

The First Woman Art Critic: Margherita Sarfatti, the Biennales, Futurism, and Italian Exhibitions Worldwide (Including Latvia)

a lecture by :

Guicciardo Sassoli de' Bianchi Strozzi

✦ - an art critic and historian, exhibition
organiser, and curator, specialising in the
history of art criticism and cultural diplomacy



The Art Academy of Latvia
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 Art Academy
of Latvia



Embassy of Italy
Riga

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Margherita Grassini Sarfatti (1880-1961)

a journalist, art critic and patron of avant-garde artists. A Venetian of Jewish origin, she began her career as an art journalist in the early twentieth century with reviews of the Venice Biennale, the first woman to do so for art columns in Italian newspapers. During the 1910s, she consolidated her relationship with the Futurist group led by Marinetti, whom she met every Wednesday in her Milanese salon in Corso Venezia. She played a fundamental role in the promotion of Umberto Boccioni and the Futurists, and was among the first Italian critics to recognise the importance of Expressionism and the European avant-gardes.



She played a crucial role in the Italian art world between the wars as an art critic and by promoting the Novecento group. This circle included several of the leading artists of the time, such as Mario Sironi, Achille Funi and Adolfo Wildt, and operated under the aegis of a 'return to order' and a 'new classicism'. Sarfatti was very influential thanks also to her relationship with Benito Mussolini, from whom she gradually distanced herself during the 1930s. The paper also considers the foreign exhibitions of Novecento, which helped launch a broader wave of international shows of Italian art, leading to significant outcomes such as the exhibitions held in Riga, and the conflicts between Futurism and Novecento when both tried to establish themselves as hegemonic art movement in the Fascist State. Using documents from the Fondo Sarfatti at MART, Rovereto, this presentation explores Sarfatti's activity within the Futurist ambit in the 1910s, her relationship with Marinetti, her campaign for the Novecento group in the 1920s, and the tensions between these two movements in the cultural politics of Fascist Italy.

✦ Guicciardo Sassoli de' Bianchi Strozzi



an art critic and historian, exhibition organiser, and curator, specialising in the history of art criticism and cultural diplomacy. Following extensive field research conducted with the University of Bologna and academic institutions in Europe, North and South America, and China, he has built an important archive of twentieth-century art criticism and related sources.

He curates and organises publications and international exhibition projects worldwide through his studio and the cultural association Nuova Artemarea, of which he is President and Scientific Director. In the early phase of his career, he was also an entrepreneur in the Oil & Gas sector, collaborating with leading companies including Eni S.p.A., Butangas S.p.A., and Liquigas S.p.A.

He works as a consultant and chief curator for exhibitions within major cultural diplomacy projects promoted by museums, Italian Embassies and Institutes of Culture worldwide, and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. He collaborates with institutions and universities such as the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, the Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani, the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz - Max Planck Institute, the University of Bologna, and museums including the Uffizi Galleries and Museo Stibbert (Florence), GNAMC and MAXXI (Rome), the Civic Museums of Bologna and Venice, the Museo Poldi Pezzoli (Milan), MART (Rovereto), the Latvian National Museum of Art, the China Academy of Art (Hangzhou), the Shandong Museum, the Art Museum of the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, and the Tianjin Museum. He has been invited to deliver keynote lectures, conferences, and university courses at institutions including the Estorick Collection (London), Accademia di Brera (Milan), University Federico II (Naples), University of Messina, University of Pisa, the Italian Institutes of Culture in New York, Beijing, and Madrid, and the Embassy of Italy in Lithuania.

He is the author of more than forty scholarly publications (De Gruyter, Treccani, among others), translated into several languages, focusing on the history of art criticism and comparative art history - from the Renaissance to the early twentieth century and contemporary art - as well as on the history of architecture and global art history. He has curated more than thirty exhibitions and related catalogues in Italy, the United States, Argentina, Latvia, Lithuania, Spain, and China.

His academic training includes research on the transition from the sixteenth century to the Early Baroque under Professors Andrea Bacchi and Daniele Benati; studies in the phenomenology of art with Professor Renato Barilli; and a thesis on the twentieth-century reception of Raphael under Marzia Faietti. Another major area of his research concerns the history of Futurism, the international avant-gardes, and the history of the Venice Biennale. In 2018, he collaborated with MART in Rovereto, co-curating the historical sections, archival research, and catalogue contents of two exhibitions dedicated to the art critic Margherita Sarfatti.





He also collaborated with Marzia Faietti and Gerhard Wolf in the organisation of the CIHA (Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art) World Congress held in Florence in 2019, as well as the CIHA Workshop in Bologna in 2024. In 2021, he curated the catalogue for the exhibition Self-Reflection: Omar Galliani, Lorenzo Puglisi, Tintoretto, held at the Art Museum Riga Bourse in collaboration with the Uffizi Galleries. In the same year, at the invitation of Eike D. Schmidt, he authored the texts for the permanent Uffizi galleries dedicated to the artists of the Renaissance Este court.

He subsequently curated the exhibition The Centenary Triptych. Leonardo 1919, Raphael 1920, Dante 1921 at Villa Farnesina in Rome, inaugurating the celebrations for the seventh centenary of Dante Alighieri for the Accademia dei Lincei, chaired by Nobel Prize laureate Giorgio Parisi. The exhibition was later presented in Beijing, Chongqing, and Tianjin (2023), marking the first time that over 300 selected Italian artworks and documents were exhibited in China.

In 2024, he curated the new permanent exhibition at the Italian Embassy in Lithuania, Art in the Embassy: Contemporary Italy in Vilnius. In the same year, he co-curated and coordinated A Journey of Knowledge. "The Travels" of Marco Polo and Their Legacy East and West at the China World Art Museum in Beijing, in collaboration with Treccani, serving as the official spokesperson for the exhibition during the state visits of the Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni (29 July 2024) and the President of the Italian Republic Sergio Mattarella (8 November 2024). The exhibition subsequently travelled to Chengdu (Sichuan Museum) and Hangzhou (China Academy of Art Museum). He is the chief curator of Light from Italy. From Fattori to Morandi, held at the Latvian National Museum of Art in Riga (4 July-30 November 2025), and of The Cascella Family. Beyond Time, presented at the Italian Institute of Culture in Madrid (24 September 2025-17 January 2026), both accompanied by catalogues published by Treccani. He currently directs the curatorial programme for contemporary art collections, residencies, and exhibitions of the Italian Embassy in Beijing as part of the Sviluppo del Contemporaneo project.

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