grew, so did Maramotti’s desire to share them with his community. While he often displayed works in his offices to foster a creative environment within the thriving business, he also dreamed of reaching a larger audience. The solution lay in opening a private museum – but where?

When Max Mara outgrew its headquarters and prepared to relocate to a brand-new, nearby building in 2003, the answer presented itself: the collection would be housed in the company’s original 1957 building, designed by architects Antonio Pastorini and Eugenio Salvarani. Taking advantage of the superb natural light and industrial, almost sculptural interior features, British architect Andrew Hapgood converted the offices into expansive galleries for the Collezione Maramotti, which opened its doors in 2007.

Eventually, curators ventured into new initiatives, such as a programme of temporary exhibitions and artist commissions, for which the versatile ground-floor space proved an ideal setting. “One of our most important activities is commissioning projects from artists of interest,” says Dacci, who adds that “they are given creative freedom and support for their research. It’s not a mere purchasing of artworks.” In the past decade, several of these commissions have been acquired for the permanent collection, which is continually evolving and expanding.

But Collezione Maramotti had taken steps to grow even before the building opened: in 2005, in collaboration with London’s Whitechapel Gallery and Max Mara, it launched the Max Mara Art Prize for Women, a biannual award given to an emerging female artist working in the United Kingdom. Recipients are awarded a six-month residency in Italy, culminating in exhibitions at Whitechapel and Collezione Maramotti, after which the collection acquires the project.



“For the past twelve years, the prize has allowed artists to take their work into new directions,” says Daniel F Herrmann, head of curatorial studies at Whitechapel Gallery. “We are thrilled that through the prize we can offer an artist the gift of time, space and flexibility.” The recipient of the prize’s sixth edition, Emma Hart, will unveil her large-scale installation *Mamma Mia!* at Whitechapel on 17 July, before it moves to Collezione Maramotti on 15 October. (Past winners include Margaret Salmon, Hannah Rickards, Andrea Büttner, Corin Sworn and Laure Prouvost, who went on to receive the 2013 Turner Prize.)

The award goes hand in hand with Max Mara’s identity as a brand for women, as well as the collection’s history of supporting innovation and new talent. “The prize seeks to encourage female creativity, specifically in a scenario where women artists don’t yet have the same space and opportunities

(Above) A view of Emma Hart’s *Giving It All That*, her installation at the Folkestone Triennial, 2014.

PHOTOGRAPH BY THERRY BAL. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND FOLKESTONE TRIENNIAL. OPPOSITE: © ANDREA PEFARI, COURTESY COLLEZIONE MARAMOTTI.

as their male colleagues,” Dacci explains. The London-based Hart is well aware of the gender imbalance in the art world. “Prizes like this give artists an important boost at a critical moment in their careers,” she says. “Even if it can’t fix the inequality, it has importantly got us all talking.” (Fittingly, Hart’s winning multimedia project is centred around language.) Engaging in such conversations about contemporary art and how it relates to the world is consistent with Maramotti’s vision, Dacci explains: “Art is a living organism embodying the spirit of its time. Now more than ever, this continuum is extremely important.” Achille Maramotti himself could not have put it better.

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The Max Mara Art Prize for Women: Emma Hart, on view 12 July–3 September at Whitechapel Gallery, London, opens 15 October at the Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia.

FOUND IN TRANSLATION

EMMA HART, WINNER OF THE SIXTH MAX MARA ART PRIZE FOR WOMEN



Emma Hart during her Italian residency.

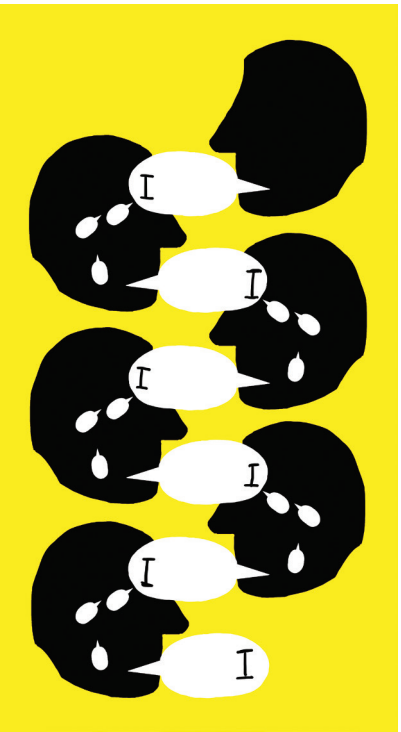
London-based Emma Hart works across multiple disciplines, employing ceramics, photography, video and sound to channel her uncensored sensibility into expressive installations. “My work is in pursuit of ‘the real,’” says the 42-year-old Hart: “Real life, real feelings, real autobiographical details. Rather than making sense of the world, I want art to generate the confusion, stress and nausea of the everyday.”

As the latest recipient of the biannual Max Mara Art Prize for Women – a collaboration between Collezione Maramotti, Whitechapel Gallery and Max Mara – Hart will be showing *Mamma Mia!*, a large-scale, multipart installation of ceramic heads. Covered with speech-bubble motifs and featuring open mouths as if in conversation with one another, the ceramic heads are meant to be an investigation into visual and psychological patterns of behaviour.

For Whitechapel head of curatorial studies Daniel F Herrmann, Hart’s project is “really a tongue-in-cheek play on British expectations of Italian culture. ‘Mamma mia!’ can be an expression of joy, anger, surprise, incredulity – it depends on the relationship between the speaker and the one who is spoken to, and the

situation they are in,” Herrmann explains. “It’s perfect for Emma’s interest in the ways that people deal with one another.”

Completed during the six-month residency in Italy afforded by the Max Mara prize, the work took Hart to three different cities. In Milan, she visited the clinic named for pioneering psychologist Mara Selvini Palazzoli, who studied families, relationships and the physical spaces between people. In Todi, the artist designed a pattern for a plate to make custom prints. Finally, with master potters in the ceramics capital of Faenza, Hart created a series of handmade sculptures. The resulting installation of large ceramic heads “suggests a family in dialogue,” says Collezione Maramotti director Marina Dacci, and may also be seen as a representation of what Hart observed in the Mara Selvini Palazzoli clinic in Milan: “I understood that sometimes the family is a structure that can either support you or cage you,” the artist explains. Words to the wise. —AO



Emma Hart’s *///*, 2017.