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Maria, Medea e le altre: I volti ambivalenti della madre.
**Feminist re-articulations of the representation of maternity in
the 20th century Italy.**

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ABSTRACT

This research project investigates the connections between visual culture and feminist movements through representations of maternity made by women. The thesis considers a period that runs from the foundation of the Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane, in 1903, to the year following the 1981 referendums on the Law 194, which disciplines the modalities of access to abortion. Over this period, the representation of maternity was a battlefield where different models of womanhood fought each other.

The specific focus of the thesis is not on images made by women *qua women*, but rather on images that activists, understood as women involved with feminist movements in the 20th century, produced and disseminated. Hence, the research aims at exploring which role images played in the process of redefinition of maternity as a specifically female experience to be explored on the level of self-representations and transformation.

The thesis includes four chapters, each one corresponding to a different historical period: the beginning of the century, the Fascist period, the post-war period and the 'long 1970s' (1968-1983). Speaking of feminism throughout such a long time span is to embrace a richness and diversity of dissent, including historical moments during which the feminist movement was weaker or non-existent. In these instances, the focus has been widened in order to research spaces of women organization. The question whether these could be considered truly autonomous is one of the issues that this research addresses. In conclusion, the thesis aims at bringing forth continuities and discontinuities, repetition and difference of Italian feminist visual culture in the 20th century.

CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

In 2016 Beatrice Lorenzin, the Italian Ministry of Health, organized a “Fertility Day,” an awareness-raising day dedicated to sensitizing public opinion to the Italian falling birth rate and to issues related to fertility. The initiative was aimed, in the Ministry’s words, “to increase particularly in young people knowledge about their reproductive health and provide useful tools in order to safeguard fertility through prevention, early diagnosis and treatment of diseases that can affect it.”¹ The campaign was accompanied by explicit images urging women to reflect upon their reproductive powers. One of them, for example, captured a woman caressing her belly and holding a sand timer with the caption “Beauty knows no age. Fertility does” (fig. 1). Following a strong disapproval of the campaign at a national and international level, the images were withdrawn from the website and the ministry apologized for their content. Yet, Lorenzin reiterated her support to the initiative.²

Without making easy parallels between this initiative and maternity policies from other historical periods,³ it is interesting noting how the campaign images seemed to carry a much bigger weight than the words used to describe the initiative on the Ministry’s website. The way maternity had been represented in the images urging women to become mothers provoked strong reactions, proving the claims that images can be powerful in their own right and that, despite “the interaction of pictures and texts

¹ Information on the Fertility Day can be found on the website of the Ministry. Available at http://www.salute.gov.it/portale/news/p3_2_2_1_1.jsp?lingua=italiano&menu=eventi&p=daeventi&id=431 (accessed June 1, 2019).

² Monica Rubino, “Fertility Day, Renzi: ‘Campagna inguardabile’. Lorenzin: ‘Basta polemiche, contano i fatti,’” *Repubblica*, September 22, 2016. Available at https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2016/09/22/news/fertility_day_al_via_proteste_piazza-148297333/ (accessed November 10, 2017).

³ The images were defined not only “sexist,” but “echoes of a fascist past” by Annalisa Coppolaro-Nowell, “Italy’s fertility day posters aren’t just sexist—they’re echoes of a fascist past,” *The Guardian*, September 5, 2016. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/05/italys-fertility-day-posters-sexist-echoes-of-fascist-past> (accessed November 10, 2017).

is constitutive of representation as such,” images and language differ on many levels.⁴ Yet, the reaction to those pictures also proves, according to me, the centrality of the representation of maternity in the Italian society. This awareness is at the hearth of this research. Following in the footsteps of a feminist tradition aimed at politicising representations of women’s bodies and claiming agency over self-representation, in both the artistic as well as cultural and political arenas,⁵ my research focuses on *representations* of maternity and on their production.

1.2 Aim and scope of the thesis

The main purpose of this research is to investigate representations of maternity made by women involved with the feminist movements of 20th century Italy as sites where issues of representation, cultural diversity and sexual difference or identity have been problematized and visually represented. In Western visual culture, motherhood has been a recurrent theme, and an image with enormous cultural resonance, shaped for centuries on the model of the Christian figure of the Virgin Mary.⁶ Maternity was used to control women and impose on them a supposed natural structure and a normalized order of power throughout the 20th century. This included, for example, the religious model of woman destined for maternity by nature and God⁷ but also the

⁴ William John Thomas Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), 5. The same author defined “textuality” a significant other and a rival mode of representation to “imagery.” See William John Thomas Mitchell, *Iconology: image, text, ideology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1987), 3. On the relationship between images and language see also Roland Barthes, *Image music text*, transl. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1984).

⁵ See for instance Amelia Jones, ed., *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, *Reclaiming female agency. Feminist art history after postmodernism* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California press, 2005); Linda Nochlin, *Representing Women* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999); Lynda Hardt and Peggy Phelan, eds., *Acting Out: Feminist Performances* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993).

⁶ Timothy Verdon, ed., *Picturing Mary: woman, mother, idea* (New York: Scala Arts Publishers: National Museum of Women in the Arts, 2014).

⁷ Francesca Koch, “La madre di famiglia nell’esperienza sociale cattolica,” in *Storia della maternità*, ed. D’Amelia, 239-272.

prolific mother in the service of the Fascist regime.⁸ Yet, as underlined by Marina D'Amelia in her pioneering study including different perspectives on the history of motherhood in Italy, historians showed a late interest in this key topic.⁹

At the same time, maternity has been a key issue in feminist discourses, which tried to add different and deepest layers of meaning to a definition reducing it to a biological and natural fact. In the 1970s the relationship between feminism and maternity has been ambivalent. First perceived as the symbolic site of women's subjugation, it later became part of a broader discourse claiming the right to independent decisions over sexuality and reproduction and of a more general women's empowerment. Yet, at the beginning of the 20th century maternity played a much different role and was even at the core of the first feminist movement's claims.

In 1976 *Of Woman Born* Adrienne Rich examined for the first time motherhood "in a social context as embedded in a political institution: in feminist terms."¹⁰ In a similar way, the thesis focuses on images of maternity used within the feminist movements in order to reinforce or disrupt prevailing maternal ideals. It explores the ways in which these images mirrored fluctuations internal to the movements and were produced by, and produced, women's identities. I argue that these images, disseminated through feminist journals and displayed in feminist or non-feminist exhibitions, are suffused with political meanings. They have been central to the process of re-appropriation through which women involved with feminist movements have reshaped the definition of maternity itself. This claim might seem banal in relation to the 1970s new feminism. However, it carries a different weight in relation to the emancipationism and moderate feminism at the beginning of the century and, even if in a much more ambivalent way, to the development of women's activities during

⁸ See, for example, Piero Meldini, *Sposa e madre esemplare: ideologia e politica della donna e della famiglia durante il fascismo* (Firenze: Guaraldi, 1975).

⁹ Marina D'Amelia, introduction to *Storia della maternità*, ed. Marina D'Amelia (Roma: Laterza, 1997), vi. Another important study about the early modern period is Giovanna Fiume, ed., *Madri. Storia di un ruolo sociale* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1995). On the perception of the stereotype of the Italian mother inside and outside the national borders see Penelope Morris and Perry Wilson, eds., *La mamma. Interrogating a National Stereotype* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

¹⁰ Adrienne Rich wrote these words in 1986 in the foreword to a new edition of *Of Woman Born: motherhood as experience and institution* (New York: Norton & company, 1986), ix.

the Fascist regime. The thesis proposes a reconsideration of these periods aimed at showing their centrality in the development of a feminist visual culture.

The notion of “involvement” that I refer to will be clearer after the definition of feminism used throughout the thesis will be clarified. Yet, it is enough to say here that I do not intend to provide an ultimate understanding of what this involvement is. It is a concept difficult to pinpoint not only in different historical periods but also in the same timeframe, as proved by a recent investigation of the concept of militancy as key to the understanding of the relationships between artists and feminism in the 1970s. By describing the activity of the *Cooperativa Beato Angelico*, the *group XX* and the *group Donne/Imagine/Collettività*, Marta Seravalli proves how the involvement of these groups with the contemporary feminist movement was very varied, despite all of them were influenced by it.¹¹

The second aim of the thesis, to some extent introductory to the first one since it provides the frame within which some images have been analysed, has been to fill a gap in the research about women artists and the first feminist movement in Italy. As Deborah Cherry has rightly noticed, there has been an assumption in art history that feminist interventions in art and its literatures began around the 1970s. In *Beyond the frame: feminism and visual culture, Britain 1850-1900* she tried to correct this misconception. By looking at a variety of materials, including art works, prints, embroidery and comic drawings, she explored the links between feminism, visual culture and power in the Victorian age Britain.¹² In Italy the connections between art and feminism have been researched in particular in the 1970s in works such as Marta Seravalli's *Arte e femminismo a Roma negli anni Settanta* or Raffaella Perna's *Arte, fotografia e femminismo in Italia negli anni Settanta*.¹³

¹¹ Marta Seravalli, “Separare l’arte. La militanza come strumento di lettura dei rapporti tra le artiste e il femminismo degli anni Settanta,” in *Arte fuori dall’arte. Incontri e scambi fra arti visive e società negli anni Settanta*, AA. VV. (Milano: Postmediabooks, 2017), 59-65.

¹² Deborah Cherry, *Beyond the frame: feminism and visual culture, Britain 1850-1900* (London: Routledge, 2000). Other contributions on the same topic are Rosemary Betteerton, “Women Artists, modernity and suffrage cultures in Britain and Germany 1890-1920,” in *Women artists and Modernism*, ed. Katy Deepwell (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Lisa Tickner, *The spectacle of women: imagery of the suffrage campaign, 1907-14* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

¹³ Marta Seravalli, *Arte e femminismo a Roma negli anni Settanta* (Roma: Biblink, 2013); Raffaella Perna, *Arte, fotografia e femminismo in Italia negli anni Settanta* (Milano: Postmedia

Meanwhile, a similar research focusing on last century's early years is still missing. Despite recent attempts to rediscover women's presence in the artistic sphere at the time,¹⁴ no effort has been made to investigate women artists' biographies in search of a possible political commitment. These studies often mention artists' political and social engagement only in passing, as side activities and minor aspects of their biographies. It is interesting to note that, for example, Maria Antonietta Trasforini speaks of the political involvement of English women artists, like Barbara Bodichon and Anna Mary Howitt, with the 19th century feminist movement and considers their art "openly militant."¹⁵ Yet, there has not been an interest to explore this topic in the Italian area. On the contrary, I argue that the political activity carried out by some artists cannot be considered a minor element of their biographies and should be taken into consideration in order to analyse their artworks. Hence, drawing on unpublished documents from the Archivio Storico dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera in Milan and on contemporary journals, I explore the connections between arts, visual culture and feminist movement at the beginning of the century. These become the framework within which images, artworks and exhibitions are examined.

Finally, the thesis offers new research on little known artists and artworks. In a recent publication about Maria Ippoliti, one of the artists discussed in chapter one, Isabella Reale speaks of the oblivion of her work as a destiny common to many other artists of the 19th century, who did not manage to enter the market system and, thus, have been forgotten.¹⁶ Reale does not mention the obstacles that, as a woman artist, Ippoliti likely had to face nor hints at the fact that her destiny has been shared by many women artists. On the contrary, the approach to the work of women artists who have been forgotten needs a consideration of the specific conditions in which they worked and the acknowledgment of the

Books, 2013). It was also the subject of the recent exhibition *Il Soggetto Imprevisto. 1978. Arte e Femminismo in Italia*, organized between April 4, 2019 and May 26, 2019 at FM Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea in Milan and curated by Raffaella Perna and Marco Scotini.

¹⁴ Pier Paolo Pancotto, *Artiste a Roma nella prima metà del '900* (Roma: Palombi Editore, 2006); Pier Paolo Pancotto and Elena Lazzarini, eds., *A.i.20: artiste in Italia nel ventesimo secolo* (Prato: Gli Ori, 2004).

¹⁵ Maria Antonietta Trasforini, *Nel segno delle artiste. Donne, professioni d'arte e modernità* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007), 67.

¹⁶ Isabella Reale, *Maria Ippoliti (Udine, 1861-Pordenone, 1932): una pioniera del paesaggio en plein air* (Udine: Comune di Udine: Gamud-Galleria d'arte moderna, 2009), 5.

oblivion they were often driven into because considered a priori uninteresting.

The thesis often refers to artworks, even if it is not exclusively interested in art. On the contrary, it looks at various materials including photos, drawings, posters, illustrated magazines as parts of a visual culture in which women turned from objects to subjects. The thesis is particularly interested in representations of maternity in magazines. Scholars have researched feminist publications since the 1970s in order to investigate the feminist movement's origins. The first studies were general introductions to map the field, but also explored magazines as sources of information.¹⁷ Despite they have proved to be very useful in this same way also in the course of this research, especially for the first and second chapters,¹⁸ they are here considered in particular as expressions of the politics of women, in the way described by Ida Dominijanni in *La politica nelle riviste delle donne*.¹⁹ All elements of feminist publications, their contents and how they were prioritized, but also structure, images and graphics, contributed to convey the point of view that, from time to time, was the expression of a section of the movement. This sometimes created frictions among the different groups, which reflected the multiplicity of definitions that go under the general umbrella of feminisms in the 20th century. The selection of the magazines to analyse has proved challenging because it was very difficult to define which ones could be considered feminist in the different historical periods examined. In an interesting book published in 1975 Giovanna Pezzuoli explored the iconic and linguistic strategies used by women's magazines to stimulate readers to identify with the proposed model of institutionalized

¹⁷ This is the case, for example, of Franca Pieroni Bortolotti, *Alle origini del movimento femminile in Italia, 1848-1892* (Torino: Einaudi, 1962). On the role played by magazines and journalists during the first feminist movement see Gaetanina Sicari Ruffo, *Il voto alle donne. La lunga lotta per il suffragio femminile tra l'Ottocento e il Novecento* (Roma: Mond&editori, 2009), 87-104; Annarita Buttafuoco, *Cronache femminili: temi e momenti della stampa emancipazionista in Italia dall'Unità al Fascismo* (Arezzo: Dipartimento di studi storico-sociali e filosofici. Università degli studi di Siena, 1988). See also Annarita Buttafuoco, "'Sprezza chi ride'. Politica e cultura nei periodici del movimento di emancipazione in Italia," *DWF*, no. 21 (1982): 7-34.

¹⁸ Due to a lack of biographical and bibliographical information, contemporary journals have proved an invaluable source of information.

¹⁹ Ida Dominijanni and Roberta Tatafiore, eds., *La politica nella rivista delle donne* (Parma: Biblioteca delle donne Mauretta Pelagatti, 1995).

femininity.²⁰ Besides that, she looked at the magazine *Effe* to discuss what features a real feminist publication should have. If in the text the magazine was praised as a valid attempt to denounce women's conditions and contribute to the discussions and proposals coming from the movement, Pezzuoli expressed a different opinion in a note added at a later time. Here, she criticized the ambiguity and the limits of *Effe*, which she defined a "magazine of information and counter-information, but not of the movement."²¹ On the contrary, she praised *Sottosopra*, real expression of feminist life and politics. With that being said, the thesis focuses on *La Donna*, *Almanacco della donna italiana*, *Effe* and *Quotidiano Donna* as privileged sites of investigation of a visual culture related to feminisms.

Focusing on images of maternity made by women, even if restricting the field to women involved with feminist movements, brings with it a risk of essentializing them. Griselda Pollock reflects upon the problems of a project directed only to women artists, pointing out the importance of historical specificity.²² An interesting essay that reflects upon the problematic relationship between different generations of feminists in historiography, and that made me reflect upon my own approach to the material, is Annarita Buttafuoco's *On 'mothers' and 'sisters'. Fragments on women/feminism/historiography*.²³ Here Buttafuoco emphasizes the importance of building women's historical memory and claims the political meaning of historical research. This does not only build knowledge about women in the past, but plays a key role in building a possible future. The feminist historian, though, also reflects on feminist historiography's relativism and on its dependency on the point of view of the observer. Hence, she identifies two typologies of historiography. One looks at women

²⁰ Giovanna Pezzuoli, *La stampa femminile come ideologia* (Milano: Edizioni il formichiere, 1975). The author analysed weekly magazines, such as *Amica*, *Annabella*, *Confidenze*, *Gioia*, *Grazia*, *Intimità*, and *Arianna*, later *Cosmopolitan-Arianna*, published monthly, between November 1972 and April 1973 and again between January 1974 and April 1974.

²¹ Pezzuoli, *La stampa femminile*, 131.

²² Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desires and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 33.

²³ Annarita Buttafuoco, "On 'mothers' and 'sisters'. Fragments on women/feminism/historiography," in *The lonely Mirror. Italian Perspectives on feminist theory*, eds. Sandra Kemp and Paola Bono (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), 170-185. It was originally published as "Di 'madrì' e di 'sorelle'. Frammenti su donne, femminismo, storiografia," *Nuova DWF*, no. 15 (1981): 89-104.

only as victims. Another, instead, looks at them always as rebels and leads to an overinterpretation of women's initiatives and networks. For this reason, she emphasizes the importance of carefully using terms like *feminism*, *awareness*, *organization* and *social cause*. Therefore, Buttafuoco suggests to carefully avoid imposing a different point of view or overinterpreting the attitudes of the women studied so as not to build a biased collective memory. A similar discourse, in the visual culture, is proposed by Donna Haraway when she urges the critic of visual images to reflect upon its own position.²⁴

The thesis involves two kinds of approach, critical and historical. Considering the time frame investigated, the thesis necessarily deals with issues born out of generational gaps. However, despite looking at images made by women, it does not suggest that there is a fixed ahistorical category of women neither a specific female, fixed and common to all the images analysed. On the contrary, following the words of Katia Ricci, my aim is to discover "traces of subjectivity" that stands for "an historically variable feminine and in any case outside of canons."²⁵ I share Ricci's definition of female experience as a place from which it is possible to look at the relationship with the world and between women and men.²⁶

The thesis has its own partialities: the omission, for example, of the women active in the avant-gardes. The reasons behind this exclusion will be clarified in the next paragraphs. However, the scope of the thesis is not to provide a comprehensive and exhaustive overview of a supposed women's visual culture. Rather, it looks at selected images in order to highlight continuities and discontinuities, repetition and difference of feminist visual culture of the 20th century.

²⁴ Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), 190.

²⁵ Katia Ricci, "A scuola con Mary Cassatt," in *Matrice. Pensiero delle donne e pratiche artistiche*, ed. Donatella Franchi (Milano: Libreria delle donne di Milano, 2004), 43.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

1.3 Research questions

Given the aims and the scope of the research, the following questions are at the centre of my exploration of the relationships between visual culture, maternity and feminist movements in the 20th century Italy:

How was maternity represented by women involved with feminist movements in the 20th century Italy?

Which role did images play in the feminist movements and how did this change along the century?

What kind of places can be defined feminist in the different historical periods taken into consideration?

The research ultimately tries to respond to the question whether images of maternity made by women might be looked at as part of a political project of shifting cultural representations. Can they be read as visual interventions in the maternal status quo?

1.4 Methodology

I interrogate visual representations of maternity from different historical moments by putting them into their historical, social and cultural context. I followed an inductive approach. After a broader screening of the sources, I selected single images or groups of images that I found interesting. Then, I tried to detect some patterns in the use of the selected instances. The readings proposed oscillate between past and present. I tried to approach the images using a “critical visual methodology”²⁷ and mixing some content and discourse analysis.

²⁷ Rose Gillian, *Visual methodologies: an introduction to the interpretation of visual materials* (London: Sage, 2001), 15.

Visual culture draws from different models of examining visual representations, including methodologies developed in the disciplines of art history and films studies. This interdisciplinarity is mirrored also in this thesis. I rely on what Enrico Crispolti has defined “horizontal perspective.” In *Come studiare l’arte contemporanea*, introduced as a methodological tool for the study of contemporary art, he claims that there is not methodological difference in the approach to old and contemporary art. Nevertheless, the latter requires a particular attention to the archival sources and what he calls a horizontal perspective. This is described in the first of his six lessons on issues of methodology, on historiography of contemporary art. Differently from the vertical perspective, looking at works over an extended period of time, the horizontal one implies the need for the researcher to look at his subject of interest as a contemporary witness. Thus, this is an up-close perspective that, according to Crispolti, sets a correct proportion of values and relationships since it facilitates a better understanding of the period and of the circulation of works at the time.²⁸ According to Crispolti, only thanks to this perspective and to the real understanding of the context of the work that facilitates, it is possible to encounter and appreciate also minor events, such as, during the Fascist period, the exhibitions of the syndicate.²⁹

1.5 Women’s archives

The search for the materials has been one of the most challenging aspects of the research, as the archives of women’s movements and women artists are dispersed and fragmentary. If an increased awareness of the importance to preserve materials related to the feminist movement in order to build its historical memory eventually resulted in the creation of specialised women’s archives,³⁰ researches focused on the first half of the century face a disappointing lack of sources. The material is often

²⁸ Enrico Crispolti, *Come studiare l’arte contemporanea* (Roma: Donzelli, 1997), 33-39.

²⁹ Enrico Crispolti, “Una rilettura non inopportuna,” in *Arte e Stato. Le Esposizioni sindacali nelle Tre Venezie (1927 – 1944)*, eds. Enrico Crispolti, Daniela De Angelis and Maria Masau Dan (Milano: Skira, 1997), 13 – 20.

³⁰ I will cite here only Archivia in Rome and the Biblioteca Italiana delle Donne in Bologna, which are the main places where I have conducted my research.

scattered in different archives and incomplete. The situation does not necessarily improve in the case of women's associations. For example, since the archive of the Lyceum in Florence is not open to the public, it is very difficult to have access to it. Hence, a lack of biographical and bibliographical sources made the research of the sources for the first and second chapters particularly challenging. As Catherine Dossin and Hanna Alkema underline in the first essay of the recently published volume dedicated to women artists shows, salons and societies until 1970s,³¹ scholars working on women artists in the 20th century often complain about the lack of archives. However, rather than being an issue only in the artistic field, this lack of information is a more generalized complaint. As Taricone underlines in relation to the archive of the CNDI, the conservation of the historic memory of the women's associations active between the Italian Unification and the Fascist period has been very irregular. The reasons were both personal and political. Due to a lack of recognition of women's right to citizenship and the little interest in their activities, the documents related to them were not considered worthy of conservation and were not automatically preserved.³²

1.6 Outline of the thesis

The thesis has a chronological structure that follows the development of the women's movement along the century. On a case-by-case basis the connections between visual culture and feminism are looked for and analysed taking into consideration the specificity of the periods. The structure of the thesis can be divided in two macro sections. The first part comprises chapters one and two and most heavily relies on primary sources, such as archival documents and coeval papers. Chapters three and four, despite relying on feminist publications of the period and materials that have never been examined, can certainly be

³¹ Catherine Dossin and Hanna Alkema. "Women Artists Shows:Salons:Societies: Towards a Global History of All-Women Exhibitions," *Artl@s Bulletin* 8, no. 1 (2019): Article 19.

³² Fiorenza Taricone, "Materiali per una storia delle idee," in *L'archivio del Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane inventario*, eds. Elena Ginanneschi, Luisa Montevecchi and Fiorenza Taricone (Roma: Pubbliprint service, 2000), 12-20.

expanded in the future. Nevertheless, this second part is used as a benchmark. The first two chapters' initial conclusions will be considered alongside what emerges in the second part of the thesis.

The structure of every chapter is similar. It starts by sketching the situation of women in society and describing the state of the feminist movement and, then, focuses more directly on visual culture. Each example has been selected because representative of one of the time periods taken into consideration. Chapter one first summarises the transformation of women's position in society and in the artistic field, while describing the consolidation of the feminist movement. Then, it explores the connections between the movement and the artistic field by retracing the participation of the *group of women artists* in the *Mostra Nazionale di Belle Arti* (National Exhibition of Fine Arts) at the 1906 Esposizione Internazionale del Sempione (International Exhibition of Sempione) in Milan. This episode is read as a political act in that it was one of the first attempts of women to be recognized as professionals and as a collectivity within the artistic field. Then, the chapter focuses on Carla Celesia di Vegliasco's *L'uomo di domani* and the work of Adelina Zandrino. Their activity is examined in light of the connections between artistic field and feminist movement already discussed in the chapter. Finally, it examines the representation of maternity in the magazine *La Donna*, one of the first magazines for women at the beginning of the 20th century. On its pages *La Donna* connected the most reformist themes of the emancipationism with the distribution of an illustrated magazine for women, while keeping an eye on the development of more radical feminist movements, such as the English one.³³

Chapter two is concerned with images produced at a time characterized by the progressive control of Fascist regime over women's lives and organizations. It mainly focuses on the international competition open only to female artists on the theme *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna* (The Madonna as seen by women), organized between 1933 and 1934 at the Lyceum of Florence, and the representation of maternity in the *Almanacco della donna italiana*. Both case studies have been chosen because

³³ G. A. Rosso, "Le Suffragette d'Inghilterra," *La Donna*, no. 123, 1910, 11-13.

representative of a characteristic mixture of belief in the regime and compromise. Despite the Lyceum's evident contacts with Fascism and its ambiguous behaviour, tending towards the support of the regime, the archival material concerning *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna* seems to show an attempt to resist the control of the Fascist syndicate and to keep at least partial independence from the Fascist institutional framework. Also the *Almanacco della donna italiana*, published during a period of the Italian history that saw many political and social transformations, has been chosen because of its mixture of different opinions and attitudes towards the official culture of the regime. Chapter two analyses also the painting *La donna e il fantoccio* by Ida Salvagnini Bidoli. This work has been selected because it seems to reflect the ambiguity that characterized the relationship of many women with the Fascist regime and ideology. Moreover, it ideally connects first and second chapter through the work of a woman artist and suffragist, Ida Salvagnini Bidoli.

Chapter three focuses on the second post-war period, which was characterized by a new relationship between women and political activity. The gradual transformation in the situation of women in the Italian post-war society did not keep up with the foundations that had been laid during the war. Thus, the chapter examines the representation of maternity in the period that preceded the emergence of the new feminist movement. First, it focuses on the work of Carla Accardi and on the ways she explored the theme of maternity. Then, it examines the posters published by UDI until 1969, including one example from the 1970s. This analysis is aimed at showing how the representation of maternity changed within the framework of the first women's association emerged after World War Two. Lastly, the chapter examines a 1969 poster from an advertisement campaign for the firm PRÉNATAL in order to bring forth the main stereotypes that characterized Italian society in the post-war period.

Chapter four starts an exploration of the representation of maternity between the beginning of the 1970s and the first years of the 1980s. Without claiming to be exhaustive, it will attempt to identify some of the many ways in which the theme has been represented in this decade in order to confront them with what has emerged from the previous chapters. Although the 1970s and early 1980s were a complex period with respect to the

representation of maternity and would deserve further exploration, the thesis nevertheless points out some directions to situate the periods discussed in previous chapters and highlight continuities and discontinuities among them. After briefly sketching the organization of the new feminist movement and the relevance of the topic of maternity at its core, the chapter looks at images that have been considered representative to build a kind of catalogue of strategies used by artists, feminist magazines and collectives to represent maternity. After focusing on artworks, the chapter shifts to the collettivo madri (collective mothers), later Cooperativa Il taccuino d'oro (Cooperative The Golden notebook), and the organization of the 1982 exhibition *Maria, Medea e le altre: I volti ambivalenti della madre* (Maria, Medea and the others: the ambivalent faces of mother). Lastly, the chapter focuses on two feminist magazines, *Effe* and *Quotidiano Donna*, which have been examined inasmuch as they were an important expression of the 1970s feminist movement. *Quotidiano Donna* was born out of the need to denounce the strong influence exercised by media on women, both through their contents and the image of women conveyed. It focused on women's everyday life and on the new way of doing politics of the feminist movement, using a bottom up approach which introduced a purely female perspective in the print media. Likewise, *Effe* was an original expression of the feminist movement of the 1970s. Since it was not related to any group in particular, as underlined by Gabriella Parca,³⁴ it especially mirrored the diversity of the feminist movement.³⁵

1.7 Terminology

Feminisms in the 20th century Italy are not easily reducible to a compact and homogeneous group. They expressed themselves through multiple positions, to such an extent that it is difficult to provide a simple and univocal definition of them. Not only a generational problem, the different Italian expressions of the movement mirrored geographically and socially different

³⁴ Gabriella Parca (1926-2016). She was a writer and journalist.

³⁵ "Editoriale," *Effe*, November 1973, 2.

situations. Moreover, many groups that defined themselves feminist were born within political parties or had a clear political preference. Thus, as Nancy Cott underlined, the use of the word *feminism* in order to signify the multiple ways in which women have contested male power and traditional hierarchies is problematic.³⁶

This complexity is mirrored also in the terminological confusion that emerges in literature, where often feminism, feminist movement, women's movement, emancipationism are used in an interchangeable way, as they were equivalent. Here are some examples of this complexity. Michela de Giorgio gives an overview of the history of the movement and touches on the terminological problem in *Le Italiane dall'Unità a oggi*,³⁷ as part of a broader survey of the condition of women in Italy since the unification of the country. She speaks of *emancipazionismo* (emancipationism) and of *neo-femminismo* (neo-feminism) for, respectively, the 19th - 20th century and the 1970s movements. Taricone, instead, refuses to use the word emancipationism for the associations born at the end of the 19th century, which eventually gathered in CNDI. She argues that the word carries negative meanings and refuses to use it for what she considers, instead, real political laboratories. She prefers the term "femmil-feministe" (femal-feminist).³⁸ The last contribution to the debate in order of time, in relation to the period between the 19th and 20th century, is in Liviana Gazzetta's *Orizzonti nuovi. Storia del primo femminismo in Italia (1865-1925)*.³⁹ Interestingly, she notices how the word feminism, despite being the starting point of women's history and the inspiration for much research, implies a disruptive drive that could apply only to very small sectors of the movement at the beginning of the century. Moreover, also considering the negative

³⁶ Nancy Cott, "What's in a Name: The Limits of "social feminism" or Expanding the Vocabulary of Women's History," in *Journal of American History* 76, no. 3 (December 1989): 809. The article was later published with the title "Cosa c'è in un nome. Come ampliare il vocabolario della storia delle donne," in *Memoria. Rivista di storia delle donne*, no. 31 (1991): 92-114.

³⁷ She also refers to other declinations such as "femminismo pratico" (practical feminism), "femminismo latino" (latin feminism) and "femminilità militante" (militant femininity). Michela De Giorgio, *Le Italiane dall'Unità a oggi* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1992), 494-507.

³⁸ Fiorenza Taricone, *L'associazionismo femminile italiano dall'unità al fascismo* (Milano: UNICOPLI, 1996), 9-15.

³⁹ Liviana Gazzetta, *Orizzonti nuovi: storia del primo femminismo in Italia (1865-1925)* (Roma: Viella, 2018), 7-14.

nuance that the term emancipationism has gained, she proposes a terminological revision in order to give its complexity back to the movement. Then, she proposes to use emancipationism to define the group of women who, like Anna Maria Mozzoni, constituted the leading edge of the movement, in comparison to its more moderate component, that she defines moderate feminism. Concerning a later period, the Giolitti era, she makes a distinction in particular between suffragist feminism and maternal or social feminism, even if underlining the flexibility and the slippages between them.⁴⁰

According to the historian Elda Guerra, the debate about the use of different terms did not extend to cover the 1970s. Yet, she recognizes the importance of terminology to convey different visions and perspectives. Despite being used without any distinction, feminism, feminist movement and women's movement carry slightly different meanings. She explains their differences in terms of theoretical developments and visibility to the external society. On one side, the term movement emphasizes the public and visible aspect of feminism, that is the movement that became widely recognized in the mid 1970s. On the other side, feminism points at the whole combination of practices and theoretical elaborations that were the backbone of a complex political culture, of which the movement was only one visible aspect. This considered, Guerra claims to prefer feminisms, since it directly suggests its multiplicity and the presence of a new subjectivity interested in understanding reality from a new and original point of view.⁴¹

On the terminological problem, it is also interesting to quickly refer to Griselda Pollock. She explains her choice to use the term women's movement by emphasizing its political connotation. According to her, the term movement helps to hint to the political collectivity that is at the basis of feminist work, without strictly confining it into the label of feminism.⁴²

⁴⁰ On the contrary, Annarita Buttafuoco proposed to use the term emancipationism to include the whole movement between 19th and 20th century. See, for example, Annarita Buttafuoco, *Cronache femminili: temi e momenti della stampa emancipazionista in Italia dall'Unità al Fascismo* (Arezzo: Dipartimento di studi storico-sociali e filosofici Università degli Studi di Siena, 1988). The term is used also in Pieroni Bortolotti, *Alle origini del movimento femminile in Italia 1848-1892* (Torino: Einaudi editore, 1963), 18.

⁴¹ Elda Guerra, "Femminismo/ femminismi: appunti per una storia da scrivere," *Genesis* 3, no. 1 (2004): 93-94.

⁴² Pollock, *Differencing the canon. Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*, 26.

Throughout the thesis I use different terms in order to avoid a terminological flattening that would also hide the movement's complexity. For the first period, I will use suffragist movement, emancipationism, moderate feminism and maternal feminism, whenever I speak more specifically of one of the groups described by Gazzetta. However, I will also use the term feminist movement to refer generically to the movement at the beginning of the century, weighed against the future developments of the second half of the century. For the latter, instead, I will use the terms new feminist movement and new feminism in order to emphasize the differences that Guerra has highlighted. Although I share Guerra's definition of feminism as a complex of theories and practices, I nonetheless want to retain the political nuance that, as Pollock says, is conveyed by the word movement.

This multiplication of definitions and terms proves how it is difficult to provide any ultimate explanation of feminism or feminist. In fact, the thesis does not want to label images or their producers as "feminist" or "not feminist." In order to choose them, though, I used a kind of working definition of feminist politics as being "ultimately a matter of bringing about changes in the very structures of subjectivity" and in "our collective modes of relation to the environment [...] to our cultural norms and values [and] to our bodies."⁴³ I tried to take into consideration images and practices that think of subjects as gendered and that have a political dimension in that they tried to assume different positions in relation to hegemonic discourses about women.

1.8 The "maternal turn"

The thesis connects to a broader field of research recently emerging in academia focused on maternity seen as a key place from which it is possible to explore the most recent developments in feminism. Speaking of this renewed interest in the topic Natalie Loveless uses the term "maternal turn" in her review of the book *The M Word: Real Mothers in Contemporary Art* in order to refer to a

⁴³ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic subjects: embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 74-75.

group of publications, art projects and exhibitions reflecting on the theme of maternity “as a crucial location from which to explore the conditions, ethics, and futures of feminism today.”⁴⁴ The review is part of a special issue of *Studies in the Maternal*, “The Surprise of the real,” which collects contributions by scholars reflecting on maternal identities, subjectivities and intersubjectivities in the visual arts and writing. All the articles aim at conveying the clash between an inner and personal sense of the maternal and the cultural and political assumptions about mothering. In the editorial essay of the issue Andrea Liss touches upon an aspect that has for a long time hampered research on the topic. She recollects the rejection of her manuscript on feminist art and cultural representations of the maternal, based on the alleged little originality of the work, which was considered not enough innovative.⁴⁵ Liss touches on the scant attention given to the topic and on the surprise provoked by her interest in feminist motherhood in the late 1990s and early 2000s also in the introduction to *Feminist Art and the Maternal*.⁴⁶ Claiming that motherhood should no longer be perceived in opposition to feminism, as it still is, she considers ways in which maternity can be defined from mothers’ own perspective and subjectivity. In doing so, the normalized order of gender and power is disrupted and the institutionalized idea of maternity is exchanged with the idea of feminist motherhood. In this way, she claims, the lived material experiences of women who rethink the representation of motherhood as more than a sign of codified femininity and a muted allegory become a productive space in cultural theory, art history and practice. Liss also suggests to substitute the traditional model of selfless mother, always giving to the other, with the idea of intersubjectivity, which starts with the mother-child relationship. This intersubjectivity has to be understood as the possibility to be in the place of the other and inside one’s self, to care for another and one’s self and, eventually, to recognize the existence of multiple maternal spaces. Liss, then, analyses

⁴⁴ Natalie Loveless, review of *The M Word: Real Mothers in Contemporary Art*, by Myrel Chernick and Jennie Klein, eds., *Studies in the Maternal* 5, no. 1 (January 2013). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/sim.33>.

⁴⁵ Andrea Liss, “Maternal Aesthetics: The Surprise of the Real,” *Studies in the Maternal* 5, no. 1 (January 2013). DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/sim.32>.

⁴⁶ Andrea Liss, *Feminist Art and the Maternal* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xiv-xv.

contemporary representations of maternity by feminists and argues for creative transformations of the maternal into a “new erotics that breach the mutual exclusivity that have separated motherhood from personhood, professionalism, and self-knowledge.”⁴⁷

Rosemary Betterton’s *Maternal bodies in the visual arts* reconnects to this line of research.⁴⁸ Betterton recognizes the lack of acknowledgment of the visual history of the maternal body understood as a symbolic construct with enormous cultural resonance, shaped and produced through competing discourses and practices. Thus, she sets to explore the ways in which visual imagery frames the understanding of maternal bodies and helps to shape maternal ideals. Grounded in the contemporary age, she claims that maternal bodies represented in the 21st century constitute only a censored sample of the real articulations of the maternal in contemporary society. Those deemed deviant in all the different possible forms are excluded. On the contrary, Betterton uses the term maternal in a much more inclusive way to describe not only the pregnant and post-partum body, but different forms of maternal identities. Hence, she explores different historical, cultural and political formations in order to study the representational practices by which the maternal becomes embodied in the visual and their role in giving visibility to some of these bodies, while hiding others. The thesis follows this strand of research working on the problematic relationship connecting feminisms, visual culture and maternity, trying, at the same time, to reflect upon its historical specificity in the Italian context.

⁴⁷ Ibid., xvii.

⁴⁸ Rosemary Betterton, *Maternal bodies in the visual arts* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2014). This is the last outcome of a preoccupation with this theme that started with the author’s pregnancy and, at the same time, the writing of her first study on the topic “Mother figures: the female nude in the work of German women artists in the 1900s” in *Profession Ohne Tradition: 125 Jahre Verein der Berliner Künstlerinnen*, ed. Carola Muysers (Berlin: Berlinische Galerie, 1992). See also, by the same author, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); “Promising Monsters: Pregnant Bodies, Artistic Subjects and Maternal Imagination,” *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 21, no. 1 (January 2009): 80-100. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2006.tb00966.x>.

1.9 Feminism and visual culture

In her exploration of the visual history of the maternal body Betterton prefers to use the term *visual arts* in the title to indicate a wide range of practices, including painting, photography, sculpture and illustration, as well as performance and installation art.⁴⁹ She explains her choice by recalling how visual culture has become a contested disciplinary terrain.⁵⁰ On the contrary, I chose to use the term visual culture in order to emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of the thesis and its reliance on concepts and methods previously used in specialized disciplines. As Irit Rogoff says, visual culture does not simply study images, but focuses “on the centrality of vision and the visual world in producing meanings, establishing and maintaining aesthetic values, gender stereotypes and power relations with culture.” The field of vision is, then, understood as “an arena in which cultural meanings get constituted” together with “an entire range of analyses and interpretations of the audio, the spatial, and of the psychic dynamics of spectatorship.”⁵¹

A privileged link connects feminism and visual culture. Amelia Jones, for example, argues that feminism has become central in most modes of visual culture analysis, even when not acknowledged. She also emphasizes their common political drive: feminism proposes or demands a political or ethical stance towards all forms of culture since conditioned by gender and sexual difference, while visual culture critically thinks about images that surround us. Thus, Jones speaks of two “modes of thinking [...] driven by political concerns” that “focus primarily on cultural forms as informing subjective experience.”⁵²

⁴⁹ Betterton, *Maternal bodies*, 8.

⁵⁰ She refers in particular to the article by Deborah Cherry, “Art History, Visual Culture,” *Art History* 27, no. 4 (September 2004): 479-493.

⁵¹ Irit Rogoff, “Studying visual culture,” in *The visual culture reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London-New York: Routledge, 2013), 14.

⁵² Amelia Jones, “Introduction. Conceiving the intersection of feminism and visual culture,” in *The feminism and visual culture reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (London-New York: Routledge, 2010), 1. The literature on the relationship between feminism and visual culture is very broad and includes, among the others, Teresa De Lauretis, *Alice doesn't. Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University press, 1984); Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London-New York: Verso 1986); Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference* (London: New York: Routledge, 1988); Bracha L. Ettinger, *The Matrixial Gaze* (Leeds: Feminist Arts

A light motive runs through the whole thesis: the possibility or impossibility of women to re-imagine themselves and the practices by which this is possible. Feminism has long acknowledged visuality⁵³ as one of the key ways in which gender is inscribed in Western culture. In the foundational “Visual pleasure and narrative cinema,” Laura Mulvey introduces the idea of man as the active bearer of the look and of woman as the image that gives meaning to his world. She defines the woman as “a signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning.”⁵⁴ Mulvey claims to analyze visual pleasure in order to destroy it and, with it, the oppressive forms that are inherent in film history and in the specific focus of her essay, Hollywood films. John Berger understands and explains visual images as the result of an exchange between the image itself and the viewer as well and claims that all images embody a certain way of seeing. He describes what he defines “social presence of women”⁵⁵ as the result of lives lived within a confined and allotted space under the tutelage of men. According to Berger, this also produces a split in women’s subjectivity: the surveyor of woman in herself, who is male, and the female surveyed become the two halves of her identity.⁵⁶

Yet, it is possible to find a space of intervention. Teresa De Lauretis claims that gender is a representation and that is produced by different social technologies, such as cinema, institutional discourses, epistemologies and critical practices, and that the female-gendered subject is, at once, inside and outside the ideology of gender. She claims that “gender is also affected [...] by any discourse, feminist or otherwise, that would discard it as

and Histories Network, 1995); Fiona Carson and Claire Pajaczkowska, *Feminist visual culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁵³ For a discussion of the distinction between vision, understood as what the human eye is capable of seeing, and visuality, which refers to a field in which vision is constructed, see Hal Foster, ed., *Vision and Visuality* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988).

⁵⁴ Laura Mulvey, “Visual pleasure and narrative cinema,” in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 15.

⁵⁵ John Berger, *Ways of seeing* (London: Penguin, 2008), 40.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

ideological misrepresentation."⁵⁷ By claiming some mutual interactions between the social representation of gender and its subjective formation, she also creates a space for action and self-determination.

The thesis focuses on this space of women action. Yet, it does not propose a positive women's imaginary as opposed to the masculine one. In "Missing women. Rethinking Early Thoughts on 'Images of Women'" Griselda Pollock addresses the surviving gap between the awareness of the role played by ideology in visual representation in the oppression of women, largely widespread, and the niche critique and theory developed on this theme by scholars. She underlines the impossibility of challenging existing imagery without an adequate theory of ideology and representation. She refuses to admit the existence of two distinguished identities, women and their representations made by men. This premise would lead on to the idea that reality always precedes images and that these are a simple reflection, true or false, of the real. Thus, she also refuses to use the term images of women, hence separating some allegedly good or bad images. The notion of images of women attempts to make a separation between signifier and signified that does not exist. A research of images of women supposed to decolonize the female body has been carried out within the feminist context. However, according to Pollock, these images only serve and consolidate the potency of signification rather than the feminist aim. The imagery based on these images can be easily re-appropriated. Instead, she suggests to approach this issue in a more relevant political way, by understanding images not only as a reflection of external causes and reality, but also as producers of that reality. Representations produce meanings and reflect a world which is already saturated with others.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of gender. Essays on theory, film and fiction* (Bloomington-Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 3.

⁵⁸ Griselda Pollock, "Missing women. Rethinking Early Thoughts on 'Images of Women'," in *Overexposed. Essays on contemporary photography*, ed. Carol Squiers (New York: New York Press, 1999), 229-246. This article followed a previous reflection on the same topic: "What's wrong with 'images of women'?" in *The Sexual Subject. A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, ed. Merck Mandy (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 135-145.

1.10 Feminism and maternity in Italy

In 2005 *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890-1970: The Maternal Dilemma*, Ann Taylor Allen explored the changing relationship between motherhood and feminist movements from the end of the 19th century to the 1970s, in relation to the transformation of the structure of family in the same period. She described how feminists tried to solve the relatively recent “maternal dilemma,”⁵⁹ that is the possibility to reconcile individuality and the role of mother, by creating a new non-restrictive idea of motherhood. The book pointed out the different approaches to the theme, from the feminists of the beginning of the century, who considered motherhood the highest achievement for women and, for this reason, were later seen as “conservatives whose contribution was minor if not harmful,”⁶⁰ to later feminists who had a much more ambiguous relationship with maternity. Yet, despite few hints to other countries, Allen mainly focused on Britain, France, Germany and the Netherlands, claiming that other countries, including Italy, were under a dictatorship for the majority of the time span taken into consideration. However, excluding Italy from the book is an omission that highly affects its relevance. As we will see, despite the emergence of Fascism in the 1920s, the thought on maternity has been fundamental during the first feminism. Moreover, later Italian feminist thinkers have developed an original and essential theory about maternity. In her work, Allen seems to fall victim of “cultural imperialism,”⁶¹ a concept used by Bono and Kemp to define a tendency that, on an international level, privileged some national feminisms and neglected others, including the Italian one. Trying to redeem this lack of acknowledgement outside of the national borders, Bono and Kemp speak of the Italian feminism as an “unexpected subject,”⁶² which, despite the French, English and American influences, was nevertheless distinctively Italian.

⁵⁹ Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and motherhood in western Europe, 1890-1970* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 1.

⁶⁰ Allen, *Feminism and motherhood*, 2.

⁶¹ Paola Bono, Sandra Kemp, eds., *Italian feminist thought: a reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 1.

⁶² *Ibid.*

There has been much debate and ambivalence in the way feminists have theorized maternity. While Simone de Beauvoir⁶³ argued that women's liberation could come only after their liberation from their biological reproductive roles,⁶⁴ others, such as Adrienne Rich,⁶⁵ Nancy Chodorow⁶⁶ and Mary O'Brien,⁶⁷ argued that maternity is a site from which women can articulate and validate their own identities. This ambiguity emerges also in the Italian feminisms. The fundamental role of maternity and its theorization within the development of the feminist movements in Italy is very well described in Anna Scattigno's *La figura materna tra emancipazionismo e femminismo*. The historian follows the development of the thought about maternity throughout the whole century, bringing out its peculiarities. First she describes how the first feminist movement gave new meaning to the so-called female virtues by transferring them from the domestic context, where they were signs of subjugation, to the public sphere. Here, turned into civic virtues, they were seen as a possible foundation for the valorisation of women and the construction of their political and social identity. This translated into a commitment to the realization of facilities supporting, for example, working and single mothers and prostitutes.⁶⁸ The powerful mother was, basically, the Italian declination of the new woman.⁶⁹ In the second part of the essay, Scattigno follows the

⁶³ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956).

⁶⁴ A different reading of de Beauvoir is in Linda M. G. Zerilli, "A Process without a Subject: Simone de Beauvoir and Julia Kristeva on Maternity," *Signs* 18, no.1 (Autumn 1992): 111-135. Here the author reconsiders the way in which de Beauvoir allegedly defines maternity in a negative way as the obliteration of female subjectivity. And, by showing how de Beauvoir's use of maternal bodies intersect with and contest Kristeva's maternal, she attempts to show its relevance to postmodern feminist debates about the representation of motherhood and female subjectivity. She speaks of de Beauvoir's definition of maternal as a discursive strategy of defamiliarization that restages the traditional drama of maternity.

⁶⁵ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born. Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976).

⁶⁶ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978).

⁶⁷ Mary O' Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982).

⁶⁸ Anna Scattigno, "La figura materna tra emancipazionismo e femminismo," in *Storia della maternità*, ed. Marina D'Amelia (Roma: Laterza, 1997), 273-299.

⁶⁹ Michela de Giorgio, *Le Italiane dall'Unità a oggi: modelli culturali e comportamenti sociali* (Roma; Bari: Laterza, 1992), 508-509. On the role of maternity at the beginning of the century and the contradictions born out of the difficult reconciliation between maternity in the private sphere and active citizenship in the public one see also Annarita Buttafuoco, *Questioni di cittadinanza. Donne e diritti sociali nell'Italia liberale* (Siena: Protagon editori toscani, 1997); Anna Rossi-Doria, "Rappresentare un corpo. Individualità e 'anima

trajectory of the idea of maternity in the new feminism, from its initial refusal to the moment when it became a “political and theoretical central site of the women’s movement.”⁷⁰

The radical critique of the family, where the personal was detached from the political, is one of the elements that make the new feminism deeply different and original from the feminism at the beginning of the century. This crucial point emerged in the first issue of the magazine *Differenze*,⁷¹ published in January 1976 by the *Collettivo femminista donne e cultura*. The members of the collective argued that a reflection on the history of the movement and its roots was necessary to understand contemporary problems faced by feminism. For this reason, they commented two selected excerpts from texts by Anna Maria Mozzoni and Anna Kuliscioff and pointed at the lack of critique of family and sexuality as what distinguished new feminism from the movement at the beginning of the 20th century.

Family was the first place of oppression of women, according to the new feminism. Hence, DEMAU⁷² proposed a demystification of the values on which the relations internal to families were based in its 1966 *Manifesto*.⁷³ Also in the 1970 *Manifesto* of Rivolta Femminile family was described as an institution based not on virtues, but on bonds created on purpose to maintain it.⁷⁴ The critique of the family ran parallel to the refusal of maternity, explained as a value and a radical form of denounce and fight.⁷⁵ In 1972 Chiara Saraceno wrote on the pages of *L'erba voglio* of the difficulty to accept a strictly socially and culturally determined maternity.⁷⁶ At the same time, this refusal had its roots

collettiva' nelle lotte per il suffragio," in *Il dilemma della cittadinanza. Diritti e doveri delle donne*, eds. Gabriella Bonacchi and Angela Groppi (Roma: Laterza, 1993), 87-103.

⁷⁰ Scattigno, "La figura materna tra emancipazionismo e femminismo," 294.

⁷¹ The periodical, published between 1976 and 1982, was born in order to give to all the feminist collectives in Rome an independent space to communicate their activities. Hence, every issue was published by a different group.

⁷² The group DEMAU (Demystification of Authority) was founded in 1966 in Milan.

⁷³ Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp, eds., *Italian feminist thought: a reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 34.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 37-40.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Elena Gianini Belotti, "E se decidissimo di non generare," *Quotidiano donna*, February 13, 1980.

⁷⁶ Chiara Saraceno, "Donne e bambini," in *Maria, Medea e le altre. Il materno nelle parole delle donne: rassegna stampa*, Provincia di Roma, Cooperativa Il Taccuino d'oro (Cosenza-Roma: Lerici 1982), 58-59. The devaluation of maternity in society was described in Alice Oxman, *Lager maternità: libro-documentario sulle donne e i bambini in venti storie italiane* (Milano: Bompiani, 1974).

also in the unsolved and problematic relationship with the mother, to be understood not only in the private sphere, but also within the movement itself, in terms of relationships among the groups' members. However, maternity was not completely denied. The possibility to rethink it was already present in the *Manifesto* of Rivolta femminile, even if still in its infancy. The manifesto condemned the way maternity was presented to women as a dilemma and the exclusion that followed from it. It defined the transmission of life as an intense experience that was claimed back by women.⁷⁷

The approval of the law 194 in 1978 gave an unprecedented freedom to women and changed their perception of maternity and abortion.⁷⁸ There was also more awareness of the fragilities and contradictions inherent to maternity.⁷⁹ Lea Melandri, Adriana Cavarero and Luisa Muraro initiated a positive reconfiguration of the maternal and its symbolic value. Cavarero suggested to women to rethink themselves starting from maternity.⁸⁰ She spoke of the difficulty for a woman to search for female figures in a patriarchal symbolic order where women can find only representations and roles based on the centrality of the masculine. Instead, Cavarero argued, sexual difference demands adequate representation in a symbolic order where two differently sexed subjects should be capable of independently adopting figures appropriate to each. Hence, she questioned ancient female figures contextualizing them in a feminine symbolic order where the maternal figure was revalued.⁸¹ At the beginning of the 1990s Luisa Muraro proposed to symbolically recover the mother to give back to women philosophical knowledge. Thus, the mother became a principle of authority. Muraro considered the relationship with the mother, in its symbolic meanings, as the way to build a new subjectivity but, also, to foster different contacts among people. Being born from a

⁷⁷ Bono and Kemp, *Italian feminist thought*, 37-40.

⁷⁸ "Madri e non madri," *Memoria*, no. 7 (1983): 4.

⁷⁹ Chiara Saraceno, "La prima conquista è una maternità liberamente scelta, la seconda...", *Quotidiano Donna*, February 13, 1980.

⁸⁰ Adriana Cavarero, "Per una teoria della differenza sessuale," in *Il pensiero della differenza sessuale*, Diotima (Roma: La Tartaruga, 1987), 56.

⁸¹ Adriana Cavarero, *Nonostante Platone: figure femminili nella filosofia antica* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1990).

mother, that is already in a relationship, is an indelible experience that can become a measure of one's actions.⁸²

Part of the reconfiguration of the maternal in the 1980s was the re-evaluation of the mother-daughter relationship, understood also as the relationship with other women, which upstaged the relationship with men in 1970s. This relationship, according to Luce Irigaray, would be able to undermine the patriarchal order.⁸³ According to the French philosopher, the maternal dimension embraces all the things that women produce: love, desire, language, art and society politics.⁸⁴

The importance of the maternal for the artistic practices has been explored in the recent *Matrice. Pensiero delle donne e pratiche artistiche*.⁸⁵ In place of words such as art work, genius, art critique, art exhibition, the authors propose to call *matrice* (matrix) what is usually defined art,⁸⁶ in order to point at the materiality of the art and its capacity to create relations and to refer to the relationship among women, which is impossible to represent and is, thus, only alluded to. The final artistic object, when there is one, is only a moment of the creative process that happens among two or more than two people. According to the authors, the relationships among women have often something of the maternal. Donatella Franchi speaks of the importance that the 1998 text *All'inizio di tutto la lingua materna* had on her reflection on creativity, artistic practices and fruition of the artwork. She refers, in particular, to the opening essay by Elisabeth Jankowski, where the maternal language is defined as a varied language, that loosely combines different expressive codes, voice, gestures, touch and playful invention of words. According to Franchi, elements of

⁸² Luisa Muraro, *L'ordine simbolico della madre* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1991).

⁸³ "Nella madre la donna," *Effe*, July 1979, 47.

⁸⁴ Luce Irigaray, "Il corpo a corpo con la madre," in *Sessi e genealogie*, Luce Irigaray, transl. Luisa Muraro (Milano: La Tartaruga, 1989), 29.

⁸⁵ Donatella Franchi, ed., *Matrice. Pensiero delle donne e pratiche artistiche* (Milano: Libreria delle donne di Milano, 2004).

⁸⁶ In Donatella Franchi's contribution to the book, the author refers to the concept of matrix that the psychoanalyst, theorist and artist Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger has developed. Ettinger defines the matrix as the image that represents the coexistence of mother and child in the last period of pregnancy, that is the coexistence of two bodies in a space. It is intended as a model for situations and relations where two bodies coexist without opposition and transform each other. The other is neither refused nor assimilated. Hence, the author defines the "matrixial gaze" as the gaze that has memory of this symbiotic life. See Bracha L. Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace* (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

this maternal language can be found in the work of many women artists part of the avant-garde in the 20th century and in their will to escape a strict identification with styles and art movements.⁸⁷ *Matrice. Pensiero delle donne e pratiche artistiche* also focuses on the role played by the maternal in connecting artistic and political practices. Chiara Zamboni, for example, considers the maternal language as the origin of the relationship between politics and art.

She obviously does not refer to the activity of political parties, but to a specific female politics that considers language essential to change. Zamboni describes the maternal language as a non-specialized language, which values the relationship among women and recalls that playful relationship with the mother that has a long lasting influence on everyone's life. Both politics and art place great value on the relationship among women and have the same *matrice*. Thus, elements of politics can be found at the hearth of artistic practice and the other way around.⁸⁸

1.11 A change of perspective

The link between women and maternity in the arts and visual culture has been recently explored in various exhibitions.⁸⁹ In 2015 *Mater. Percorsi simbolici sulla maternità*⁹⁰ was organized at Palazzo del Governatore in Parma between March 8 and June 28, while the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington

⁸⁷ Donatella Franchi, "La novità fertile," in *Matrice. Pensiero delle donne e pratiche artistiche*, 13-32. It is interesting to note that for many women artists pregnancy and the post-partum period were a moment of inspiration.

⁸⁸ Chiara Zamboni, "Pratiche artistiche, pratiche politiche," in *Matrice. Pensiero delle donne e pratiche artistiche*, 33-40.

⁸⁹ An exhibition that is not treated in this paragraph, but that is worth mentioning, is a project by Harald Szeemann, which was never realized. The exhibition should have been part of a trilogy, which in turn was a segment of a broader project of the curator: visualizing some concepts that he considered the basic myths of the 20th century culture. Studying Szeemann's archive, Pietro Rigolo was able to retrace his plans. The exhibition focused on concepts such as female energy and capacity to generate. It was meant to represent the study of the woman and of her body, including the maternal figure, through the centuries. The curator was also interested in the myth of Mother Earth and in women politically involved in the fights for women's rights and emancipation, who had also an unconventional sexual life. See Pietro Rigolo, *La mamma: una mostra di Harald Szeemann mai realizzata* (Milano: Johan & Levi, 2014).

⁹⁰ Annamaria Andreoli, Cosimo Damiano Fonseca and Elena Fontanella, *Mater: percorsi simbolici sulla maternità* (Roma: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2015). Exhibition catalogue.

hold *Picturing Mary: Woman, Mother, Idea*⁹¹ between December 5, 2014 and April 12, 2015. The first one explored the theme in its religious and secular declinations, but there were hardly any women artists on display. On the contrary, *Picturing Mary: Woman, Mother, Idea* tried to include also a women's perspective among the others, with paintings by Sofonisba Anguissola, Artemisia Gentileschi, Orsola Maddalena Caccia and Elisabetta Sirani. Yet, the interpretation of one of the paintings on show suggests the risk connected with an overly essentializing reading of works by women. Referring to the 1609-1610 Artemisia Gentileschi's *Madonna con Bambino* Timothy Verdon wrote that while male artists usually treated the nursing theme with reserve, Gentileschi imbues it with "the fragrance of warm bodies and milk."⁹²

A women's perspective was, instead, the exclusive focus of 2015 *La Grande madre. Donne, maternità e potere nell'arte e nella cultura visive, 1900-2015*. The exhibition, curated by Massimiliano Gioni at Palazzo reale in Milan, explored the iconography of maternity in the 20th century. As the curator wrote in the catalogue, maternity was explored as a site where the battle around power and oppression of women was fought. Thus, rather than focusing on its representations in the media or on the way it was exploited by 20th century totalitarian regimes, the exhibition was meant to focus on images that critique the traditional family and the idea of maternity as an institution. Symbolic starting point of the exhibition's path was Meret Oppenheim's *Votivbild* (1931), a talisman against maternity that the artist herself created to avert an undesired pregnancy.⁹³

La Grande madre certainly succeeded in unfolding a history of visual representations of maternity more complex and thought provoking than the usual ones. Yet, possibly due to the aspiration to write a universal history of the representation of maternity, the alleged purely feminine perspective that seemed to be the focus of

⁹¹ Timothy Verdon, ed., *Picturing Mary: Woman, Mother, Idea* (New York: Scala Arts Publishers: National Museum of Women in the Arts, 2014). Exhibition catalogue.

⁹² Timothy Verdon, "Picturing Mary: Woman, Mother, Idea," in *Picturing Mary: Woman, Mother, Idea*, ed. Verdon, 16.

⁹³ Massimiliano Gioni, "La grande madre: donne, maternità e potere nell'arte e nella cultura visive, 1900-2015," in *La grande madre: donne, maternità e potere nell'arte e nella cultura visive, 1900-2015*, ed. Massimiliano Gioni (Milano: Skira: Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, 2015). Exhibition catalogue, 15.

the project in the preface to the catalogue went somehow missing.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, the exhibition managed to bring out an aspect that helps to situate this research and to justify what could be perceived as some thesis' oversights, in particular in relation to the first half of the century. The contributions by Lucia Re⁹⁵ and Adrien Sina⁹⁶ on women artists in the Futurist avant-garde, such as Mina Loy and Valentine de Saint-Point, underline the clear separation that divided women who joined the avant-garde and those who were part of the coeval feminist movement in the first decades of the 20th century. In the 1912 *Manifesto of the Futurist Woman* Valentine de Saint-Point did not support and, rather, strongly opposed the contemporary feminist movement, with its struggles and demands. She defined it a "political error [...] cerebral error of woman, an error that her instinct will recognize."⁹⁷ Mina Loy shared similar ideas in the *Feminist Manifesto*. She considered contemporary feminism inadequate and criticised its approach, which tried to establish equality between men and women by calling for, for example, the reform of economic legislation and education system. On the contrary, Loy urged women to acknowledge the differences between men and women and discover their own identities, instead of accepting the roles that had been traditionally imposed on them.⁹⁸ Acknowledging the clash of opinions between these artists and the feminists their contemporaries is fundamental in order to set the framework of this research. The first chapter looks at images born within that specific context that was the feminist, emancipationist and suffragist movement between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Hence, women artists who were part of avant-gardes and who did not have any involvement in the coeval feminist movement, and in some cases openly condemned it, have

⁹⁴ Despite the relevance of the work of Marcel Duchamp for a discourse about gender in the arts, the interview to Calvin Tomkins about him seems off topic in relation to what the curator affirmed in the introduction to the catalogue. See Calvin Tomkins, "Nostra Signora dei desideri. Sessualità e questioni di genere nell'opera di Marcel Duchamp," in *La Grande Madre*, ed. Gioni, 127-131.

⁹⁵ Lucia Re, "Mater-Materia. Il potere materno e l'avanguardia futurista," in *La Grande Madre*, ed. Gioni, 49-59.

⁹⁶ Adrien Sina, "Valentine de Saint-Point," in *La Grande Madre*, ed. Gioni, 77-89.

⁹⁷ Valentine de Saint-Point, "Manifesto della donna futurista: risposta a F.T. Marinetti," in *Manifesti proclamati, interventi e documenti teorici del futurismo, 1909-1944*, ed. Luciano Caruso (Firenze: Coedizioni Spes-Salimbeni, 1980), 23.

⁹⁸ Roger L. Conover, ed., *Mina Loy. The lost lunar Baedeker. Poems* (New York: The Noonday Press-Farrar, Straus And Giroux, 1996), 153-156.

not been considered. Since the thesis wants to examine the interconnections between feminism, as a political movement with different declinations along the 20th century, and its visual production, only case studies that have been considered useful to shed some light on these connections have been examined.

After all, the relationship between women artists and feminist movements has been problematic throughout the whole century. Many women artists did not want to be associated with feminist endeavours because this would hamper their career. The artist Emma Ciardi, for example, was not against women-only exhibitions as a matter of principle.⁹⁹ Rather, her neutral behaviour in regard to the possibility to exhibit as a member of a women-only group might have stemmed from a preoccupation for her own career, like I suggest in the first chapter. Some women artists refused to be labelled as feminists and avoided women-only exhibitions also in the second half of the century, as clearly emerges in the interviews conducted by Simona Weller in *Il complesso di Michelangelo. Ricerca sul contributo dato dalla donna all'arte italiana del novecento*. To name but one example, Bice Lazzari defined the theme of the book unpleasant and claimed to be anti-feminist.¹⁰⁰ Commenting on the reservations and concerns that she encountered among the artists themselves while working on her text on the contribution of women artists to the 20th century art, Weller dates back to the historical roots of the clash between artists and the movement. Anna Maria Mozzoni already condemned women intellectuals, and creatives in general, who, according to her, did not have any reason to fight man's privilege since they had successfully managed to find a place in it.¹⁰¹

The choice to exclude artists who did not have any contact with the feminist movement and, thus, did not comply with the general approach of the thesis has resulted in the exclusion of unquestionably interesting images. However, the thesis does not want to ask any question about the quality of the images taken into consideration, starting from the point of view that such a question would misread the central point of the research. On the

⁹⁹ She had a solo exhibition during the *II Esposizione Internazionale Femminile* in Turin (1913).

¹⁰⁰ Simona Weller, *Il complesso di Michelangelo. Ricerca sul contributo dato dalla donna all'arte italiana del novecento* (Macerata: La Nuova Foglio Editrice, 1976), 37.

¹⁰¹ Simona Weller, preface to *Il complesso di Michelangelo. Ricerca sul contributo dato dalla donna all'arte italiana del novecento* (Macerata: La Nuova Foglio Editrice, 1976), 19-29.

contrary, the presence of so many forgotten artists, and the difficulties in retrieving material on them, exposes a value system in which women have been traditionally disadvantaged because they could neither study in the right schools nor exhibit in the right places. As Alkema and Dossin notice, a different value system is needed in order not only to define an artist as a professional, but also to rethink the definition of modern and progressive art. It should be a female-specific definition of what it meant to be a successful professional artist at different times and places.¹⁰² Many women artists have been considered mediocre and not particularly innovative. Yet, their results were often a consequence of life conditions and education, what Berger called “social presence of women,” which did not foster audacity, but rather traditional artworks, both in subject and in technique. Moreover, the setting and audience of women-only exhibitions often discouraged any audacity in terms of content and style. When studying women artists, it is important to keep in mind that women’s confinement to the woman’s world dramatically limited their world views and artistic practices and that only a few exceptional women in exceptional circumstances were able to break away from such limitations.¹⁰³

1.12 Originality of research

The originality of the thesis stands in its reconsideration of maternity as a privileged site of investigation for the relationships between visual culture and feminist movements in the 20th century Italy. The thesis also fills a gap in the literature around Italian feminisms and visual culture, by bringing to light the so far unexplored connections between the women’s movement and the artistic field at the start of the 20th century. By analysing the women artists’ group participation in the *Mostra Nazionale di Belle Arti* at

¹⁰² Catherine Dossin and Hanna Alkema. "Women Artists Shows.Salons.Societies: Towards a Global History of All-Women Exhibitions." *Art@s Bulletin* 8, no. 1 (2019): Article 19, 10-12

¹⁰³ Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *Women, art and power and other essays* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 147-162.

the 1906 Esposizione Internazionale del Sempione in Milan, the thesis describes the emergence of a women artists' gender consciousness in connection with the transformation of the female position in the Italian society and the developments of the feminist movements between the 19th and 20th century. The thesis also fills a gap in historical knowledge by researching the work of women artists who have been excluded from the main narratives of history of art at the turn of the century.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 Introduction

This chapter traces the interactions between the feminist movement at the beginning of the century and the images that were its direct expression or were influenced by it. I have chosen 1903 as a symbolic starting point of the chapter, a year that saw two important instances concerning the discourse of maternity and the feminist movement: the jury of the Venice Biennial refused *Maternità – Studio per L'uomo di domani* by Carla Celesia di Vegliasco, a painting that carries an important political content. The same year, the Italian National Council of Women (Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane) (CNDI) was born. In order to situate the images of this period, the chapter draws on a variety of materials, including archival documents and contemporary magazines.

The beginning of the century was characterized by a big transformation of women's position in society. I begin by showing these changes both in the artistic scene and in society at large. I briefly sketch the complexity of the Italian feminist movement and look at the female presence within the artistic field. Then, I focus on the relationships between these two spheres. Were some women artists actively part of the feminist movement and how did they position themselves? What kind of opinions did they represent within the feminist movement and how did they translate them into the artistic field? I will analyse two moments of the history of the suffragist and emancipationist movement, the petition pro-female suffrage presented to the Parliament in 1906 and the first CNDI conference in Rome in 1908. Both of them will be discussed in relation to the role played by women artists on those occasions. Afterwards, I will zoom in on the creation of a Society of women artists and its participation in the *Mostra Nazionale di Belle Arti* (National Exhibition of Fine Arts) at the *Esposizione Internazionale del Sempione* (International Exhibition of Sempione) in Milan in 1906. This represents one of the first attempts by a group of women artists to participate in an exhibition as a collectivity. Moreover, it shows how artistic field and feminist movements were connected at the beginning of the

century through the activities of women who identified themselves as artists, suffragists and emancipationists. The different examples considered will bring out various ways of representing maternity that mirrored the complexity of the feminist movements at the opening of the century.

2.2 Women in Italy at the beginning of the 20th century

2.2.1 The women's movement: a complex panorama

By choosing the year 1903 as starting point, I do not intend to underestimate the previous history of the feminist movement. Its origins were strictly connected to the transformation of the role of women in the second half of the 19th century, when the intense process of industrialization that characterized Western industrialized European countries, including Italy, deeply transformed family and society.¹⁰⁴ An unprecedented number of women was pushed into factories and, thanks to this new role outside of the family, developed a new consciousness of its condition and possibilities.

However, if it is not possible to forget the older history of the feminist movement, the beginning of the 20th century constituted a turning point. The creation of the CNDI in 1903, which was the Italian branch of the International Council of Women born in Washington in 1883, corresponded to its consolidation and strengthening.¹⁰⁵ Using the words of Marina

¹⁰⁴ Next to the line of thought that directly links the transformation of the women's role to industrialization, another opinion sees women's entry into the labour market as the natural development of a previous tendency. Simonetta Ortaggi Cammarosano, for example, argues that the industrialization improved and strengthened a process already in place. She claims that long before the decade of 1870-1880, when the industrial and agricultural face of the country changed, there was no field of activity from which women were excluded. In fact, female labour was very popular because of its low cost. On this topic see Simonetta Ortaggi Cammarosano, "Condizione femminile e industrializzazione tra Otto e Novecento," in *Tra fabbrica e società. Mondi operai nell'Italia del Novecento*, ed. Stefano Musso (Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 1999), 109-171.

¹⁰⁵ The government lead by Giolitti proved to be accommodating towards a moderate feminism. This situation changed when the movement became more aggressive, in particular after the preliminary agreements that were supposed to lead to the so called universal suffrage in 1912. See Fiorenza Taricone, *L'associazionismo femminile italiano dall'unità al fascismo* (Milano: UNICOPLI, 1996), 9-15.

Addis Saba, Italy was a “good last” joining the organization. However, being part of a bigger and more experienced organization helped CNDI to become a stronger actor of the contemporary social debate.¹⁰⁶

The movement was, however, still very diverse and fragmented. Restaino explains how the division between the liberal and the socialist currents had been a feature of feminism since its beginning. The liberals aimed at reaching equality between men and women. The socialists, on the other side, were critical of the research of a legal recognition of equality, which would not change workers and low class women’s material conditions.¹⁰⁷ This was the fundamental difference that kept dividing the movement also in the first decade of the century.

The various conferences that were organized did not help to smooth out the differences. On the contrary, at the 1908 conference of CNDI in Rome a new rupture took place. Sicari Ruffo speaks of a third group, the catholic, which emerged on that occasion, due to a disagreement on the teaching of religion in public schools.¹⁰⁸

This schematization is, however, quite reductive of the complexity of the movement. Different positions emerged within those three main areas as well. The disagreement between Anna Maria Mozzoni¹⁰⁹ and Anna Kuliscioff¹¹⁰ on the law for the protection of women workers is a good example of the contrasts internal to the movement. Mozzoni was against it, since she thought it would make more difficult for women to work outside of the house. On the contrary, Kuliscioff supported it since she was convinced that the law would have the opposite effect, helping women to join forces and become a stronger social actor. The disagreement was based basically on the dichotomy difference/equality that will return also in the 1970s. The two

¹⁰⁶ Marina Addis Sabba, foreword to *L’associazionismo femminile italiano dall’unità al fascismo*, Firenze Taricone (Milano: UNICOPLI, 1996), 1-8.

¹⁰⁷ Adriana Cavarero and Franco Restaino, *Le filosofie femministe* (Torino: Paravia Scriptorium, 1999), 10-19.

¹⁰⁸ For more details on this separation see Gaetanina Sicari Ruffo, *Il voto alle donne. La lunga lotta per il suffragio femminile tra l’Ottocento e il Novecento* (Roma: Mond&ditori, 2009), 49-55. On the catholic associationism see Cecilia Dau Novelli, *Società, Chiesa e associazionismo femminile: l’Unione fra le donne cattoliche d’Italia, 1902-1919* (Roma: A.V.E, 1988).

¹⁰⁹ Anna Maria Mozzoni (1837-1920). She founded the Lega per la promozione degli interessi femminili (League for the Promotion of Women’s Interests) in 1881.

¹¹⁰ Anna Kuliscioff (1857-1925).

protagonists of the feminism of the beginning of the century had also a different approach to politics. While Kuliscioff was part of the Socialist party, Anna Maria Mozzoni refused to become member of a political party, since this would not help the women's cause.¹¹¹

2.2.1.1 Maternal feminism

On the wave of a renewed interest of feminist movements in Europe and America for the category of the maternal and the theorization of a new order that would be based on it at the turn of the 19th century,¹¹² maternal feminism developed also in Italy. As Buttafuoco underlines, the emphasis on the maternal role, real and symbolic, characterized part of the movement from the very beginning and was persistently recalled in the first two decades of the 20th century.¹¹³ Following maternal feminism, the research of new roles for women in society was on a par with the idea that a female specificity based on maternity existed. Thus, instead of proposing a radical change of society, the role of wife and mother was still considered the most important one.

Despite the claims for women's greater social involvement and for universal suffrage, a consistent section of the Italian feminism remained closely bound to the traditional sphere of home and family. A conservative, middle class maternal feminism promoted the belief that women's humanitarian and nurturing qualities justified their participation in public life and their right to vote. The importance given to maternity was considered a distinctive sign of the contemporary feminist movement.¹¹⁴ In

¹¹¹ Franca Pieroni Bortolotti, *Alle origini del movimento femminile in Italia: 1848-1892* (Torino: Einaudi, 1975). On the fragmented panorama of the movement at the beginning of the century see also Liviana Gazzetta, *Orizzonti nuovi. Storia del primo femminismo in Italia (1865-1925)* (Roma: Viella, 2018), 125-159.

¹¹² Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, *Mothers of a New World. Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare State* (New York, London: Routledge, 1993).

¹¹³ Annarita Buttafuoco, *Cronache femminili: temi e momenti della stampa emancipazionista in Italia dall'Unità al Fascismo* (Arezzo: Dipartimento di studi storico-sociali e filosofici Università degli Studi di Siena, 1988), 13.

¹¹⁴ Teresa Labriola, *La questione femminista* (Roma: Loescher, 1909), 29. Teresa Labriola (1873-1941). Despite the irregular path of her career, she was a key figure of the Italian feminism. She was also the author of *Del femminismo come visione della vita* (Pescara: Arte della stampa,

L'Alleanza, one of the women's magazines more active in the female pro suffrage campaign, Paolina Schiff asked for the right to vote to give women real power to look after their children's future.¹¹⁵ In the same issue, Melany Scodnik emphasized that the movement never wanted to overcome or distract women from their traditional roles, in particular the maternal one.¹¹⁶ As Michela De Giorgio has noticed, Maria Montessori's speech at the 1908 conference of CNDI in Rome was a celebration of maternity.¹¹⁷ However, the revaluation of the maternal did not imply the exclusion or submission of women. This maternalism proposed a translation of virtues from the private sphere to the public one. There, as civic virtues, they would have helped women to build their political and social identity. For maternalists, women's place was not only the family, but the whole society.¹¹⁸ This part of the movement claimed women's powers to generate not only children, but also new values for society.¹¹⁹

2.2.1.2 Women's associations

The variety that characterized the women's movement was mirrored in the numerous associations that were born between the end of the 19th and the 20th century.¹²⁰ The traditional division between a private sphere, women's domain, and a public

1917). See Fiorenza Taricone, *Teresa Labriola. Biografia politica di un'intellettuale tra '800 e '900* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1994); Fiorenza Taricone, "Teresa Labriola teorica dell'emancipazionismo," *Il Risorgimento*, no. 1 (1992): 147-161.

¹¹⁵ Paolina Schiff, "Diritti legali della madre," *L'Alleanza. Giornale settimanale, politico, letterario per l'istruzione sociale e politica della donna*, April 14, 1906, 1.

¹¹⁶ M. Scodnik, "La donna e i diritti dei figli," *L'Alleanza. Giornale settimanale, politico, letterario per l'istruzione sociale e politica della donna*, June 16, 1906, 2.

¹¹⁷ Michela de Giorgio, *Le Italiane dall'Unità a oggi: modelli culturali e comportamenti sociali* (Roma; Bari: Laterza, 1992), 508-509.

¹¹⁸ Anna Scattigno, "La figura materna tra emancipazionismo e femminismo," in *Storia della maternità*, ed. Marina D'Amelia (Roma: Laterza, 1997), 275-9.

¹¹⁹ Annarita Buttafuoco, *Questioni di cittadinanza. Donne e diritti sociali nell'Italia liberale*, (Siena: Protagon editori toscani, 1997), 60.

¹²⁰ Fiorenza Taricone, *Donne in movimento e associazionismo femminile nel primo Novecento*, Presentation for the conference Convegno Cammini di donne da Genova al mondo-dal mondo a Genova, Genova 22-23 ottobre 2004. Available at <http://www.provincia.fr.it/public/File/FIORENZA%20TARICONE%20TESTI/Donne%20in%20movimento%20e%20associazionismo%20femminile%20nel%20primo%20Novecento.pdf> (accessed October 29, 2016).

one, prerogative of men, was still very strong at the beginning of the century, together with the limitations imposed to women's initiative by legislation. Yet, a secular, middle-class female associationism developed in Italy, in particular in the North-centre, but also in the centre-south and on the islands.¹²¹

Women's associationism was not a completely new phenomenon, since it was already prompted by the increased presence of women in factories in the second half of the 19th century. On one side, women's working conditions, usually worse than those of their male colleagues, urged them to look for protection, either by entering men associations, despite men's common hostility, or by creating their own. On the other side, women's new role outside of the family helped them develop a new consciousness of their condition and of their possibilities. Therefore, a different kind of associationism was born with the purpose of giving women an active role in society.¹²² The new associationism presented original features. While the previous organizations were uniform from a social point of view, the new ones were women-only groups that accepted members from different social backgrounds. Moreover, they were more gender specific, instead of considering the women's situation as only part of a bigger problem involving the whole working class.¹²³

The associations that belonged to the various feminist panorama at the beginning of the century were very different from each other. Large organizations like the *Unione Femminile Nazionale* (National Female Union) (UFN) and the local branches of CNDI coexisted with smaller local associations, such as the cooperatives of work, mutual enterprises and the organizations for the support of maternity. To this already various panorama,

¹²¹ Taricone, *L'associazionismo femminile italiano*, 9-15.

¹²² Sicari Ruffo, *Il voto alle donne*, 48. Many female societies of mutual help were born between 1850 and 1870. However, a major transformation happened only between the end of the 1870s and the beginning of the 1880s when female associations, progressively influenced by socialism and emancipationism, embraced more openly the idea of fight and social bargaining. This provoked a change from the old paternalistic assistance to a format more similar to the trade union organisation. See also Ada Gigli Marchetti, "Associazionismo operaio e associazionismo femminile alle origini delle ideologie cooperative (1854-1886)," in *L'Audacia Insolente. La cooperazione femminile (1886-1986)*, AA.VV. (Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 1986), 15-34.

¹²³ Taricone, *L'associazionismo femminile italiano*, 9-15.

pro-suffrage associations, particularly active during the 1905-1906 campaign for the universal suffrage, must be added.¹²⁴

2.3 Women in the arts

In Italy women artists could attend not only private academies, under the guidance of well-known artists like Carcano, Bazzaro, Sottocornola and Longoni, but also public ones. They had not suffered the explicit exclusion from Art Academies that had affected women in other countries.¹²⁵ However, this does not prove that the artistic career was an easy choice. As Maria Antonietta Trasforini underlines, it only shows that women were not perceived as real possible competitors of male artists.¹²⁶ In fact, it was still very difficult for women to be successful as professional artists. Throughout the 19th century professional training and artistic careers were a prerogative of either wives, daughters and sisters of men painters or of members of nobility and upper-middle class women who kept an amateurish approach to painting.¹²⁷ Women's space was still the private space of the family, while the woman artist of the modernity would be a

¹²⁴ Gazzetta, *Orizzonti Nuovi*, 126-127.

¹²⁵ Artemisia Gentileschi was the first woman to be accepted by the Accademia del Disegno in Florence in 1616. Afterwards, few more women are recorded as students in Italian Academies, even if under certain restrictions, such as the impossibility to draw from nude models. On this topic see Barbara Casavecchia, "Senza nome. La difficile ascesa della donna artista," in *Arte e artisti nella modernità*, ed. Antonello Negri (Milano: Jaca Book, 2000), 98; Wendy Wassing Roworth, "Academies of Art. Italy," in *Dictionary of Women Artists. Introductory Surveys, vol. I: Artists, A-I*, ed. Delia Gaze (London-Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), 43-45; Flavia Matitti, "Le donne in Accademia, 1900-1950," in *A.i.20: artiste in Italia nel ventesimo secolo*, eds. Pier Paolo Pancotto and Elena Lazzarini (Prato: Gli Ori, 2004), 233-238; Maria Antonietta Trasforini, *Nel segno delle artiste. Donne, professioni d'arte e modernità* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007), 74-79. On the possibility to study with well-known artists of the time see, for example, Flavia Matitti, "Le allieve dilettanti di Balla". Annie Nathan e altre pittrici dimenticate," in *L'arte delle donne nell'Italia del Novecento*, eds. Laura Iamurri and Sabrina Spinazzè (Roma: Maltemi, 2001), 83-99.

¹²⁶ Trasforini, *Nel segno delle artiste*, 75-76.

¹²⁷ Maria Mimita Lamberti, "Contesse, madame e damigelle," in *Istituzioni e strutture espositive in Italia. Secolo XIX: Milano, Torino. Quaderni del Seminario di Storia della Critica d'Arte* (Pisa: Scuola Normale Superiore, 1981), 380-408.

flâneuse, interested in getting out of the restricted domestic space to find freedom of movement and education.¹²⁸

During the second half of the 19th century, however, more women enrolled Italian art academies and entered the artistic field as professionals like in the rest of Europe. This phenomenon was also linked to the increase in the number of women who, because of a demographic imbalance, did not marry and were not subsidised by anyone. But, if low class women could easily work, members of the middle class needed to find jobs that were not considered disgraceful, such as teaching. Moreover, after the Italian unification in 1871 a new regulation of the school system made a drawing examination part of the qualification exam to become teachers.¹²⁹ The first women teachers of drawing got a diploma from the Academy of Brera in 1877.¹³⁰ Despite the perception that the majority of women enrolled Academies only to get the diploma in drawing,¹³¹ this new system helped increase the number of women arts students.

Exhibitions did not follow the academic world though. By comparing the number of women listed as professional artists in Turin, Milan, Florence, Rome and Naples in 1887 and 1913, Imarisio concludes that, despite a time span of almost 30 years, women did not manage to become established in the visual arts.¹³² The perception of a lack of good Italian women artists was popular.¹³³ However, if it is true that only few Italian women artists were able to have a satisfactory artistic career, it was also recognized how this was not a proof of the intellectual inferiority of women. As Linda Nochlin would repeat some decades later,¹³⁴

¹²⁸ Maria Antonietta Trasforini, "Donne-artiste: che genere di professione," in *Arte a parte. Donne artiste fra margini e centro*, ed. Maria Antonietta Trasforini (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2000), 17.

¹²⁹ Trasforini, *Nel segno delle artiste*, 76; Trasforini, *Donne-artiste*, 73-75; Casavecchia, *Senza nome*, 88.

¹³⁰ Sergio Rebora, "Le protagoniste. Scuole e tendenze nella pittura milanese a cavallo dei due secoli," in *Dal Salotto agli ateliers: produzione artistica femminile a Milano 1880 – 1920*, eds. Aurora Scotti, Maria Teresa Fiorio and Sergio Rebora (Milano: Jandi Sapi Editori, 1989), 28.

¹³¹ Sofia Bisi Albini, "La donna nella pittura, nella scultura e nell'arte industriale," in *Atti del I Congresso Nazionale delle donne italiane, Roma, 24-30 aprile 1908* (Roma: Stabilimento tipografico della Società Editrice Laziale, 1912), 473.

¹³² Eligio Imarisio, *Donna poi artista: identità e presenza tra Otto e Novecento* (Milano: F. Angeli, 1996), 141-142.

¹³³ See also *La Donna*, 1910, no. 132, 11.

¹³⁴ Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *Women, art and power and other essays* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 147-162.

the journalist and writer Sofia Bisi Albini¹³⁵ underlined the role of education and life conditions and obligations among the difficulties that women had in the artistic field.¹³⁶ In this period the number of exhibiting women artists was not affected by the changes within the academies, also because of juries' tendency to exclude women more easily than men. Women artists were more likely to participate in exhibitions of independent associations, such as the Permanente and the Famiglia Artistica.¹³⁷ Moreover, they created their own occasions to exhibit, such as the I Esposizione Internazionale Femminile di Belle Arti, held at the Mole Antonelliana between 4 December 1910 and 10 January 1911, and the II Esposizione Internazionale Femminile di Belle Arti at the Palazzo Stabile del Valentino in 1913 in Turin.¹³⁸

2.4 Arts and emancipationist movement

2.4.1 Artists as activists

In the arena of high culture, more or less established women artists showed a commitment to the feminist movement by supporting female suffrage, playing active roles within women's associations and participating in public meetings and conferences. Amalia Besso,¹³⁹ for example, was part of the CNDI

¹³⁵ Sofia Bisi Albini (1856-1919), writer and journalist. In 1894 she founded *Rivista per signorine*. From 1907 she directed *Vita femminile italiana*, which published the bulletin of the CNDI.

¹³⁶ Sofia Bisi Albini, "La donna nella pittura, nella scultura e nell'arte industriale," in *Atti del I Congresso Nazionale delle donne italiane*, 460-462.

¹³⁷ Both of them were based in Milan. The Permanente was founded in 1883 and the Famiglia Artistica was created in 1873.

¹³⁸ Francesca Lombardi, "L'Esposizione Internazionale Femminile di Belle Arti (Torino, 1910-1911; 1913). Note su genere, arte e professione in Italia all'inizio del XX secolo," *Artl@s Bulletin* 8, no. 1 (2019): Article 2; Vittorio Pajusco, "Bice Levi Minzi (Bice Rossi Minzi) e l'Esposizione Internazionale femminile di Torino del 1913," in *Gli artisti di Ca' Pesaro: l'Esposizione d'arte del 1913*, eds. Nico Stringa and Stefania Portinari (Venezia: Ca' Foscari-Digital publishing, 2017), 159-183. For another example see Sergio Rebor, "Una esperienza innovativa a Milano: la Federazione Artistica Femminile Italiana," in *L'arte delle donne*, eds. Iamurri and Spinazzè, 100-106.

¹³⁹ Amalia Goldmann Besso (1856-1932). Italian painter. She studied with Delleani in Turin and with Innocenti in Rome. Chris Petteys, *Dictionary of women artists: an international dictionary of women artist born before 1900* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1985), 64. See also Marina

Comitato Direttivo and, later on, became president of the Unione Politica Nazionale Femminile (Female National Political Union).¹⁴⁰ Also Carla Celesia di Vegliasco¹⁴¹ showed a progressive involvement with the women's movement. A supporter of the artistic education for women, she underlined the mistrust that surrounded women artists' activity and urged the public to acknowledge the need to grant women the same education that men received, including the artistic one, during her speech on the role of women in painting at the first CNDI conference.¹⁴² She also held official positions in several associations advocating for women's rights. She was the director of the Federazione Artistica Femminile Italiana¹⁴³ and was in charge of the artistic section of the Lyceum in Milan.¹⁴⁴ Convinced of the necessity to keep working for women's emancipation, she said "if one does not try, nothing will be achieved."¹⁴⁵

Artists were also actively supporting female suffrage. The debate about this topic was at the time very lively since, besides the opposition from some sectors of society, the feminist movement was also internally divided on the issue. While the current represented by the suffragist and emancipationist Anna Maria Mozzoni and Linda Malnati¹⁴⁶ championed suffrage for women, another group, represented by the countess Spalletti Rasponi, did not support it.¹⁴⁷ In 1906 Anna Maria Mozzoni wrote

Bakos, Olga Melasecchi and Federica Pirani, eds., *Artiste del Novecento tra visione e identità ebraica: Amelia Almaggià Ambron, Wanda Coen Biagini, Paola Consolo, Eva Fischer, Amalia Goldmann Besso, Pierina Levi, Paola Levi Montalcini, Corinna Modigliani, Olga Modigliani, Annie Nathan, Lillah Nathan, Gabriella Orefice, Adriana Pincherle, Antonietta Raphaël, Silvana Weiller* (Venezia, Trieste: Trart, 2014).

¹⁴⁰ The Unione politica nazionale femminile was founded in 1899 in Milan to fight for women's emancipation.

¹⁴¹ Carla Celesia di Vegliasco (1868-1939).

¹⁴² Carla Celesia di Vegliasco, "La donna nell'arte - Sig.na Carla Celesia di Vegliasco," in *Atti del I Congresso Nazionale delle donne italiane*, 471-473. This speech was the first step of her progressive involvement with the movement. In 1910 she also became president of the CNDI branch in Milan.

¹⁴³ Sergio Reborà, "Una esperienza innovativa a Milano: la Federazione Artistica Femminile Italiana," in *L'arte delle donne*, eds. Iamurri and Spinazzè, 100-106.

¹⁴⁴ The Lyceum in Milan was founded in 1909 and Carla Celesia di Vegliasco was responsible for the artistic section from its opening. Francesca Cagianelli, ed., *Carla Celesia di Vegliasco protagonista del Simbolismo Toscano (1868-1939)* (Livorno: Debate, 2003), 12.

¹⁴⁵ Carla Lavelli Celesia, *Pensieri, scritti, discorsi, opere di Carla Celesia, baronessa di Vegliasco, in Lavelli de Capitani* (Milano: Alfieri e Lacroix, 1942), 73.

¹⁴⁶ Linda Malnati (1855-1921). Pro-female suffrage committees, coordinated by a national one, were founded all over Italy thanks to her work.

¹⁴⁷ Rossana, "Vita femminile. Identità femminile," *La Tribuna*, February 17, 1912.

a document in order to stimulate discussions on the possibility of granting the right to the political vote for women.¹⁴⁸ The petition found its first twenty-seven signatories within the *Associazione per la donna* (Association for the woman) in Rome.¹⁴⁹ The document was then presented to the Parliament by the National Committee pro female suffrage.

The petition claimed the right to vote for every woman, independently from her education, as a consequence of women's new role outside of the house and of the transformation of the female condition brought about by the economic crisis, the industrial revolution and the dispositions of the new Civil Code. By referring to working class and middle-class women, the petition also tried to overcome class divisions. This is further proved by the signatories to the document, women who were active in education, medicine, industry, social and political work, together with a telephonist and a telegraph operator. Among them two artists, also members of the *Associazione per la donna*, signed

¹⁴⁸ The petition was only a moment of a pro-female suffrage campaign that had started in the 19th century. Anna Maria Mozzoni had already presented a petition to the Parliament in 1887, the first one of this kind in Italy. She had been one of the speakers at a large public meeting held in Rome in 1881 and she had urged women to protest against their condition, including the impossibility to vote, in her work *La donna e i suoi rapporti sociali* (1864) reproduced in Aldo Rosselli and Zeffiro Ciuffoletti, *Il pensiero democratico e socialista dell'Ottocento* (Roma: Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1997), 581-582. The petition began "The admission to the exercise of vote, which for us and on behalf of all Italian women, we ask to the Parliament, is the natural and by now mature product of the economic crisis, of the transformation of industries and of the dispositions of the national Civil code, elements that, different at the individual origins, came all together in a single fact, get the woman out of the house to throw her in the fight for life" and continued "we make it clear that all women (like all men) have the right to vote, *with and without the alphabet*, which if it is the Highest instrument of culture, does not create, however, neither intelligence, neither common sense, neither the conscious vision of one's own interests. We have that right because we are citizens, because we pay taxes and duties, because we produce wealth, because we pay the tax of blood with the pain of maternity, because, lastly, we bring the contribution of work and money to the functioning of the State." The full text of the petition "Al Senato del Regno, alla Camera dei Deputati. Petizione delle donne italiane (ai sensi dell'art. 57 dello Statuto fondamentale del Regno) per il voto politico e amministrativo" is fully reproduced in Irene De Bonis De Nobili, *Per il voto alle donne* (Roma: Tip. Righetti, 1909), 101-114.

¹⁴⁹ The members of the *Associazione per la donna* used to meet in the house of Donna Giacinta Martini, who took the reins of the suffragist movement in Rome, until they had another venue in Piazza Fiammetta. The pro-female suffrage committee in Rome was born within the association. See Liviana Gazzetta, *Orizzonti nuovi: storia del primo femminismo in Italia (1865-1925)* (Roma: Viella, 2018), 145-151.

the petition, Tilde Ferrari Narducci¹⁵⁰ and Ida Salvagnini Bidoli.¹⁵¹ Despite the few information available on her, Tilde Ferrari Narducci is a particularly interesting figure who was very much involved with the suffragist movement. She did not only sign the petition, but was also appointed advisor of the *Comitato Nazionale Italiano per il voto alle donne* at the end of 1906.¹⁵²

2.4.2 The 1908 conference of CNDI

2.4.2.1 *The conference*

The CNDI was founded in 1903 as the Italian branch of the International Council of Women, born in Washington in 1888, and

¹⁵⁰ She signed the petition as Tilde Ferrari Narducci. However, the same year she was also mentioned in the catalogue of the *Mostra Nazionale di Belle Arti*, in which she participated within the group of women artists, as Tilde Ferrari. Hence, it is likely that she was recorded in the catalogue with her maiden name. She was the nephew and student of the painter Nino Costa as indicated in *“Artiste che hanno aderito”*, s.l., s.d., Esposizione Nazionale di Milano 1906, Archivio Storico dell’Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, Italy.

¹⁵¹ In addition to Anna Maria Mozzoni, Tilde Ferrari Narducci and Ida Salvagnini Bidoli, the signatures included Donna Giacinta Martini Marescotti, founder and president of the Comitato Pro-suffragio, Valeria Benetti, Graduated in Natural Sciences; Teresa Boncompagni, Princess of Venosa, President of Ambulatorio per I bambini poveri (Clinique for poor children); Eva de Vincentiis, writer; Marquise Etta de Viti De Marco, Board member of the Society against begging; Maria Grassi Koenen, President of the Comitato Nazionale femminile di soccorso per le vedove e gli orfani degli impiegati dello Stato non provviste di pensione (Female National Rescue Committee for widows and orphans of civil servant without a pension); Cleofe Leoni, telephone operator; Olga Lodi, decorated with the medal at the well-deserving for public health, journalist; Elena Massetti Pisani, President of the Associazione magistrale femminile romana (Roman female Magistral Association); Margherita Mengarini, Graduated in Natural Sciences; Maria Montessori, Doctor in Medicine and Surgery; Donna Bice Mozzoni, Graduated in Jurisprudence; Carolina Palma, primary school teacher; Giuditta Parboni, primary school teacher; Contessa Maria Pasolini, President of the Biblioteca circolante (Circulating library); Delia Pavoni widow Magnaghi, owner of Terme di Salsomaggiore; Predelea Longhi, Graduated in Mathematics; Beatrice Sacchi, Graduated in Mathematics; Maria Santarelli, industrial; Contessa Maria Anna Soderini de Frankenstein, School Inspector; Anna Stelluti, industrial and merchant; Contessa Lavinia Taverna, Vice-president of the Cooperativa industrie femminili italiane (Cooperative of female Italian industries); Romelia Troise, telegraph operator.

¹⁵² Prof. Anita Pagliari Bianchi, *“Le pioniere del suffragismo,” Almanacco della donna italiana*, 1926. The article is interesting as Pagliari Bianchi strongly affirmed the existence of the Italian feminism, but also noticed that many suffragists dedicated themselves to voluntary and charitable organizations during World War One.

it represented the liberal wing of the emancipationist movement.¹⁵³ It was born as a confederation of many different women's associations and charities that operated locally. Gabriella Spalletti Rasponi was its president from the foundation to her death in 1931, when Mussolini was able to choose a new president in line with his plans. The CNDI first conference was organized in Rome between 23 and 30 April 1908. Different aspects of women's lives and conditions were discussed during the sessions: literature and arts; education; social work and security, including the importance of healthcare and security funds during the maternity period; moral and legal condition of women; hygiene. The section about literature and arts was dedicated to the role of women in the artistic and literary fields. Different speakers described the position of women in the arts, but also underlined the importance of the study of disciplines like art history and archaeology, which were not usually chosen by women, in order to find occupation in museums and galleries.

During the conference, attended by members of CNDI, Associazione per la Donna and Unione tra le Donne Cattoliche d'Italia (Union of the Italian Catholic Women), the movement's internal divisions became evident. The discussion on the issue of religion classes in schools, for example, highlighted the distance that separated catholic feminists of the Unione tra le Donne Cattoliche d'Italia from the members of the other associations. However, the disagreements had much deeper roots. Despite common goals, CNDI and Associazione per la donna interpreted the movement in different ways. The latter represented its extreme wing, while the CNDI aimed at being more inclusive and less radical.¹⁵⁴ During the congress, a more moderate vision seemed to prevail, disappointing movement's representatives like Anna Maria Mozzoni and Anna Kuliscioff. The idea that belonging to the same sex was more important than different political opinions and ideas silenced the most radical positions. For this reason, the congress became, according to Chiara Martinelli, a lost opportunity for real development.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ On the history of the Consiglio Nazionale delle donne italiane see Taricone, *L'associazionismo femminile in Italia*, 9-100.

¹⁵⁴ Virtus, "Eva...bifronte," *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, March 8, 1912.

¹⁵⁵ Chiara Martinelli, "Suffragismo, femminismo e ruolo femminile nelle attività di Giacinta Martini Marescotti," in *Diritti negati, diritti sognati: da Italia Donati a Giacinta Marescotti*

2.4.2.2 *First mother, then artist*

The movement's internal disagreements and contradictions emerged also during the session on the position of women in the arts. Despite different opinions were expressed, a conservative and moderate line of thought seemed to prevail. Talks from the writer and journalist Sofia Albini Bisi, the suffragist Irene de Bonis de Nobili and the writer and journalist Evelyn Franceschi Marini, known as Evelyn, for instance, embodied all the contradictions between the claims for a new status for women and the reaffirmation of their traditional role of wives and mothers. The emphasis on the alleged female aesthetic sense and the importance to cultivate and sustain it, a recurring theme of these speeches, did not match with an encouragement and praise for women choosing the artistic career that, on the contrary, was discouraged.

Sofia Albini Bisi opened the session with a talk on the woman in painting, sculpture and industrial arts. She pointed at women's life conditions and education as the causes of the lack of women artists. Those who managed to have an artistic career often belonged to families where other members, usually men, were artists too and, therefore, were more open minded and supportive. However, she foresaw an increase in the number of women artists in the future, thanks to a higher freedom accorded to them. Yet, instead of urging a change and more radical solutions to the problems hampering women artists' careers, she suggested that women should dedicate themselves to crafts, in particular the art of lace. In this way they would be able to work at home and avoid unhealthy activities and insalubrious places such as factories. At the same time, women would find a practical reason for their artistic education. Ultimately, she confirmed that women choosing the artistic career had to be ready to sacrifice their life as women and she proved her point by mentioning women artists who had been obliged to quit their work after giving birth.

(Monsummano, 2018). Exhibition catalogue. Museo della città e del Territorio, 26 November 26, 2017-March 11, 2018, 27-5.

A similar moderate position permeated Irene de Bonis de Nobili's speech. She claimed that women's artistic ambitions, a luxury that did not provide enough to live also to some men, should be channelled into practical applications. For this reason, she suggested that more women attended the existing schools of industrial arts. She also conceived the study of architecture only to help male architects or to become interior decorators, as every woman should be the "artist of the house."¹⁵⁶ After speaking of the need to give an artistic education also to lower class women, the stress on a practical and everyday life use of the artistic education was reaffirmed also by Evelyn.¹⁵⁷ The aesthetic sense developed through that kind of education, she maintained, could be useful in decorating the house and in being always fashionable, "without ever exaggerating."¹⁵⁸ The idea that the most natural field of expression for female aesthetic sense is applied arts was at the basis of the speech by Agresti as well. She asked for more and improved professional schools instead of Academies of Fine Arts in order for women's aesthetic sense to emerge and improve.¹⁵⁹

Evidence of a clash of opinions during this session is the exchange between the artists Tilde Ferrari Narducci and Adelaide Maraini. The latter, who spoke about women in sculpture,¹⁶⁰ was one of those women who found in a family of artists the encouragement and understanding to pursue an artistic career.¹⁶¹ She focused on the difficulties of reconciling the roles of mother and wife, still the most noble ones according to her, with the activity of sculptor. In her opinion the woman artist, even if very talented, should always give way to the mother and wife, by turning, for example, to crafts and decorative arts in order to not

¹⁵⁶ Irene de Bonis De Nobili, *Atti del I Congresso Nazionale delle donne italiane*, 466.

¹⁵⁷ Evelyn Franceschi Marini, born Evelyn de Touche and known as Evelyn (1855-Sansepolcro 1920). Art historian, journalist and writer.

¹⁵⁸ Evelyn, "Cultura artistica della donna," *Atti del I Congresso Nazionale delle donne italiane*, 467-471.

¹⁵⁹ Agresti, *Atti del I Congresso Nazionale delle donne italiane*, 470- 471.

¹⁶⁰ "La donna nella scultura – Comunicazione della Sig.ra Adelaide Maraini," in *Atti del I Congresso Nazionale delle donne italiane*, 474-476.

¹⁶¹ Adelaide Maraini-Pandiani (1836-1917). Sculptor. After studying with her father, Giovanni Pandiani, she attended some courses at the Academy of Brera. She married the engineer Clemente Maraini in 1862 and had two children in 1864 and 1868. Particularly active between 1870 and 1900, she moved to Rome where she lived until her death. Petteys, *Dictionary of women artists*, 472.

neglect her domestic responsibilities.¹⁶² Her speech, like the others mentioned, was the expression of a moderate section of the movement, which was demanding more freedom, although still supporting a strict separation of roles between men and women. Nevertheless, some dissenting voices made their presence known.

The conference proceedings kept record of at least one of them. They mention in the discussion following Maraini's talk a speech by a madam Ferrari, who is likely the painter Tilde Ferrari Narducci. According to the records, she vindicated women's right to follow their artistic aspirations in any circumstance.¹⁶³ In the same discussion the proceedings mention also the painter Ida Salvagnini Bidoli. Unfortunately, no record of her contribution was filed, since her suggestion for the agenda, together with those from other participants, was not registered. Nevertheless, the reference to the reply given by Ferrari Narducci is a significant piece in the puzzle that I am trying to reconstruct. Next to women who had still conservative opinions on the role that they should have in society and within the family, despite their own position of artists, others chose not to comply with that traditional idea of womanhood and to actively fight against it. It is interesting to note that Adelaide Maraini and Tilde Ferrari Narducci were the founders, among others, of the *Società delle artiste*, which exhibited at the *Mostra Nazionale di Belle Arti* at the Esposizione Internazionale del Sempione in Milan. However, Adelaide Maraini did not eventually exhibit with the group. The next paragraph will come forward with a hypothesis for her absence.

2.5 The group of women artists at the 1906 *Mostra Nazionale di Belle Arti* in Milan

2.5.1 The *Società delle artiste*

The claims to representation that women were struggling to get in every field, from the political to the working one, became more visible in the artistic world too thanks to the activity of those

¹⁶²Adelaide Maraini, "La donna nella scultura," in *Atti del I Congresso Nazionale delle donne italiane*, 474-476.

¹⁶³*Atti del I Congresso Nazionale delle donne italiane, Roma, 24-30 aprile 1908*, 479.

women artists who were also suffragists and emancipationists. A group including the painters Ida Salvagnini Bidoli,¹⁶⁴ Amalia Besso, Tilde Ferrari, Frieda Menshausen,¹⁶⁵ Tyra Kleen¹⁶⁶ and the sculptors Adelaide Maraini and Marcella Lancelot Croce¹⁶⁷ gathered in the house of the painter Ida Salvagnini Bidoli and her husband Francesco Alberto Salvagnini and founded a Società delle artiste (Society of women artists).¹⁶⁸ They wanted to gather women artists who shared similar intentions, independently from their school and technique, on the basis of their willingness to follow the contemporary developments of the artistic world and to translate the meaning of life into art, without focusing on the simple technical reproduction of forms.¹⁶⁹

The society is mentioned for the first time in a letter to Camillo Boito, President of the Fine Arts Committee, by Francesco Alberto Salvagnini.¹⁷⁰ Ida Salvagnini Bidoli's husband repeatedly wrote to Boito in order to promote the society and ensure its participation in the exhibition.¹⁷¹ Despite many references to the

¹⁶⁴ Ida Salvagnini Bidoli (Trieste, 1866- 1945).

¹⁶⁵ Frieda Menshausen-Labriola (Stendal, 1861 -). Painter and craftworker active in Berlin. She studied at Kassel Academy and with The dys in Weimar. Petteys, *Dictionary of women artists*, 489.

¹⁶⁶ Tyra Kleen (1874-1951). Swedish painter, illustrator, lithographer and etcher, writer. Before moving to Paris in 1895, she studied at the Women's art school in Dresden between 1891-1892, at the School of Painting in Karlsruhe between 1892 -1894 and at the Academy of Arts in Munich between 1894 and 1895. She lived in Rome between 1898 and 1908. Her illustrations feature imaginative and fantasy figures, scenes of phantoms, fable beings and departed souls. See Niclas Franzén et al., *Tyra Kleen. Her life and work rediscovered* (Linderothos Tryckeri, Sweden, 2018).

¹⁶⁷ Marcelle Renée Lancelot-Croce (Paris, 1854 -). Sculptor in bronze, plaster. She married the Italian sculptor Croce and lived many years in Rome. She studied with her father Dieudonné Lancelot and with Chaplin, Ponscarne and E. Delaplanche. She exhibited also at the *Columbian Exposition of Chicago* in 1893. Petteys, *Dictionary of women artists*, 417; Maud Howe Elliott, *Art and Handicraft in the Woman's Building of the World's Columbia Exhibition* (New York: Goupil & Co, 1893), 96, 179.

¹⁶⁸ Their home in via Giulia 167 in Rome became the headquarters of the Society. The society's branch in Milan, where Carla Cesia di Vegliasco was its representative, was in Via Morigi 9, as indicated by the letterhead.

¹⁶⁹ Correspondence from Ida Salvagnini Bidoli, 10 October 1905, CARPI C VI 23, Esposizione Nazionale di Milano 1906, Archivio Storico dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, Italy.

¹⁷⁰ Francesco Alberto Salvagnini (1867 –1947). General Director of Academies and Libraries, covered different roles within the Italian Public Administration. He married Ida Bidoli in 1897. See Alberto Petrucciani, "Francesco Alberto Salvagnini," in *Dizionario biografico dei direttori generali Direzione Generale Accademie e Biblioteche Direzione Generale Antichità e Belle Arti (1904-1974)* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2011), 168-179.

¹⁷¹ Although there is no proof that Salvagnini actually used his strong position within the public administration to smooth the way for the group, his heavy involvement with the society was likely a consequence of his connections, which made him a helpful candidate

Statute in the correspondence, the impossibility to retrieve it so far does not allow to say much on the general policy of the society.¹⁷² However, the choice to exhibit professional well-known artists suggests a focus, at least at these initial stages, on drawing attention to established women artists, rather than encouraging young unknown ones. Thanks to the letters, it is also possible to know that the Statute placed more emphasis on the value and success of the artists rather than on their geographical provenance.¹⁷³ Indeed, the geographical composition of the group that would later exhibit with the society was very diverse as many artists were foreigners living in Italy. Some of them were also members of foreign women's associations. Julie Wolfthorne and Dora Hitz, for instance, were members of the Verein der Künstlerinnen und Kunstfreunde in Berlin; Charlotte Chauchet-Guilleré was a member of the Union des Femmes Peintres and Sculpteurs in Paris. According to Francesco Alberto Salvagnini, the need to invite foreign artists to exhibit with the members of the society was a consequence of a lack of good Italian women artists.¹⁷⁴

to support the initiative. Differently from what happened later in the century, women welcomed men's contribution to the cause since it helped them to reach the appropriate places. For example, the collaboration with well-known men from the political and cultural Italian sphere gave to journals connected to the feminist movement an image of credibility. Moreover, it gave the idea that they hosted discussions in a free and open-minded environment, far from the excesses of radical emancipationism. See Annarita Buttafuoco and Rosanna De Longis, "La stampa politica delle donne dal 1861 al 1924. Repertorio-Catalogo," *Nuova DWF*, no. 21 (1982): 73 – 100.

¹⁷² It has been particularly difficult to find material on the society. Moreover, a lack of biographical and bibliographical sources interests many of the artists discussed.

¹⁷³ Correspondence from Francesco Alberto Salvagnini, 5 September 1905, CARPI C VI 23, Esposizione Nazionale di Milano 1906, Archivio Storico dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, Italy. According to this letter, another reason used by the organizers to refuse the group was its provenance from Rome, like many other groups that applied. The city was one of the centres of the Italian art at the time and many women artists were active there. See Pier Paolo Pancotto, *Artiste a Roma nella prima metà del '900* (Roma: Palombi, 2006).

¹⁷⁴ Francesco Alberto Salvagnini, *L'arte di Ida Salvagnini Bidoli pittrice. Pensieri e Giudizi a cura di F. A. S.* (Roma 1937-XV: Edizioni Enzo Pinci), 9-12. Camillo Boito shared his opinion and suggested that the group included some foreign artists in order to increase their chances of admission.

2.5.2 A room of their own

The members of the society decided to apply as “group of women artists” at the *Mostra Nazionale di Belle Arti* at the Esposizione Internazionale del Sempione in Milan (fig. 2).¹⁷⁵ The exhibition full title, *Mostra Internazionale dei Trasporti, della Previdenza e delle Belle Arti* (International Exhibition of Transports, Social Security and Fine Arts), testifies of the central role played by the arts at the event. The artistic and cultural environment of Milan obtained an important window at the exhibition through its fine arts section.¹⁷⁶ According to Camillo Boito, one of the members of the Executive Committee and President of the Commission for the Fine Arts,¹⁷⁷ Milan had to demonstrate its artistic vocation, in addition to the commercial and industrial one. For this reason, he supported the choice to have a section dedicated exclusively to the fine arts against the opinion of another member of the Commission, De Andreis, who wanted the exhibition to be focused only on transports.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Organized between April 28 and November 11, 1906, this world fair celebrated the opening of the Sempione Tunnel, which connected Switzerland to Italy. At a national level, the fair confirmed Milan’s central role in the upcoming young Italian country. Moreover, by celebrating a tunnel that improved the transports and the economic sector of the whole Europe, it constituted an important occasion at an international level as well. The literature on this exhibition is far too extensive to cite here. For a general introduction see *Esposizione Internazionale di Milano 1906: Guida Ufficiale* (Milano: Max Frank & C., 1906); Pietro Redondi and Domenico Lini, eds., *La scienza, la città, la vita: Milano 1906, l’Esposizione internazionale del Sempione* (Milano: Skira, 2006), 23; Rossana Bossaglia, “L’Esposizione del Sempione del 1906,” in *Arte a Milano 1906-1929* (Milano: Electa, 1995). Exhibition catalogue. 17-19.

¹⁷⁶ “Un’esposizione a Milano nel 1904,” *La Perseveranza*, June 21, 1901. On the *Mostra Nazionale di Belle arti* see “La mostra di belle arti e d’architettura, ed il salone dei festeggiamenti,” in *Esposizione Internazionale di Milano 1906*, 59-65.

¹⁷⁷ The Commission for the *Mostra Nazionale di Belle Arti*, appointed by the Executive Committee, included the president Camillo Boito, the vice presidents Virgilio Colombo and Giorgio Sinigaglia, Achille Alberti, Felice Bialetti, Diego Brioschi, Pompeo Mariani, Ernesto Pirovano, Camillo Rapetti, Luigi Secchi, Alessandro Vanotti and the secretary Arturo Campi. The Ordering Committee, elected by the artists, included Giorgio Belloni, Filippo Carcano, Camillo Innocenti, Paolo Sala, Ettore Tito, Leonardo Bistolfi, Enrico Butti, Bassano Danielli, Eugenio Pellini, Raffaello Romanelli, Edoardo Collamarini, Alfredo D’Andrade, Angelo Savoldi, Giuseppe Sommaruga, Ulisse Stacchini.

¹⁷⁸ Quoted in Francesca Misiano, “La città più città d’Italia” verso l’Europa. L’Esposizione Internazionale di Milano del 1906,” PhD Diss., Università degli Studi di Milano, 2012-2013, 28.

Available at https://air.unimi.it/retrieve/handle/2434/232582/301669/phd_unimi_R09049.pdf (accessed September 28, 2016).

In order to avoid the competition with the Venice Biennial on an international level, the Mostra Nazionale di Belle Arti was the only section of the exhibition to preserve a national character. By restricting the participation to Italian artists living abroad and foreign artists living permanently in Italy, it was conceived as a window on the Italian contemporary artistic scene. The exhibition was characterized by the presence of many different tendencies of the time, including more or less modern currents.¹⁷⁹ The Regulation allowed the participation of groups that shared a common artistic orientation or, in exceptional cases, which collectively represented characteristics and tendencies of their regions. The Commission also promoted the participation of individual living artists, up to a maximum of ten, and solo shows of artists who had recently died.¹⁸⁰ Eventually the exhibition saw the participation of many well-known artists.¹⁸¹

Before sending any official application together with the Statute of the society, the members asked Salvagnini to write on their behalf in order to ascertain Boito's potential willingness to support the group. In his first letter he focuses not only on the members' artistic value, of which he considers the reputation of the artists a proof, but suggests to the commission that they accept the group as evidence of the exhibition's modernity. For this purpose, he compares the Society of women artists to other women's associations such as the Société des femmes artistes of Paris and the Künstlerinnen Verein of Munich.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Paolo Biscottini, "Arte a Milano 1906-1929. Le ragioni di una mostra," in *Arte a Milano, 1906-1929*, 13-15.

¹⁸⁰ Executive Committee, *Catalogo illustrato/Mostra nazionale di belle arti* (Milano, 1906), 5-22.

¹⁸¹ The artists exhibiting individually were Alfredo D'Andrade, Ettore Tito, Mosè Bianchi, Filippo Carcano, Onorato Carlandi, Enrico Butti. The groups, in addition to the women artists group, included the Tuscan artists (headed by Luigi Gioli); the Circolo Artistico Partenopeo (headed by Vincenzo Caprile); the Group of Lazio (headed by Giulio Aristide Sartorio); the artists from Venice (headed by Cesare Laurenti); the Unione degli Artisti di Roma (headed by Ernesto Biondi); the group Ciardi (headed by Guglielmo Ciardi); the young artists from Venice (headed by Lino Selvatico); the landscape painters from Piemonte (headed by Marco Calderini); the group of Galileo Chini; the group from Lombardy (headed by Leonardo Bazzaro); another group from Lombardy (headed by Emilio Gola); the Giovane Roma (headed by Pietro Mengarini).

¹⁸² Correspondence from Francesco Alberto Salvagnini, 26 August 1905, CARPI C VI 23, Esposizione Nazionale di Milano 1906, Archivio Storico dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, Italy.

The official submission was sent on the 10 October 1905. Before presenting the list of the participant artists, the representative tried to reply to any possible objection:

“Someone observed that the simple fact of being women artists was not enough to justify the creation of a group, to which it is easy to reply that – while no article of the Regulation prevents women artists to create a group – the fact is that in order to compose our group only women artists who, according to the founding members, gave reassurance of having an affirmed artistic career, have been called. Someone else observed that the group was not regional; however, even this is not prescribed by the Regulation, which admits the regionality as justification for groups lacking any other binding characteristic. Besides, we trust the open-mindedness of the distinguished members of the Commission that will not listen to this kind of motivations.”¹⁸³

The issue of professionalism was repeatedly referred to in the correspondence. Francesco Alberto Salvagnini stressed the will of the society’s members not only to create a group based on gender, but a serious and long-lasting collectivity bound together by common intentions and interests.¹⁸⁴ Writing to another member of the commission, Amalia Besso asked for his support underlining that the reputation of the group’s members was a guarantee of seriousness and that all the possible efforts would have been put in place in order to present the group in a decorous way.¹⁸⁵

The group certainly tried to involve well-known artists, whose presence would be a proof of their professionalism and commitment. An artist whose support would have given an

¹⁸³ Correspondence from Ida Salvagnini Bidoli to the President of the Commission, 10 October 1905, CARPI C VI 23, Esposizione Nazionale di Milano 1906, Archivio Storico dell’Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, Italy. The emphasis is original.

¹⁸⁴ Correspondence from Francesco Alberto Salvagnini, 5 September 1905, CARPI C VI 23, Esposizione Nazionale di Milano 1906, Archivio Storico dell’Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, Italy.

¹⁸⁵ Correspondence from Amalia Besso, 27 September 1905, CARPI C VI 23, Esposizione Nazionale di Milano 1906, Archivio Storico dell’Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, Italy.

important contribution to the initiative was Emma Ciardi, one of the most appreciated painters at the time. She was invited to join the group, but she had already been accepted with her father and brother. Since the regulation did not allow to participate within two different groups, she doubted the possibility to accept the invitation. Without even mentioning the possibility of withdrawing from her family's group, she suggested that Ida Salvagnini Bidoli asked the commission to grant her the permit to participate in both groups, saying that she "would be happy of a positive reply."¹⁸⁶ Indeed, her name appears in the first list of artists attached to the society's official application even if, as the permit was denied, she did not exhibit with them.¹⁸⁷ It can be imagined that family ties were particularly binding in her case. On a more general note, however, women artists who were already well known were usually less willing to get involved in women-only exhibitions.¹⁸⁸ Participating in such manifestations could have spoiled an artist's reputation, considering the scepticism that often surrounded women artists' work.

Ida Salvagnini Bidoli, who was elected representative of the group by the other members of the society, showed a very different attitude towards the exhibition. According to the Regulation, the groups' representatives had to be well-known artists. By the time the exhibition in Milan opened, she had already participated to the Venice Biennial in 1897 and to several exhibitions of the Società Amatori e Cultori di Belle Arti (Collectors and Connoisseurs Society) in Rome, but she was not a celebrated artist as all the other representatives.¹⁸⁹ Nevertheless, she took her role very seriously and placed much emphasis on the importance of the group. On Boito's advice, she applied also individually in order to secure her participation, although

¹⁸⁶ Correspondence from Emma Ciardi, 26 September 1905, CARPI C VI 23, Esposizione Nazionale di Milano 1906, Archivio Storico dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, Italy.

¹⁸⁷ "Notifica per gruppi e sodalizi," 10 October 1905, CARPI C VI 23, Esposizione Nazionale di Milano 1906, Archivio Storico dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, Italy. The list will, nevertheless, change later as some artists here included, such as Adele von Finck, Ellen Jolin, Cornelia Paczka-Wagner and Lotten Rönquist, did not exhibit with the group.

¹⁸⁸ Deborah Cherry, *Beyond the frame: feminism and visual culture, Britain 1850-1900* (London: Routledge, 2000), 50-52.

¹⁸⁹ The only biographical information on the artist can be retrieved, together with reproductions of the artworks and excerpts from magazines and newspapers regarding exhibitions of her work, in Salvagnini, *L'arte di Ida Salvagnini Bidoli pittrice*; Petteys, *Dictionary of Women Artists*, 66.

planning to renounce in case there was the possibility to exhibit with the group of women artists.¹⁹⁰ Being part of that endeavour was much more meaningful to her than simply exhibiting at the *Mostra*. Although getting some recognition as a group would have definitely improved the members' status as individual artists, the creation of the society cannot be seen only as an attempt to enhance the individual members' personal reputations. It shows, instead, their firm belief that a collective action could best serve their interests. Whether these were achieved in this occasion is debatable.

The behaviours of Ida Salvagnini Bidoli and Emma Ciardi seem to illustrate two different strategies of being women artists at the beginning of the century. While the first one placed most emphasis on the importance of the collectivity, even if retaining a commitment to quality, the second one is the example of an individual exception to the exclusion of women artists from the artistic world, who did not need or feel the need to place emphasis on her belonging to a group of women artists.

At first, the women's application was not taken into consideration because it had been presented, according to the commission, after the deadline.¹⁹¹ Besides this official explanation, however, there might have been other reasons for the refusal. Francesco Alberto Salvagnini recalled, for example, the grim and astonished reception that Boito initially reserved to them.¹⁹² An all-women application was certainly unconventional and might have astonished or annoyed some members of the committee. Regardless of the refusal, the campaign to widen the support for the initiative among the commission's members continued.¹⁹³ The painter Filippo Carcano was contacted several times, also by Ida Salvagnini Bidoli, who asked his opinion about some of his students in the eventuality of inviting them to exhibit with the

¹⁹⁰ Correspondence from Francesco Alberto Salvagnini, September 1905, CARPI C VI 23, Esposizione Nazionale di Milano 1906, Archivio Storico dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, Italy.

¹⁹¹ "Adunanza della Commissione per le Belle Arti 26 Settembre 1905 ore 9 pom.," CARPI C IV 32, Esposizione Nazionale di Milano 1906, Archivio Storico dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, Italy.

¹⁹² Salvagnini, *L'arte di Ida Salvagnini Bidoli pittrice*, 9-12.

¹⁹³ Correspondence from Francesco Alberto Salvagnini, 2 October 1905, CARPI C VI 23, Esposizione Nazionale di Milano 1906, Archivio Storico dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, Italy.

members of the society.¹⁹⁴ Two contradictory forces played out during the process that led to the exhibition. On one side, the group's members wanted to present themselves *qua women*, independently. On the other, they still had to submit themselves to an only men commission's judgment and to rely on the opinion of teachers, always men, about their female students. It is not possible to say whether this was a real necessity or a way to please some committees' members. Eventually, their persistence outlasted the resistance of the commission that re-examined its previous decision and accepted the group.¹⁹⁵

2.5.3 The exhibition

The Società delle artiste was assigned the room XVIII of the prominent pavilion in the Parco Sempione dedicated to the arts, designed by the architect Sebastiano Giuseppe Locati (fig. 3).¹⁹⁶ The room was well-placed, being one of the first ones that visitors encountered entering the pavilion through a side entrance, after the presidency, the secretary's office and the sales' room. The artists took care of the decoration too. Two walls were covered with tapestries by Selma Giobel and Tyra Kleen was meant to realize an original decoration.¹⁹⁷ The room exhibited 40 works by 17 artists, including, in addition to the members of the society, Magda Becker, Ernestina Orlandini,¹⁹⁸ Sofia di

¹⁹⁴ Correspondence from Ida Salvagnini Bidoli, 6 October 1905, CARPI C VI 23, Esposizione Nazionale di Milano 1906, Archivio Storico dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, Italy. Many women painters studied with Filippo Carcano (1840-1914). He exhibited individually at the *Mostra Nazionale di Belle Arti* and was also a member of the commission.

¹⁹⁵ "Adunanza della Commissione per le Belle Arti Venerdì 20 Ottobre 1905," CARPI C IV 32, Esposizione Nazionale di Milano 1906, Archivio Storico dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, Italy.

¹⁹⁶ Sebastiano Giuseppe Locati (1861 – 1939).

¹⁹⁷ This was one of the requests of the group, together with a room without side windows. It has not been possible to know whether it was realized. "Gruppi di artisti italiani," CARPI C VI 23, Esposizione Nazionale di Milano 1906, Archivio Storico dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, Italy.

¹⁹⁸ See Donna Maria, "Le espositrici alla mostra di Venezia," *La Donna*, no. 17, 1905, 14-16.

Bricherasio,¹⁹⁹ Maria Ippoliti,²⁰⁰ Louise Catherine Breslau,²⁰¹ Marie Villedieu,²⁰² Carla Ceselia di Vegliasco, Charlotte Chauchet Guillere,²⁰³ Maria Antoniette Marcotte,²⁰⁴ Dora Hitz,²⁰⁵ Julie Wolfthorn²⁰⁶ and Selma Giobel.²⁰⁷ Eventually, the sculptors Adelaide Maraini and Marcella Lancelot Croce, originally members of the society, did not exhibit in the room, which included only painters. Unfortunately, no documents referring to the reasons of their absence have been found. However, as we have seen, Adelaide Maraini and Tilde Ferrari Narducci had different opinions on how women artists should pursue their careers. Therefore, it can be imagined that their disagreement eventually divided the group.

¹⁹⁹ Sofia di Bricherasio (1867-1950). Painter. She studied with Lorenzo Delleani in Turin. Petteys, *Dictionary of Women Artists*, 95.

²⁰⁰ Maria Ippoliti (1861-1932). Painter. She studied at the Academy in Venice. See Isabella Reale, *Maria Ippoliti (Udine, 1861-Pordenone, 1932): una pioniera del paesaggio en plein air* (Udine: Comune di Udine: Gamud-Galleria d'arte moderna, 2009).

²⁰¹ Marie Louise-Catherine Breslau. Painter (1856-1927). Around 1900 she was the most famous and sought-after painter of portraits of women and children. Born in Munich, she grew up in Zürich and obtained the Swiss nationality in 1892. She studied under Tony Robert-Fleury at Académie Julian in Paris between 1878 and 1881 and always referred to him as her only teacher. She exhibited at the Salon de la Société des Artistes Français showing mainly portraits and episodes from everyday life until 1890. Afterwards, she exhibited regularly at the Société National des Beaux-Arts, of which she was also a founding member. The latter was run on more flexible lines than the Salon de la Société des Artistes Français. During World War One she abandoned portraits of women and children and preferred to paint officers. See Breslau, (Marie) Louise-Catherine, Dominique Lobstein, in *Dictionary of Women Artists. Introductory Surveys, vol. I: Artists, A-I*, ed. Delia Gaze (London-Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997), 315-316.

²⁰² Marie Villedieu (born Montelimar, Drome, France). Painter (portraits). She studied with Louis Deschamps. She exhibited at the Salon de la Société des Artistes Français and at the Salon des Tuileries. Petteys, *Dictionary of Women Artists*, 724

²⁰³ Charlotte Chauchet-Guillere (born 1878-Charleville, Ardennes). Painter. She studied with Gabriel Thurner, B. Constant and J.P. Laurens. She exhibited between 1891 and 1912 at the Salon de la Société des Artistes Français. She was a member of the Union des Femmes Peintres and Sculpteurs. Petteys, *Dictionary of women artists*, 136; Donna Maria, "Le espositrici alla mostra di Venezia," *La Donna*, no. 17, 1905, 14-16.

²⁰⁴ Marie Antoniette Marcotte (Troyes, France, 1869 -). Painter. She studied with E. Claus and Portaels in Brussels and with Jules Lefebvre in Paris. She frequently exhibited at the Société des Artistes Français. Petteys, *Dictionary of women artists*, 473.

²⁰⁵ Dora Hitz (1856 Altdorf near Nürnberg, Germany- 1924 Berlin). Painter and illustrator. She was in Berlin from 1892. She studied with Lindenschmit in Munich; Merson, Courtois, Constant and Carrière in Paris. She travelled to Italy in 1911-1912. Petteys, *Dictionary of women artists*, 340.

²⁰⁶ Julie Wolfthorn (born 1846, Thorn, Prussia). Painter and printmaker active in Berlin. She studied in Berlin, at Académie Colarossi and with Courtois in Paris. She was influenced by Aman-Jean and the impressionists. See Petteys, *Dictionary of women artists*, 765.

²⁰⁷ Selma Giobel (1843 – 1925).

A general evaluation of the exhibition is difficult considering that some artworks are known only thanks to reproductions in books, like *Notturmo* by Ida Salvagnini Bidoli,²⁰⁸ while others are completely unknown, like *Salotto Verde* and *Sul Gianicolo* by the same artist and *Meriggio (Campagna romana)* and *Tramonto* by Tilde Ferrari Narducci. However, no overarching political content seems to bind the artworks. Many of them fell within genres traditionally considered more feminine, such as landscape, still life and portraiture.²⁰⁹ Others were more interested in representing a new kind of woman. On this occasion Carla Celesia di Vegliasco exhibited *Lettrice al sole*, which can be read as a symbol of the importance of the intellectual involvement and education for women. In 1897 Carla Celesia wrote to Gino Lavelli "...About the culture of the woman there is nothing to be happy for; but I say: "Who made it in this way? Who wants this? Men and no one else!...You treat women like a toy worthy of benign pity, serious in nothing but in making children."²¹⁰ The artist seemed to be aware of the missed opportunity that the exhibition represented, at least in terms of the artworks on show. She indeed agreed with Enrico Thovez who lamented a lack of originality of the group.²¹¹ Nevertheless, she also added that "the lotus flower must grow under the river before blossoming [...]."²¹²

²⁰⁸ Reproduced in the catalogue of the exhibition and in Salvagnini, *L'arte di Ida Salvagnini Bidoli pittrice*.

²⁰⁹ Since women could not study from nude models, they were excluded from some genres, such as history painting, which were considered higher forms of art. They could practice only genres that were deemed less prestigious and thought to demand less skills and intellect. Still life, portraiture and landscape were often practiced by women who were, therefore, judged inferior artists. Women's narrow choice of genres prevented them from making their own representations of the world and influencing the language of high art. See Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference. Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London-New York: Routledge, 2003), 61-64.

²¹⁰ Gino Lavelli de Capitani, *Pensieri, scritti, discorsi, opere di Carla Celesia, baronessa di Vegliasco, in Lavelli de Capitani* (Milano: Alfieri e Lacroix, 1942), 58.

²¹¹ Enrico Thovez (Turin, 1869 – 1925).

²¹² Gino Lavelli de Capitani, *Pensieri, scritti, discorsi, opere di Carla Celesia, baronessa di Vegliasco*, 35.

2.5.4 The reception

The group received scant attention from the official publication of the exhibition. *L'Esposizione Illustrata di Milano 1906*, the official journal of the Executive Committee published by Sonzogno, dedicated little space to the arts in general. Apart from listing the prizes awarded to the artists, it referred to other reviews, such as the articles by Vittorio Pica in *Il Secolo*, for a more punctual art critique.²¹³ For this reason, it is not saying much that the women's participation was not granted any space in the publication. It is more telling, instead, that other reviews, such as *L'arte nell'Esposizione di Milano 1906* by Ugo Ojetti, did not mention it. Here the writer and art critic reserved a whole section to female fashion where he described what he defined its value of social prophecy. Moreover, he described in detail the two rooms of the *Industrie femminili*, praising, for example, the *Società cooperativa nazionale per le Industrie femminili Italiane*.²¹⁴ *L'Esposizione Illustrata di Milano* had been prone to highlight women's handicraft works over that of fine arts as well.²¹⁵ Crafts, identified with the domestic, the decorative, the utilitarian, were traditionally considered quintessentially "feminine." Equally, this section of the exhibition was perceived as a privileged sphere of action for women. As a matter of fact, the sharp distinction between a male dominated fine arts section and a female crafts section was mirrored in the committees' composition. The Committee for the exhibition of women's handicrafts included only ladies, while men dominated all the other committees.²¹⁶ Among the artists in room XVIII, Ojetti mentioned only Amalia Besso, whose *Modista* he defined as one of the most remarkable artworks from Rome, without acknowledging the painter's participation as a member of the

²¹³ "La Mostra delle Belle Arti," *L'Esposizione illustrata di Milano del 1906, Giornale Ufficiale del Comitato Esecutivo*, no. 40, November 1906, 317-318.

²¹⁴ The *Società Cooperativa Industrie Femminili Italiane* was funded in 1903 in Rome. The cooperative commissioned, bought and sold female handicrafts. Thanks to its intervention, there was a revival of traditional women's handicrafts and many women were able to find a job. For more information see *Esposizione Internazionale di Milano 1906: Guida Ufficiale*, 69-71; La direzione dell'Almanacco della Donna Italiana, "Società femminili italiane," *Almanacco della Donna Italiana*, 1923, 316-317.

²¹⁵ "La mostra dei lavori femminili," *L'Esposizione illustrata di Milano del 1906, Giornale Ufficiale del Comitato Esecutivo*, no. 4, November 1905, 28 - 30.

²¹⁶ *Comitato Generale e Commissioni* (Milano: Tip. F. Marcolli, 1906).

women's group.²¹⁷ This omission, however, is not surprising. Ojetti was not a supporter of women-only exhibitions. On the contrary, he was very critical of the *II Esposizione Internazionale Femminile di Belle Arti* at the Palazzo Stabile del Valentino in 1913 in Turin. Reviewing this exhibition, he polemically asked whether there was an art specifically feminine. He underlined how many women artists wanted their work judged according to the same criteria applied to men, but still exhibited in women-only shows. Reflecting on how the majority of women artists of the past was a wife, daughter or sister of an artist, he claimed that, in those cases, art was "learnt through imitation, I do not dare to say through obedience, from the master of the house, it is in short another domestic virtue that they would have lacked if the master of the house had been a doctor or a farmer." For this reason, "if one keeps these women's art apart from their relatives' art, one risks to not understand its intimate reason and foremost cause." Despite this hard critic, he underlined how German artists exhibiting in Turin were particularly good, especially Dora Hitz and Frieda Menshausen Labriola. Among the Italians, he praised Emma Ciardi and Ernestina Orlandini, but heavily criticized Evangelina Alciati for her academism.²¹⁸

In *L'arte nell'Esposizione di Milano 1906* Ojetti defined the group of the women artists simply as a group from Rome. The substitution of the geographical designation to the gender characterization of the group was a common feature of the press coverage. When newspapers mentioned the presence of the women artists' group, it was repeatedly referred to as the "group from Rome," instead of "group of women artists" used in the catalogue.²¹⁹ However, although the geographical origin of the group had been indicated in Rome, that was not its main binding feature since many artists did not live there. Whereas other groups identified themselves according to their geographic provenance, the representative's surname or the name of the association they belonged to, the choice to call themselves "group of women artists" was a definite affirmation of these women artists' gender consciousness. On the contrary, by presenting them

²¹⁷ Ugo Ojetti, *L'arte nell'Esposizione di Milano 1906* (Milano: Treves, 1906), 48.

²¹⁸ Ugo Ojetti, "Un'esposizione per signore sole," *Corriere della Sera*, May 23, 1913, 3.

²¹⁹ Of course, there are some exceptions, like Raffaello Barbiera, "Le Belle Arti all'Esposizione Internazionale in Milano," *L'Illustrazione Italiana*, no. 16, 1906, 366.

simply as the umpteenth group from Rome, the press underestimated the gendered characterization of the group and silenced its intentions.

If the perception of a lack of professional Italian women artist was widespread, the tendency to overlook women artists' production was common too. As the emancipationist and suffrage supporter Bruno Sperani (Beatrice Sperez) noticed, the attitude of art critics towards women artists was usually very arrogant.²²⁰ They either heavily criticized or ignored their artworks altogether. Her review of the exhibition in Milan is the only existing account of women painters at the exhibition. She focused on the women artists exhibiting both within the room XVIII and outside, pointing out that "the percentage of the very poor ones – of the impossible ones – is not higher than that of men." Moreover, she also argued that if none of the women could be compared with the more experienced men artists, it was mostly due to the education that they received in the women-only schools. Although she also praised the work of some women artists outside room XVIII, she underlined that exhibiting in group with men had not been an advantage for some of them.²²¹ Bruno Sperani was certainly aware of the reluctance with which women artists often approached women-only exhibitions and initiatives. Therefore, she probably wanted to emphasize that the refusal to participate in such initiatives was not always the best strategy.

The little coverage that the group received in the press was doubled with very little sales, limited to two paintings by Maria Ippoliti, *Un ospizio alpino* and *Solitudine*.²²² By the time she exhibited in Milan, Ippoliti had already participated in the 1897 and 1899 *Venice Biennial* and in the *Prima Esposizione Quadriennale* (First Quadrennial Exhibition) in Turin in 1902. During the 1899 *Biennial* in Venice her painting *Crepuscolo Gelido* (1899) was awarded a special prize and was destined for the museum Ca' Pesaro in Venice.²²³ After completing her education at the Academy of Venice

²²⁰ Bruno Sperani is the pseudonym of the journalist and writer Beatrice Sperez (1840-1923). On her see Rachele Farina, ed., *Dizionario biografico delle donne lombarde, 568 – 1968* (Milano: Baldini & Castoldi, 1995), 1035 – 1036.

²²¹ Bruno Sperani, "Le pittrici," *Ars et labor: rivista mensile illustrata*, no. 1, April 25, 1907, 18-21.

²²² "Bollettari delle vendite," CARPI C VI 27, Esposizione Nazionale di Milano 1906, Archivio Storico dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, Italy.

²²³ The painting is currently off-site in Palazzo Grimani. See Isabella Reale, *Maria Ippoliti*, 19. Nancy Proctor previously claimed that *Crepuscolo gelido* had been bought by the Galleria

under Domenico Bresolin,²²⁴ Ippoliti practiced the landscape painting en plein air that appeared in Venice in the final decades of the 19th century. Thus, her works possibly met the artistic preferences of the public in Milan, which was used to the tradition of the Academy and looked for a sober balance matching the needs of middle-class decorum.²²⁵

Despite the scant consideration that the exhibition received, the importance of this experience should not be overlooked. This was one of the first attempts of women to get recognized as professionals and as a collectivity within the artistic field. Hence, it deserves a space not only in the history of the women-only exhibitions, but in the history of the women's movement as well. Despite a lack of an overarching political content, the participation of the group in the exhibition can be seen as a political act. As Dossin and Alkema say, the organization of a women-only exhibition is already the outcome of a change of perception of the relationship connecting women, the arts and women artists.²²⁶ Ida Salvagnini Bidoli and the other members invested a considerable amount of time and energy into a professional endeavour with a common purpose beyond personal gain. They successfully managed to challenge women's usual inferior position within the mainstream exhibition system through their organized presence. In 1974 the critic Lucy Lippard organized the exhibition "Ca. 7,500" at the Warehouse in Earlham Street in London. When asked about the not particularly feminist content of the exhibition, the artists replied that "Feminism can be expressed in many levels – not just by the use of explicit imagery. And, as in any group of people, there will be varying levels of commitment and consciousness which will be reflected in the work. We convey feminism not only in the content of our work but also in its context, in terms of how we go about finding a space in which to exhibit..."²²⁷ I think that these words can be applied to an exhibition that, more than half century before, really tried to

Nazionale d'arte moderna in Rome. See Nancy Proctor, "Training and Professionalism. Italy," in *Dictionary of Women Artists.*, ed. Gaze, 107.

²²⁴ Domenico Bresolin (1813-1899). Painter and photographer.

²²⁵ Sergio Reborà, "Le Biennali di Brera: la continuità dell'accademia e il dialogo con l'avanguardia", in *Arte a Milano 1906-1929*, 21-22.

²²⁶ Catherine Dossin and Hanna Alkema, "Women Artists Shows.Salons.Societies: Towards a Global History of All-Women Exhibitions," *Artl@s Bulletin* 8, no. 1 (2019): Article 19, 6.

²²⁷ Women's Workshop, "Artists' Union," *Spare Rib*, no. 29, July 1974, 38.

make a difference for women artists. Even if the content of their work was not explicitly political, the feminism of these artists was expressed in the way they grouped to obtain their own room in Milan and worked together to overcome the opposition that they encountered. By presenting themselves at an international event as a group, instead of exhibiting individually, these women did not simply use the space of the Esposizione Internazionale del Sempione as an occasion to exhibit, but as a means to make a statement and to seek professional recognition by contesting the label of amateurs that was traditionally attached to their activities. Although other women artists were present at the exhibition, participating in a separate room under the title of “group of women artists” carried different political weight. Despite low sales and the scant attention they received from the press, they successfully managed to challenge women’s usual inferior position within the mainstream exhibition system through their organized presence.

2.6 Images of maternity

2.6.1 Carla Celesia di Vegliasco’ s *L’uomo di domani*

In 1903 the painting *L’uomo di domani* (fig. 4) by Carla Celesia di Vegliasco was refused by the Venice Biennial. The artwork is known today only thanks to a reproduction in the book that her husband Gino Lavelli de Capitani realized and two privately owned sketches.²²⁸ The work refused by the *Venice Biennial* was a large painting divided into three sections. The central figure in the foreground was a mother hugging her child. In the background, on one side four women were dancing, while, on the other, a figure hiding behind a tree was looking at the woman with the child. The central figures are more easily readable thanks to one of the surviving preparatory sketches, *Maternità - Studio per L’uomo di domani* (fig. 5). The woman, wearing a shawl, seems to belong to the low working class. She is

²²⁸ It is interesting to note that also the work of another artist discussed in this chapter, Ida Salvagnini Bidoli, is known mainly through the book that her husband realized after her death.

hugging her child, even if their embrace, at a closer look, expresses much more ambiguity than expected. The mother's hand does not seem to kindly hold the little head and her gaze towards the viewer seems almost spiteful. The child has the face turned towards the back. It is barely possible to see his legs and hair. Hence, he, or she, becomes a stain of colour. It has been suggested that the four women dancing in the background might represent the future that comes forward, ready to change the present of the woman holding the child.²²⁹ Celesia di Vegliasco underlines the position of the woman in society, looked at and controlled, by that figure hiding at the back of the tree. The year of the refusal the artist wrote "Uncertainty on the value of my works. Uncertainty on others' work that connects to mine; comments and chuckles of people who do not know, do not understand and laugh [...] Everything is difficult. But I go ahead [...]"²³⁰ And after receiving the communication of the refusal she replied, "the harsh judgment did not surprise and impress me."²³¹ She added that the painting was "an attempt towards what I thought and still think is the mission of the arts: that is to express an idea [...] with a unity of line and colour keeping the balance both in the subject and in the figure."²³²

Carla Celesia di Vegliasco studied with Filippo Carcano since 1898, but soon showed an influence of symbolism, which she did not consider irreconcilable with the tradition. *L'uomo di domani* shows this mixture of symbolism and realism. As the artist said, the balanced composition of the image and the realist use of colours and lines were functional to convey an idea. As we have seen, Carla Celesia di Vegliasco developed a progressive involvement with the feminist movement and was one of the artists exhibiting with the Society of women artists, becoming its representative in Milan in 1906. Her commitment to the feminist cause suggests an interpretation of *L'uomo di domani* as a highly political representation. The woman in the foreground might be one of those pushed to take up low paid jobs in unhealthy

²²⁹ Nicla Spinella Capua, "La modernità di Carla Celesia di Vegliasco," in *Carla Celesia di Vegliasco protagonista del Simbolismo Toscano (1868-1939)*, ed. Francesca Cagianelli (Livorno: Debate, 2003), 15-16.

²³⁰ Gino Lavelli de Capitani, *Pensieri, scritti, discorsi, opere di Carla Celesia, baronessa di Vegliasco*, 27.

²³¹ *Ibid.* 28.

²³² *Ibid.*

conditions at the beginning of the century.²³³ The creation of a legislation to protect women-workers took a long time in Italy. Only in 1902 the Carcano law, limiting work to twelve hours and establishing a month of maternity leave, regulated for the first time women's and children's work. However, this law was applied only to workers of the industrial field, construction industry and mines and did not really establish a system in order to control that the new regulations were observed. Moreover, it was necessary to wait until 1910 for the creation of maternity pensions, which ensured a fixed allowance to mothers.²³⁴ In 1907 the doctor Giulio Casalini²³⁵ published an article on *La Donna* denouncing the scarcity of funds dedicated to mothers and the lack of a law on the research of paternity, which would regulate the legal paternity and the juridical protection of children born out of wedlock. The article, accompanied by artworks representing maternity in different declinations,²³⁶ spoke of the newly born associations that had been created especially in France, but also in Italy, whose members often witnessed "the sadness of many maternities."²³⁷ Carla Cesia di Vegliasco was not only an active member of the feminist movement, but openly supported the need of paternal search and the abolition of the marital permission, a law that handed women's freedom to their husbands.

The artists' commitment to the feminist cause and to the improvement of women's conditions seems to suggest a reading of the painting as a powerful image of the feminist movement. The jury of the *Biennial* might have recognized the political content of the painting and, then, rejected it. Rebora has underlined how socially engaged artworks were often refused. On the contrary, women's production that focused on the family's everyday life was more likely to be accepted.²³⁸

It is interesting to note that the political involvement of Carla Cesia di Vegliasco and her efforts to become a professional

²³³ Gloria Nemeč, "Lavorare sotto tutela. Le operaie nelle fabbriche della prima metà del Novecento," in *Operai*, ed. Stefano Musso (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2006), 167.

²³⁴ Anna Bravo, "La Nuova Italia: madri fra oppressione ed emancipazione," in *Storia della maternità*, ed. Marina D'Amelia (Roma: Laterza, 1997).

²³⁵ Giulio Casalini (Vigevano, 1876 – Torino, 1956).

²³⁶ *Nessuna Gelosia* by Renè Chretien, *Povera Madre* by Jeanne Janzon, *Il figlio* by Paul Roger Bloche, *Madre felice* by Vallayer Moutet and *Le madri lavoratrici* by Herm J. Pagels.

²³⁷ Giulio Casalini, "Maternità in dolore," *La Donna*, no. 69, 1907, 21-23.

²³⁸ Rebora, "Le protagoniste. Scuole e tendenze nella pittura milanese a cavallo dei due secoli," in *Dal Salotto agli ateliers*, 39.

artist did not prevent her from abandoning the artistic career during the war to dedicate herself to other activities, a destiny shared by many women during World War One.²³⁹ A supporter of women involvement in the war effort, in 1914 she got involved with the movement for the mobilisation of women. She helped the fusion between the Comitato Femminile Nazionale (National Women's Committee) of Milan and the Comitato lombardo di preparazione (Committee of preparation of Lombardy), of which she became president.²⁴⁰ Thus, she belongs to the group of women artists who, after a period of activity, had an ambiguous behaviour towards their career. Different reasons pushed women to neglect their artistic profession in order to dedicate themselves to charitable or philanthropic activities and to their families.²⁴¹ Nevertheless, as Garb underlined, it is necessary to consider the different historical circumstances in which women operated in order to understand their behaviour. Their choices, both aesthetic and political, could be judged ambiguous by contemporary viewers. Neither is easy for contemporary women to identify with the narratives that these women wove at the beginning of the century. However, their choices should be looked at in relation to the realm of possibilities within which they lived.²⁴²

2.6.2 Adelina Zandrino

As we have seen, not all the images of maternity by women artists involved with the movement, or that had at least a connection with it, displayed a clear political content. This was the case also for the artworks presented by the group of women artists at the *Mostra Nazionale di Belle Arti* in Milan. Yet, a connection and,

²³⁹ On this you can see Allison S. Fell and Ingrid Sharp, eds., *The Women's Movement in Wartime: International Perspectives, 1914-19* (Palgrave Macmillan: Houndmills, 2007); Patrizia Albanese, *Mothers of the Nation: Women, Families, and Nationalism in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); Ingrid Sharp and Matthew Stibbe, *Aftermaths of War: Women's Movements and Female Activists, 1918-1923* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

²⁴⁰ For a more detailed description of the artist's activities during the war see Carla in Lavelli de Capitani, *Dizionario biografico delle donne lombarde*, ed. Farina, 294-295.

²⁴¹ Pier Paolo Pancotto, *Artiste a Roma nella prima metà del '900* (Roma: Palombi, 2006), 11.

²⁴² Tamar Garb, *Sisters of the Brush: women's artistic culture in late Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1994).

perhaps, an interest in feminism might lead to a different interpretation of an artist's work. For this purpose, I would like to focus on the images of maternity realized by Adelina Zandrino throughout her whole life.²⁴³ I will try to use the connections that the artist had with *La Donna*, and therefore with the moderate feminism of the time, in order to propose a different reading of her work.

Zandrino was a professional, well-rounded artist, who practiced not only painting and sculpture, but also decorative arts and illustration. She studied a few months with Maragliano and Pennasilico, but Comanducci defined her a self-taught artist. She exhibited for the first time at the II *Esposizione Internazionale Femminile di Belle Arti* in Turin in 1913. In the same year she also had her first personal exhibition in Rapallo. She participated in the *Biennials of Decorative Art* in Monza in 1923 and in 1927, in the *Venice Biennial* and *Milan Triennale* in 1936. After moving to Paris at the beginning of the century, she started working on theatrical design and costumes.²⁴⁴ From there, she also started a collaboration with *La Donna*.²⁴⁵

In 1914 she realized two illustrations for an article signed by Ernesta Campolonghi (fig. 6).²⁴⁶ The piece described the initiative of the French organization *Ligue Française pour le droit des femmes*, which set up a stall during the Christmas fair in the city centre of Paris in order to campaign for their cause. Campolonghi interviewed Maria Vérone, emphasizing her job of lawyer and her

²⁴³ Adelina Zandrino (Genova 1893 -1994). Painter, sculptor, illustrator and ceramist. She studied with F. Maragliano and G. Pennasilico for a short time, but mainly self-taught in Paris. See Petteys, *Dictionary of women artists*, 777.

²⁴⁴ Agostino Mario Comanducci, *Dizionario illustrato dei pittori, disegnatori e incisori italiani moderni e contemporanei 4 R-Z* (Milano: Leonilde M. Patuzzi Editore, 1962), 2086–2087; Paola Pallottino, *Caste dive nella vampa stridente. Sessanta illustratrici in Italia dalla fine dell'Ottocento agli anni Quaranta* (Bologna: Kritik, 1982), 68.

²⁴⁵ The collaboration between Adelina Zandrino and *La Donna* lasted few months between 1913 and 1914. In addition to those mentioned in this paragraph, her drawings were published on the cover of *La Donna*, no. 212, 1913; *La Donna*, no. 221, 1914, 11; *La Donna*, no. 223, 1914, 14-15. See also Rina Maria Pierazzi, "Una giovane artista genovese: Adelina Zandrino," *La Donna*, no. 223, 1913, 14-15.

²⁴⁶ After moving with her family to Paris in 1910, Ernesta Campolonghi interviewed French feminists such as Maria Vérone and the writer Marguerite Audoux, author of the feminist and autobiographical books *Marie-Claire* and *L'atelier de Marie-Claire*. See Luigi Campolonghi, *Pontremoli: Una cittadina italiana fra il 1880 e il '900: ritratto in piedi* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1988); Stefano Luconi and Mario Varricchio, eds., *Lontane da casa: donne italiane e diaspora globale dall'inizio del Novecento a oggi* (Torino: Accademia University Press: Centro Altreltalia, 2015).

commitment to the feminist cause together with her role of mother and wife. Hence, the article was in line with the general atmosphere of moderate feminism that was characteristic of the magazine. In line with this, Campolonghi also underlined a certain disagreement of the French activist with the radical and violent actions of the English suffragettes. Vérone condemned the violent actions of the English women, emphasizing the different ways of campaigning that she, and her fellow activists, preferred.²⁴⁷

The article was accompanied by Adelina Zandrino's illustrations, which portray the stall built by the *Ligue Française* (fig. 7) and the activist lawyer Maria Vérone (fig. 8). One drawing shows the stall, whose walls are covered by posters for the vote for women and against alcoholism. In front of the stall, it is possible to see different people who are more or less interested in the women's cause: a very elegant couple, two ladies, a father with his son. Campolonghi describes their more or less amused or critical reactions to the women's propaganda in the article. Vérone's portrait, that was realized while the interview was taking place, shows the woman in profile and reminds the reader of the many women's images that accompany the articles in *La Donna*. Photographic portraits were often used to celebrate and introduce to the reader female personalities in the magazine and played a fundamental role in the institutionalization of female public figures between 19th and 20th century.²⁴⁸ Zandrino's portrait of Vérone was part of the process of institutionalization through images carried out by the magazine²⁴⁹ and recalls, in a way, the women's portraits realized by artists, as a sign of commitment and reciprocal exchange, that established those relationships that Cherry has defined *matronage*.²⁵⁰ Even if in different terms, as Zandrino did not portray an artist, this image conveys a sense of participation and shared purposes. Despite no other connection

²⁴⁷ Ernesta Campolonghi, "Il femminismo in fiera," *La Donna*, no. 218, 1914, 22-23.

²⁴⁸ Piero Racanicchi, "Cultura fotografica in Piemonte tra Ottocento e Novecento," in *Accademie, salotti, circoli nell'arco alpino occidentale: il loro contributo alla formazione di una nuova cultura tra Ottocento e Novecento: atti del 18. Colloque franco-italien, Torre Pellice, 6-8 ottobre 1994*, ed. Claudia de Benedetti (Torino: Centro studi piemontesi, 1995), 190.

²⁴⁹ Zandrino realized also the portrait of the well-known French artist Georgette Leblanc. *La Donna*, no. 221, 1914, 11.

²⁵⁰ Deborah Cherry, "Women Artists and the politics of Feminism 1850-1900," in *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. C. Campbell Orr (Manchester-New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 61; Ead., *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London: Routledge, 1993), 102-109; Trasforini, *Nel segno delle artiste*, 67.

seems to exist between the artist and the feminist movement, the collaboration with *La Donna*, even if short-lived, and the nature of the drawings examined here can be read as a sign of interest in feminism and might lead to a different interpretation of a corpus of works that is, otherwise, very traditional.

Zandrino kept confronting with the theme of maternity throughout her whole life (fig. 9-10). In 1935 she also won the first prize at the exhibition *Sogni di Madre* in Genova (fig. 11) and in 1938 she had a personal exhibition at the Galleria Gian Ferrari in Milan on the theme of maternity.²⁵¹ In her various production including paintings, illustrations, postcards and sculptures, images of a feminine bourgeois world coexist with images of social difference. The sheer number of maternities that she realized thorough her life cannot be explained with a simple interest in the theme. In her investigation of the work of women illustrators between the 19th and 20th century, Pallottino noticed how, next to women artists who tried to affirm their position within the artistic field in any possible way, others paradoxically refused to adopt any strategy or any particularly transgressive behaviour. They were content of having their little space to hide and vent their creativity.²⁵² If this can be easily applied to Zandrino's art, I would also try to suggest a different interpretation of her works drawing on Janet Wolff's idea of celebratory aesthetics. Wolff examined the field of cultural interventions as a site of contestation of the social arrangements of gender. Her discourse is particularly interesting in the context of this research as she was also interested in women who lived at the beginning of the 20th century. She investigated the relationships between postmodernism and feminism, suggesting some continuities between modernism and postmodernism and considering also earlier promises, and apparent failures, of modernism. Hence, she defined two different kinds of strategies used by feminist activists, deconstructive and celebratory, to expose the logic of patriarchal systems of representation and create a space for a feminist politics.²⁵³ Emphasizing Zandrino's

²⁵¹ *La maternità nella mostra personale di Adelina Zandrino* (Milano: Grafa, 1938). Exhibition catalogue. Galleria Gian Ferrari, Milano, March 21-April 1, 1938.

²⁵² Pallottino, *Caste dive*, 4

²⁵³ Janet Wolff, *Feminine Sentences. Essays on Women and Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990).

collaboration with *La Donna*, I lay the foundations for a reading of her repeated representations of maternity as part of a celebratory strategy aimed at creating a specific space for the expression of women at the beginning of the century. I refer in particular to the early works, that can be contextualized within the re-evaluation of the figure of the mother typical of a certain feminism of the beginning of the century.

2.6.3 Portraits with children in *La Donna*

La Donna, printed between 1905 and 1968, was published by Sten (Stabilimento tipografico ente nazionale) until 1922, when it became property of Arnoldo Mondadori. In 1924 the new editor turned it into a glossy magazine for women, which survived with alternating fortunes until 1968.²⁵⁴ Hence, this paragraph is based on the examination of issues of *La Donna* from its first publication until 1922, in order to focus on the period in which the magazine better represented part of the emancipationist movement of the beginning of the century.

As Donatella Alesi underlines, *La Donna* is an example of the role played by women in initiating the process that transformed the 19th century press dedicated to women into illustrated journalism of the female world at the beginning of the 20th century.²⁵⁵ Moreover, the magazine was also the promoter of a rich programme of cultural events and activities in Turin thanks to the *salotto* that was connected to it.²⁵⁶ At the beginning of the century and until World War One the city offered a lively environment to women, who were able to study with artists like, in addition to Giacomo Grosso, Cesare Ferro, Carlo Follini, Lorenzo Delleani and Giovanni Guarlotti. The magazine had also

²⁵⁴ The involvement of Mondadori helped the journal to overcome the economic problems brought on by the war and the poor management of the society founded in 1920 and chaired by Enrico Bemporad. On the history of the magazine see Donatella Alesi, "La Donna 1904-1915. Un progetto giornalistico femminile di primo Novecento," *Italia Contemporanea*, no. 222 (March 2001): 43-63.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ The *salotto* was active between 1910 and 1922. First housed in the premises associated with the magazine's editorial office in via Robilant in Turin, it moved to piazza Castello in 1915. It hosted a library, a reading room and a conference room.

connections with the Lyceum, which in this way had a direct influence on the city.²⁵⁷

Since the magazine was the expression of a sector of the feminist movement and was rich of photographic images of more or less famous women writers, artists, actresses, singers, Italian and foreign queens and princesses, it can help to discover the idea of maternity shared by the emancipationists at the beginning of the century and how it was represented. For this purpose, the most interesting articles are the women writers' profiles, which were always accompanied by photos of their protagonists. The first example dates back to the issue 15, in 1905, when Adele Rovito Bresciano wrote a profile of the writer Grazia Deledda.²⁵⁸ The article occupied two pages of the magazine and was accompanied by five pictures. On page 12 Deledda was photographed in the garden of count Grasselli's villa, working at her desk and at the table with her husband and son Sardinio (fig. 12). The next page showed the writer first strolling at Villa Borghese and then, again, sitting on the sofa with Sardinio on her laps, while they read a book (fig. 13). They seemed to have been caught in a very delicate and personal moment of private life and neither of them was looking into the camera. The images placed on a similar level Deledda's activity as a writer and her position within the family, underlying her role in the education of Sardinio. Indeed, the article focused mainly on Deledda's personal life and how, despite being a writer and against the preconceived ideas that this fostered, she was still able to have a normal and acceptable life, that is being a wife and a mother. This kind of representation appeared often in the first years of the magazine. It was used again to accompany the profile of Jolanda, pseudonym of the writer Maria Maiocchi (fig. 14).²⁵⁹ The two text columns framed three photos, which portrayed, respectively, the writer alone, standing on a balcony; among the sisters; with her little son Gino. In the latter photo the writer and the son stood one next to the other. Like in Deledda's photo with her son, they were reading

²⁵⁷ For an overview on the scene in Turin in the first half of the century see Sergio Rebora "Torino, Milano e Genova dall'inizio del secolo alla seconda Guerra mondiale," in *Artiste in Italia nel Ventesimo secolo*, 27-32; Maria Mimmi Lamberti, "La pittura del primo Novecento in Piemonte (1900-1945)," in *La pittura in Italia. Il Novecento*/I. 1900-1945, vol. 1, ed. Carlo Pirovano (Milano: Electa, 1991), 45-84.

²⁵⁸ Adele Rovito Bresciano, "Grazia Deledda," *La Donna*, no. 15, 1905, 12-13.

²⁵⁹ Enrica Grasso, "Jolanda," *La Donna*, no. 18, 1905, 14.

instead of looking into the camera, as if surprised in a private moment. In the captions to the other two photos the writer was called by her pseudonym, Jolanda, while in the photo with her son she was simply identified as “the mother,” almost to underline a split in her subjectivity: this last photo wanted to portray the mother, not the writer. After all, the article emphasized that for a long time Jolanda “was wife and mother, totally absorbed in her family; she was only woman, and the pen was unused for some years.”²⁶⁰ The writer Clarice Tartufari was represented at work (fig. 15), but, also, while she “fulfills her task as a mother” by helping her son with his homework and her daughter with her piano exercises (fig. 16).²⁶¹

The celebration of maternity and of the role of educators of these women conveyed by the photos was sometimes disconnected from the articles, which did not mention any detail of their personal lives. This happened, for example, in the images that accompany Matilde Serao’s profile. Here Adele Bresciano did not focus on Serao’s role as mother, but rather praised her qualities of journalist and writer.²⁶² Nevertheless, the photos underlined her role of mother as well. While a big portrait of the writer alone occupied a central position in the second page of the article (fig.18), the construction of the first page seemed to highlight the role of Serao as mother more than her professional career. The portrait of the writer between the photos of her daughter, Eleonora, and of her son, Edoardo Scarfoglio, was placed in the middle of the page. Below the title, another image showed Serao’s desk in her studio, revealing an empty chair (fig. 17). It is also interesting that in these photos mother and daughter were represented in a similar way, while they delicately smiled and looked away, while the son looked straight into the camera with a very direct and self-confident posture.²⁶³ Thus, despite the article did not focus on the personal life of the journalist and writer, the images seemed to suggest that the dedication of Serao to her work did not diminish her commitment to her children. Yet, this example represented an exception, since most of the times

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Pilade Vecchiotti, “Profili letterari femminili. Clarice Tartufari,” *La Donna*, no. 25, 1906, 20-21.

²⁶² An interesting book to understand the complex figure of the writer is Anna Banti, *Matilde Serao* (Torino: Utet, 1965).

²⁶³ Adele Bresciano Rovito, “Matilde Serao,” *La Donna*, no. 33, 1906, 16-17.

women writers' profiles emphasized the coexistence of successful career and maternity, which was highlighted by the photos as well. In 1908 Fanny Zampini Salazar, whose portrait was on the same issue's cover, was represented between her grown up daughters, Margherita and Dora. The first page of the article was accompanied by two pictures. In the top-right corner photo the writer was at work at her desk, while in the other she sat between her daughters (fig. 19). A large section of the article spoke of Zampini Salazar as the educator of her four children, that she defined "my fortune."²⁶⁴ A similar construction of the page was used for Rachele Botti Binda's profile. The top-right corner was occupied by the writer's portrait, while at the bottom of the page she was represented sitting at a table outside with her children (fig. 20). In the article Antonio Pallottino underlined that Botti Binda was not interested in feminism or politics. Nevertheless, he added, she liked ideas and "despite she was able to live so nobly in the world of ideas [...] she took care of the housekeeping, and also of her two children."²⁶⁵ Yet, the need to balance family and children with a professional career was not a choice, but rather the only possibility faced by women at the time. As the writer herself said, she "lived like girls educated to be good wives and good mothers live."²⁶⁶

The role played by these representations of maternities becomes evident when one of them, the photographic portrait of the writer Rossana²⁶⁷ with her children, is used as a symbol of the centrality of maternity in the life of all Latin women, as opposed to Nordic ones, in the context of the contemporary debate around the possibility to reconcile maternity and women's self-fulfillment.²⁶⁸ In the issue 92 of *La Donna* Rossana was first portrayed with her daughter Delfina to accompany the article that celebrated her work as writer and journalist. In addition to a photo of Rossana alone, another one showed the writer sitting at the desk and holding a pen while her daughter stood next to her and

²⁶⁴ A. Agresti, "Profili letterari femminili. Fanny Zampini Salazar," *La Donna*, no. 77, 1908, 16-17.

²⁶⁵ Prof. Antonio Pallottino, "Profili letterari femminili. Rachele Botti Binda," *La Donna*, no. 89, 1908, 21.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ Rossana was the pseudonym of the marquise Zina Tartarini Centa.

²⁶⁸ Valeria Babini, Chiara Beccalossi and Lucy Riall, *Italian sexualities uncovered, 1789-1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

looked at what her mother was writing (fig. 21). Mother and daughter were portrayed together also on the second page of the article (fig. 22).²⁶⁹ In the same issue, a portrait of Rossana between two photos of her children accompanied an article discussing different approaches to maternity of Latin and Nordic women (fig. 23). Here Donna Paola openly condemned women who chose independence and personal achievement against, according to her, maternity. The article took as a starting point the questionnaire, received also by Donna Paola, on which the "Inchiesta sulla donna e il problema dell'amore" by Rosalia Jacobsen was based.²⁷⁰ Donna Paola critiqued the questions asked by Jacobsen, who defined the duties towards husband, children and family as social regards. According to Donna Paola, instead, Latin women's preoccupations towards their children were not a consequence of social impositions, like Jacobsen's questions seemed to imply, but part of their nature of mothers. And she affirmed that a mother who left was "simply a despicable individual." Then, she concluded, "rather, that woman, who is conscious of having such a strong personality [...] should be able to give up children."²⁷¹ Thus, the photo of Rossana next to her children became a symbol of the Latin woman who managed to reconcile personal achievement and maternity.

The representation of maternity as an integral component of women's identity appeared scattered in the magazine also in other instances. Photos representing women as mothers, as well as professionals, were used to accompany the profiles of foreign writers, like Riccarda Huch²⁷² (fig. 24) and Carmen De Burgos. The latter was described as a journalist interested in the Spanish feminist movement, even if she was not a suffragist. Rather, the article explained, she was a supporter of education for women, so that they could better educate their children. She was represented

²⁶⁹ Nino G. Caimi, "Profili letterari femminili. Chi è ROSSANA," *La Donna*, no. 92, 1908, 18-19.

²⁷⁰ Rosalia Jacobsen, "Inchiesta sulla donna e il problema dell'amore," *Pagine Libere*, no. 21, 1908, 5. Jacobsen's enquiry followed the publication of the book *Una donna* by Sibilla Aleramo and collected the opinions of many feminists of the time on the issue of maternity. On Jacobsen see Carla Cotti, "Il femminismo come caso letterario. Un'inchiesta di inizio '900 su amore e sessualità," *Memoria*, no. 2 (1981): 112-118.

²⁷¹ Donna Paola, "La grande inchiesta," *La Donna*, no. 92, 1908, 23.

²⁷² Barbara Allason, "Personalità femminili letterarie straniere. Riccarda Huch," *La Donna*, no. 233, 1914, 14.

with her daughter in the photo that accompanied the article²⁷³ (fig. 25). Gina Lombroso-Ferrero was also represented holding her son Leo next to the article reproducing part of her book *Nell'America Meridionale* about the role of women in Argentinian society²⁷⁴ (fig. 26). The writer and philanthropist Grazia Pierantoni Mancini was represented both alone and with her grown up son Riccardo Pierantoni (fig. 27-28) to accompany the article about her commitment to improve children's life in Centurano, a village close to Caserta, where the first public school was created thanks to her involvement.²⁷⁵ The actress Dina Galli was photographed with her mother (fig. 29) and with her daughter as well (fig. 30).²⁷⁶

All these women's portraits with children conveyed the idea that professional endeavors and maternity were equal components of women's lives. After all, this idea was supported by many articles in *La Donna*. For example, speaking about the painter Luisa Ghio-Biressi²⁷⁷ Donna Maria,²⁷⁸ who often wrote on the magazine, concluded that she "was able to equally embrace the three biggest and purest loves that always exalt the woman: the love of mother, the love of art and the love for parents."²⁷⁹ Moreover, the photos representing Grazia Deledda and Jolanda reading with their children emphasized not only their role of mothers, but also that of educators within the family. Anna Finocchi noticed how in the second half of the 19th century women were represented while reading and not simply using the book as an ornament. Instead of looking at the viewer, in search of some recognition, they were portrayed while reading.²⁸⁰ In the photos examined Deledda and Jolanda do not look at the camera, but read the books with their children, playing the role of educator, which every woman was called to fulfil as a mother in the private space of the house, for the camera of *La Donna*.

²⁷³ Augusta de Kabath, "Profili letterari femminili stranieri. Carmen de Burgos," *La Donna*, no. 35, 1906, 14.

²⁷⁴ "La donna Argentina," *La Donna*, no. 93, 1908, 14-16.

²⁷⁵ Donna Maria, "Grazia Pierantoni Mancini e la sua opera sociale in Centurano," *La Donna*, no. 94, 1908, 20-21.

²⁷⁶ Nino Berrini, "Le nostre attrici. Dina Galli," *La Donna*, no. 101, 1909, 15-18.

²⁷⁷ Luisa Ghio Biressi (1853-1939).

²⁷⁸ Donna Maria was the journalist Maria A. Loschi.

²⁷⁹ Donna Maria, "Educazione d'arte," *La Donna*, no. 78, 1908, 16-17.

²⁸⁰ Anna Finocchi, *Lettrici: immagini della donna che legge nella pittura dell'Ottocento* (Nuoro: Illisso, 1992).

The gender specific model used in the photos discussed above is more striking if compared with some photos accompanying articles sketching profiles of male personalities from the same period. Paola di Soriso's article on the sculptor Davide Calandra occupied three pages of the magazine. A large part of the first one was covered by a portrait of the artist in profile, sitting at his desk while he was reading (fig. 31). On the other pages a selection of his work was reproduced (fig. 32) together with, at the top of page three, an image of his house between a photo of his brother and another one of his wife, Luisa Calandra, and their children, Elena and Giorgio (fig. 33). This is the first element that makes the images accompanying Calandra's article different from the women's photos. Rather than portraying the sculptor with his children, they were photographed with their mother. Indeed, also in the article Paola di Soriso focused on the role of Luisa Calandra as mother, rather than Davide Calandra as father. The position of the family photo in the general context of the article is meaningful as well. It did not occupy the first page, unlike what happened with Grazia Deledda, Matilde Serao, Fanny Zampini Salazar and Rossana, but the last one. While women writer's portraits alone or at work were often placed next to the photos with their children on the first page of the articles, the photo portraying Calandra's wife and children occupies a less relevant position.²⁸¹

The choice to represent children with their mothers, instead of their fathers, was repeated in every photo including children published with articles sketching male profiles during the period considered. The writer Ernst Zahn was portrayed on the first page of the article dedicated to him in an official photo in profile (fig. 34). His children, instead, were photographed on the second page with, respectively, the writer's mother and wife (fig. 35). Despite being described as a good father, husband and son,²⁸² no image representing Zahn with members of his family accompanied the article.

At first sight, the photos portraying Thomas Alva Edison with his family might seem to use a different approach. The first image of the article dedicated to him was a family photo including the inventor (fig. 36). However, the rest of the images repeated the

²⁸¹ Paola di Soriso, "I nostri artisti. Davide Calandra," *La Donna*, no. 85, 1908, 14-16.

²⁸² Lida Brochon, "La gloria di Göschenen. Ernst Zahn," *La Donna*, no. 91, 1908, 23-24.

model already used in the other examples. The second page of the article was fully covered by six pictures representing Edison's house. The center right photo showed Edison standing next to his desk in what seems to be his studio. A bookshelf formed the backdrop of the photo, whose caption said: "Edison among his books." Next to this image, his wife Mina Miller was photographed standing next to their son playing the piano (fig. 37). Another photo of Edison's wife and their children was also published on page 11²⁸³ (fig. 38). Thus, the traditional separation of roles between the professional and cultured man and the woman, whose role was to educate the children, was confirmed. In the article Mina Miller was also praised as a woman who, by living with a man, could help him to be successful.²⁸⁴

An interesting change was introduced in the photos accompanying the article about the artist Lorenzo Delleani. His family portrait included the artist's students as well (fig. 39). Moreover, another photo represented Delleani with, according to the caption, his favorite students, his niece Nina and Miss Gismondo (fig. 40). Between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century many women artists, including Sofia di Bricherasio and Amalia Besso, studied with Delleani in Turin. The painter also worked on the theme of women students painting en plein air.²⁸⁵ Thus, it is not surprising that *La Donna* wanted to celebrate the artist's passion for teaching, especially women, by publishing photos including his students. However, by including some students in the family portrait, the magazine did not only emphasize the importance played by his activity as a teacher, but also merged his role within the family with his public one in a clear attempt to underline the latter.²⁸⁶ The last example from this gallery of male personalities was a 1914 article about Plinio Nomellini. Here the official portrait of the artist in his studio occupied a central place on the first page of the article (fig. 41), while the photo of his wife Griselda with their daughters Laura and Noemi appeared between other two photos of their children, which were defined the models of the painter, on the second page

²⁸³ *La Donna* hosted a full-page image on page 11 since its first issue.

²⁸⁴ Altea, "La casa e la famiglia d'un mago moderno," *La Donna*, no. 86, 1908, 17-20.

²⁸⁵ Some examples are *Le allieve*, 1885 and *La pittrice*, 1881.

²⁸⁶ E. Ferrettini, "I nostri grandi artisti. Lorenzo Delleani nell'intimità," *La Donna*, no. 94, 1908, 14-15.

(fig. 42). Even speaking about the artist's children, Térésah underlined his role of painter who used them as models, rather than father.²⁸⁷

By comparing these examples with the photos connected with women's profiles, two different uses of images for men and women emerge. The photos accompanying men's profiles did not usually represent children with their father, but with the person who was responsible for their everyday needs and education, the mother. On the contrary, women's portraits, always including their children, tried to convey the idea that private and public life were equally important for women and that their coexistence was possible.

Photos of maternity populated women's profiles in particular during the first decade of the century and became less common later. The last two examples from the period examined were the Hungarian writer Renata Erdös, represented in 1921 with her children²⁸⁸ (fig. 43), and Margherita Sarfatti,²⁸⁹ who was portrayed with her daughter Fiammetta (fig. 44). In the article about Sarfatti Nino Podenzani focused on her diverse work and commented in particular the just published *I vivi e l'ombra*, a collection of poems commemorating Sarfatti's son Roberto, killed during World War One.²⁹⁰ This helped him to highlight her qualities of mother, which were underlined also by the portrait with her daughter, following the model that had been used since the early issues of the magazine. The portraits with children of Erdös and Sarfatti came relatively late in comparison with the first examples. The long break between them can be explained with the changes that *La Donna* went through during wartime, when the attention to the war overshadowed the commitment to the

²⁸⁷ Térésah, "I nostri grandi artisti. Plinio Nomellini a casa sua," *La Donna*, no. 217, 1914, 13-15.

²⁸⁸ M. F. "Saggi di letteratura straniera. Una forte scrittrice ungherese: Renata Erdös," *La Donna*, no. 346, 1921, 16.

²⁸⁹ Nino Podenzani, "Margherita G. Sarfatti," *La Donna*, no. 350, 1921, 23. Margherita Sarfatti (1880-1961) was a controversial, but also very interesting figure of the 20th century. One of the first women art critic and promoter of the Novecento movement, she was an emancipationist as well. After moving to Milan in 1902, she had close ties with feminist activists such as Anna Kuliscioff and Ersilia Majno. See, for example, the foundational Philip V. Cannistraro and Brian R. Sullivan, *Il Duce's other woman* (Milano: Mondadori, 1993) but also more recent studies such as Massimo Mattioli, *Margherita Sarfatti più* (Imola: Manfredi, 2019) and Rachele Ferrario, *Margherita Sarfatti. La regina dell'arte nell'Italia Fascista* (Milano: Mondadori, 2018).

²⁹⁰ Margherita Sarfatti, *I vivi e l'ombra: liriche* (Milano: Facchi, 1921).

emancipationist cause. On this matter, Nino Caimi later explained that this was a judgment call, since the magazine had patriotic duties towards the country.²⁹¹ Indeed, during the war the magazine changed its subtitle in *Bollettino quindicinale illustrato dell'opera femminile italiana per la Guerra* in 1916 and, again, in *Bollettino dell'attività femminile italiana per la guerra* in 1917. A special attention was paid to the relationship between women and war. The 1914 article "Le donne e la Guerra," for example, was accompanied by a photo of a group of desperate mothers crying at the train station in Budapest (fig. 45).²⁹² After the end of the war, according to Caimi, the magazine went back to "its independence and its restlessness" and started to fight again for the improvement of the position of women in the artistic and in any other field.²⁹³

After the conflict, artistic creation, maternity and war were connected in the figures of women artists and writers who lost their children during the conflict, like Margherita Sarfatti. In an article about the writer Ada Marini Martini, Bianca Paulucci claimed that the writer preferred to speak of the son Giorgio, killed during the war, rather than her book. And she added "Art is to smile also in sorrow [...] wants everything from those who choose, asks everything to the mother. And the mother finds her sublimation in the arts."²⁹⁴ The idea of artistic creation prompted by the loss of a child, however, had already been touched in an article by the critic Emilio Zanzi about the artist Savina Rossi Farello. She is a particularly interesting figure, since her career as an artist started only after the death of her son. Before turning to commenting her work as an artist, the critic Emilio Zanzi presented Rossi Farello as a moral example. Abandoned by her husband, she dedicated herself to her son, Fiorenzo, whose dream was to become a sculptor. He entered the Accademia Albertina but died in his twenties. After the initial desperation, Rossi Farello decided to become a sculptor in order to live the life that her son could not live anymore and, also, in order to create a sculpture that would represent him. The description of how the woman

²⁹¹ A.S. "Una pittrice romana," *La Donna*, no. 312, 1919, 15.

²⁹² Napoleone Battaglia, "Le donne e la guerra," *La Donna*, no. 233, 1914, 11-12.

²⁹³ A.S. "Una pittrice romana," *La Donna*.

²⁹⁴ Bianca Paulucci, "Una nuova scrittrice rivelata da un concorso. Ada Marini Martini," *La Donna*, no. 368, 1922, 17.

started to model the clay to realize a sculpture of her son has something of the myth. Without any education in the arts, her first creation, a head of a crying child, was defined a prodigy by Zanzi. Nevertheless, lacking the economic resources to devote herself to sculpting, she turned to painting. Zanzi used the artist's words: "I will make the portrait of my son in painting. I want to have the nice consoler face alive, before my anguish." According to the critic, this time the training was not easy, but she managed to obtain astonishing results very quickly. The article was accompanied by some works by Rossi Farello. One of them, *Mater Dolorosa* (fig. 46), represented a sorrowful mother, barefoot and with her eyes closed, whose only counterpart in a desolated landscape was a dead tree trunk without leaves. The timeless woman seemed to stand for the sorrow and the misery of all mothers and, as Zanzi underlined, she became a symbol, the mother of all humans. The article ended with a description of the artist working in tears on the portrait of her son, in order to make her dream of mother and artist come true.²⁹⁵

Sergio Reborà listed Rossi Farello among those artists who, despite the lack of academic education, managed to build a career at the beginning of the 20th century, before the war. He also underlined the role played by media in helping her to obtain recognition and exhibit at the *Venice Biennial*.²⁹⁶ The article on the pages of *La Donna* is certainly an example of this publicity. However, it also established an equivalence between mother and artist. Zanzi brought together the capacity of Rossi Farello to create an artwork, despite her lack of formal education, and her capacity to raise a child alone, a woman with "man capacities."²⁹⁷ Thus, also in this dramatic case maternity is enriched of deeper meanings, instead of being used as an excuse to confine women at home.

The women's portraits with children examined in this paragraph can be read as images of maternalism and of its belief

²⁹⁵ Emilio Zanzi, "Inaugurandosi L'esposizione di Venezia. Una storia pietosa d'amore e d'arte," *La Donna*, n. 176, 1912, 13-15.

²⁹⁶ Francesco Sottomano and Sergio Reborà, eds., *Domenico Valinotti (1889-1962): protagonista della pittura di paesaggio in Piemonte* (Canelli: Fabiano, 2000).

²⁹⁷ The relationship between creativity and childbirth was central in the 20th century. It dates back to the period discussed in this paragraph, for example, *Parturitiun*, Mina Loy's 1914 poem that connected the experience of giving birth to creativity. Roger L. Conover, ed., *Mina Loy. The lost lunar Baedeker. Poems* (New York: The Noonday Press-Farrar, Straus And Giroux, 1996), 4-8.

in a female specificity based on maternity, without implying women's seclusion or confinement in the private. On the contrary, they seem to represent the translation of virtues from the private sphere to the public one that was typical of maternalism. They reflect the emphasis on the maternal role, real and symbolic, that, as we have already seen, characterized part of the feminist movement from the very beginning and was persistently recalled in the first two decades of the 20th century. However, in the last issues examined a new way of representing maternity emerged. In the issue 373 in 1922 *La Donna* launched a contest for beautiful original and artistic photos of children. This was the occasion to publish also images of mothers and children (fig. 47-49).²⁹⁸ These new images, totally disconnected from a deeper insight into the figures of the mothers, seemed to lose all the deeper meanings and social values that were conveyed by the previous women's portraits with children.

Conclusion

Chapter one followed the development of the feminist movement at the beginning of the century and the first organized attempt of the members of the Society of women artists to exhibit as a group at the 1906 *Mostra Nazionale di Belle Arti* in Milan. The involvement of the members of the society with the contemporary feminist movement suggested an interpretation of their room as a site where politics and practices of art connected. Despite a lack of an overarching political content in the artworks featured in the exhibition, the artists involved were likely aware of the political meaning of their endeavour. By presenting themselves at an international event as a group, these women did not simply use the space of the *Esposizione Internazionale del Sempione* as an occasion to exhibit, but as a means to make a statement and to seek professional recognition by contesting the label of amateurs that was traditionally attached to their activities.

Afterwards, the chapter focused on the 1903 painting *L'uomo di domani* by Carla Celesia di Vegliasco. This work was

²⁹⁸ *La Donna*, no. 374, 1922, 20; *La Donna*, no. 377, 1922, 24; *La Donna*, no. 378, 1922, 21.

looked at through the lenses of the artist's involvement with the emancipationist movement and with the society of women artists, of which she was the representative in Milan. This suggested an interpretation of her work as an image of the feminist movement and a highly political representation of maternity. Then, the chapter looked at the work of Adelina Zandrino, who confronted with the theme of maternity almost obsessively throughout her whole life. By reading her work in light of the artist's collaboration with the magazine *La Donna*, I argued that it might represent an attempt to create a specific space for the celebration of women. Finally, the chapter examined the representation of maternity in the magazine *La Donna* from its first publication until 1922. It focused in particular on the women writers' profiles, which were compared to photos accompanying profiles of men. The analysis showed how the magazine used photographic portraits to convey an idea of womanhood that was a mixture of private and public virtues, reflecting the moderate feminism that prevailed at the CNDI conference in Rome in 1908 and that enriched the figure of mother with social values. However, the representation of maternity connected with figures of well-known women, used as an example of a possible coexistence of career and family life, conveyed an idea of maternity that did not isolate women by forcing them to abandon their ambitions. This was possible in particular since this kind of photos were attached mainly to profiles of women writers, a kind of activity that was considered acceptable for women at the time. Yet, in the last years examined another kind of representation of maternity emerged, emptied of all the additional values that maternalism had attached to it.

CHAPTER 3

3.1 Introduction

The emergence of the Italian Fascist Party, PNF, dramatically affected the development of the feminist movement in Italy. After an initial mild interest, the PNF progressively co-opted also women in its plans.²⁹⁹ Yet, the question of what political function women could exercise under fascism remained ambiguous. Men continued to disapprove female activism, even when channelled into the *Fasci Femminili*, while women activists struggled to understand the significance of their activities in the wider picture of the regime.³⁰⁰ Yet, despite the ambivalent behaviour that characterized fascist politics towards women, they had a heavy impact on feminists, who were afraid to be marginalized.³⁰¹ According to De Grazia, the 1920s were characterized by a general disillusionment among the old members of feminism, whereas during the next decade some of them decided to return to public life within fascist groups.³⁰² The increasing control of the regime over private and public notions of femininity urged women to rethink their position in society at large and, more specifically, asked previous activists to reposition themselves within the movement.

²⁹⁹ Uneven during the 1920s, the pace of recruiting women speeded up in the 1930s, as part of the strategy of Achille Starace to spread the consensus for the regime among all sections of the Italian society. Then, it picked up between 1935-6, when women were mobilized on behalf of the Ethiopian campaign, and 1937, when the PNF commanded that the maximum impulse should be given to Fascism among women. The little support that the first women's sections received from the male party hierarchs is touched in Perry Wilson, "The Fairytale Witch: Laura Marani Argnani and the Fasci Femminili of Reggio Emilia, 1929-1940," *Contemporary European History* 15, no. 1 (February 2006): 23.

³⁰⁰ Victoria De Grazia, *How fascism ruled women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 246-247.

³⁰¹ The fascist movement kept an ambiguous behaviour towards women initially. Its early programme even promised female suffrage. However, it later became more restrictive on topics related to women's emancipation, including limitations to female employment. For a full account of Fascist politics towards women see Perry Wilson, *Women in twentieth century Italy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 22-111; De Grazia, *How fascism ruled women*; Piero Meldini, *Sposa e madre esemplare: Ideologia e politica della donna e della famiglia durante il fascismo* (Rimini; Firenze: Guaraldi, 1975).

³⁰² De Grazia, *How fascism ruled women*.

Maternity was one of the spheres related to women on which the fascist regime exerted a particularly invasive influence. The Fascist movement politically exploited motherhood and turned it into a discursive site. Issues related to women's emancipation, nationalism, morality and religion were publicly debated and a new definition of motherhood was created by merging its public and private spheres. For these reasons, as long as it is contextualized within the broader panorama of transformations involving the feminist movement and organizations at the time, a research trying to give an overview of the development of a visual culture related to women's attempts to claim their own space in Italy cannot overlook the Fascist period. How did women cope with the progressive restriction of their freedom? Did they try to maintain a space for resistance or did they completely give in? What kind of visual culture was then produced in this environment?

In the introduction to the text *Il complesso di Michelangelo. Ricerca sul contributo dato dalla donna all'arte italiana del novecento*,³⁰³ Cesare Vivaldi defines the years between 1910 and 1930 as a golden era for women artists. He argues that, despite preventing the development of a new generation of potential artists, the Fascist regime did not stop those who were already working. In this period, he claims, women artists were admitted to some of the most influential exhibitions, such as the *Venice Biennial* and the *Secessioni* (Secessions) in Rome.³⁰⁴ The situation was different for the feminist associations. The regime exerted a progressive control over them. The majority was eventually closed, while other organizations connected with the Fascist apparatus were created anew. For this reason, Wilson considers the Fascist period the end of feminism.³⁰⁵ However, few women's associations did manage to remain open even if under various kinds of pressures. The extent to which these can be considered spaces where women were able to fight for their rights is one of the questions that the chapter

³⁰³ Simona Weller, *Il complesso di Michelangelo. Ricerca sul contributo dato dalla donna all'arte italiana del novecento* (Macerata: La Nuova Foglio Editrice, 1976) is an overview of women artists active in Italy in the twentieth century. Riccarda Pagnozzato critiqued the approach used by Weller in "Il mercato del femminismo," *Effe*, June 1976, 41.

³⁰⁴ Cesare Vivaldi, introduction to *Il complesso di Michelangelo. Ricerca sul contributo dato dalla donna all'arte italiana del novecento*, Simona Weller (La Nuova Foglio Editrice: Macerata, 1976).

³⁰⁵ Wilson, *Women in twentieth century Italy*, 79.

addresses. The activity of these surviving organizations should be analysed in the wider context of the time, being aware of the ambiguity that characterized the relationship of many women with the regime. In this way, it is possible to discover strategies, however minute, by which women tried to reaffirm their right to independence and self-representation.

The chapter draws on different kinds of materials, including archival documents and contemporary magazines, in order to frame the pictures discussed. After briefly presenting the cult of motherhood typical of the regime and how it was visually represented, I describe women's associations and their role at the time. Afterwards, I will focus on an exhibition on the theme of maternity organized at the Lyceum of Florence between 1933 and 1934. Despite the significant role that the Lyceum played at the time, a recognition of its activity and a wider study of its relations to other Lyceum clubs and to the artistic field in general is still missing. While this is beyond the scope of this research, drawing on documents found in the archive of the Lyceum, I will discuss the organization of the exhibition *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna* and the difficulties encountered by the Lyceum's members. The artworks featured in the exhibition will be analysed in order to understand whether they proposed a configuration of maternity different from the model imposed by the Fascist regime. Afterwards, I analyse a painting by Ida Salvagnini Bidoli, *La donna e il fantoccio*. By looking at the ways in which the artist questioned the traditional representation of maternity and enriched the painting with different layers of meaning, the contrast between different ways of engaging with the theme of maternity will be highlighted. Finally, I look at the *Almanacco della donna Italiana*, investigating the ways in which the almanac's peculiar combination of consensus and feminism was mirrored in its visual components.

3.2 Fascism and motherhood

On May 26, 1927 Mussolini delivered its "Discorso dell'Ascensione," which touched, among different topics, also the physical and racial health of the Italian population. On the basis

that the demographic power of a nation is also its political, economic and moral power, Mussolini declared the increase of birth rate an objective of the Nation. Connected to this goal was the improvement of the Italian race and the pursue of an imperialist policy.³⁰⁶ The destiny of the motherland was related to its demographic power and to the number of children that women could give birth to. Women were expected to embrace fascism not as the umpteenth political “ism,” but as a life doctrine, giving meaning and purpose to their whole lives.³⁰⁷ Women’s duty and first responsibility was to give birth and support family. Thus, the fascist demographic policies and the representation of the woman as first and foremost mother were strongly intertwined.

The Fascist regime managed to create a new social perception and representation of maternity, which was downgraded to the physical act of making babies and defined every aspect of women’s social being. It lost the character of social value that had retained with the previous feminist movement, when maternity was seen as a universal condition common to all women, the site of female virtues and capacities. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the valorisation of maternity as a civic virtue at the basis of the construction of women’s political and social identity had been central to the maternal and moderate feminism of the beginning of the century. On the contrary, Fascism stripped maternity of all the meanings that the previous feminist movement had attached to it.

The regime press, and in particular publications addressed to women, supported the Fascist cult of motherhood as well, by glorifying maternity as the highest state of bliss. Women were represented as simple producers of children, whose education should be, instead, delegated to the State. A different perspective was given by *Rassegna Femminile Italiana*, a magazine that Bartoloni defines the first attempt to create a female Fascist magazine out of previous experiences and elaborations of emancipationist kind.³⁰⁸ *Rassegna* stood out of the average Fascist representation of maternity, by not reducing it to a merely

³⁰⁶ Piero Meldini, *Sposa e madre esemplare*, 140-143.

³⁰⁷ Ugo Marchetti, “La sanità della razza e il Fascismo,” *Rassegna Femminile Italiana*, no. 2, 1928, 3.

³⁰⁸ The *Rassegna Femminile Italiana* was published, despite alternate vicissitude, between 1925 and 1930. For more information see Stefani Bartoloni, “Il fascismo femminile e la sua stampa: la “Rassegna Femminile Italiana” (1925 – 1930),” *Nuova DWF*, no. 21 (1982): 165.

biological fact, which was instead considered secondary to the educational role of the mother.³⁰⁹ Yet, this was an exception to the Fascist celebration of mothers who would reproduce and produce as many children as possible for the glory of the Fascist State.

In order to achieve its goals, Fascism strove to support maternity through a complex and multifaceted strategy that included repression, social welfare programs and propaganda. Repressive and punitive measures, such as the criminalization of abortion and taxes on celibacy (introduced in 1927), were combined with initiatives aimed at materially supporting maternity, such as tax exemptions on the basis of the number of children, introduced in 1933, family allocations, introduced in 1936, maternity insurances, birth and marriage loans. Special institutions were established for infant and family health and welfare. O.N.M.I., Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia (National Agency for Maternity and Infancy), for instance, was founded in 1925 to help single mothers, promote breastfeeding and the deliveries in hospitals in order to decrease infant mortality. Since O.N.M.I. materially and morally assisted women and, by doing this, protected the Italian race health, it was considered one of the most important institutions of the Fascist regime.³¹⁰

In 1933 the cult of motherhood was institutionalized by the creation of the Giornata della madre e dell'infanzia (Mothers' and Infants' Day) on Christmas Eve, in order to propose a correspondence of every mother and child with the Virgin Mary and Jesus. In 1929 the government had signed the Lateran treaty with the Vatican. This alliance, that allowed the Fascist regime to use the influence of the Church to support its policies and helped the Church to have an influence on the Fascist legislation and measures, translated into bigger constrictions for women. The papal encyclical *Casti Connubii* in 1930, for instance, spoke of the woman as mother and wife. Women, argued the encyclical, should be granted freedom in view of their dignity as humans, but

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ "L'opera nazionale maternità e infanzia," *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 1934, 311; Pietro Corsi, *La tutela della maternità e dell'infanzia in Italia* (Roma: Società editrice Novissima, 1936), 21; Sileno Fabbri, *L'Opera Nazionale per la protezione della Maternità e dell'Infanzia* (Milano: Mondadori, 1933); Annalisa Bresci, "L'Opera nazionale maternità e infanzia nel ventennio fascista," *Italia contemporanea*, no. 192 (September 1993): 421-441.

also in view of their “most noble office as wife and mother and companion.”³¹¹

Despite the incentives, however, birth rate steadily decreased during the Fascist period. According to Massimo Livi Bacci, the decrease of natality, started long before, was a process that could not be reversed. The war and the nature of contemporary society were integrated into a process started long before, which would make pronatalist Fascist policies unsuccessful.³¹² Saraceno, on the contrary, connected the failure of pronatalist policies to characteristics inherent to the period. These measures were not created in a void and were applied within a society whose features defined the conditions in which maternity could be lived. The life conditions of broad sectors of society were worsening and pronatalist measures often collided with the material conditions of the people they were directed to.³¹³ Whatever the reasons for their failures, after a slight raise after World War One, which restored pre-war levels, from 1922 birth rates kept decreasing, with the exception of small increases in 1930 and between 1938 and 1940 (table 1).³¹⁴

3.2.1 Women in Fascist visual culture

The regime used a rich iconographic apparatus as a means to its legitimation and in order to disseminate the Fascist ideology. The strategy of using images in order to communicate with and influence people was a particularly successful one in the Catholic and highly illiterate Italy of the period. Aesthetic, ethical and political values formed an indissoluble unity, as stated by Soffici in what can be considered the earliest Fascist intervention of cultural policy.³¹⁵ The Fascist propaganda machine encompassed

³¹¹ *Casti Connubii*, December 31, 1930. Available at https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19301231_casti-connubii.html (accessed March 15, 2017).

³¹² Massimo Livi Bacci, *Donna, fecondità e figli* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1980), 342.

³¹³ Chiara Saraceno, “Costruzione della maternità e della paternità,” in *Il regime fascista: storia e storiografia*, eds. Angelo Del Boca, Massimo Legnani and Mario G. Rossi (Roma: Laterza, 1995), 475-497.

³¹⁴ Istituto centrale di statistica, *Sviluppo della popolazione italiana dal 1861 al 1961* (Roma: ISTAT, 1965), table page 401.

³¹⁵ Ardengo Soffici, “Il Fascismo e l’Arte,” *Gerarchia* I, no. 9, 1922, 504-507.

a broad range of visual materials: posters and graphic products, photos and movies, painting, sculpture and architecture.³¹⁶ This rich visual apparatus included mass-media images, but also paintings and sculptures, the art of the regime.³¹⁷

In the context of Fascist propaganda women were represented in two ways: the “*donna crisi*” (crisis woman), cosmopolitan, urban, skinny, hysterical, decadent and sterile and the “*donna madre*” or “*madre prolificata*” (prolific mother), national, rural, floridly robust, tranquil and prolific.³¹⁸ These two stereotypes are represented and juxtaposed in the linocut *Cocktail* (fig. 50), by Mino Maccari, published in *Il Selvaggio* in 1932.³¹⁹ One woman is dressed as a peasant, with the typical kerchief on her head, and her muscular arms suggest the robust and vigorous body of the peasant woman celebrated by the regime. Surrounded by what seems to be a typical interior of a house, she is breastfeeding her child. She is a very strong visual contrast to the woman represented next to her, sitting in what seems to be the interior of a bar and drinking a cocktail. This figure is very skinny, wears high heels and very fashionable party dress and jewellery. The hair is short as the fashion of the time. Maccari, a man who had been disappointed by the regime, seems to reflect upon these

³¹⁶ The relation between aesthetic, ethic and political values within the Fascist regime has been widely studied. For a general introduction see Laura Malvano, *Fascismo e politica dell'immagine* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1988).

³¹⁷ In Italy the opposition between an independent art and an art of the regime is visible in the opposition between Premi Cremona (1939-1941) and Bergamo (1939-1942). The first one, created by Roberto Farinacci, featured an art of the regime inspired by the Fascist ideology reflected in an epic, traditional and reassuring language. The second one, promoted by Giuseppe Bottai, was more interested in quality and chose free subjects, like landscapes, still life, portraits, at least until the third edition, when it underwent a sudden change. Up to that point, the Premio had supported artists that adverse critics considered grotesque, childish and unpopular, in short, antifascist. See Antonello Negri and Silvia Bignami, eds., *Anni '30: arti in Italia oltre il fascismo* (Firenze: Giunti: Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi, 2012). Exhibition catalogue. Firenze, Palazzo Strozzi, September 22, 2012- January 27, 2013; Sileno Salvagnini, *Il sistema delle arti in Italia, 1919 – 1943* (Bologna: Minerva Edizioni, 2000), 113-126; Pia Vivarelli, “La politica delle arti figurative negli anni del Premio Bergamo,” in *Gli anni del Premio Bergamo. Arte in Italia intorno agli anni Trenta* (Milano: Electa, 1993). Exhibition catalogue, Bergamo, Galleria d'arte moderna e contemporanea e Accademia Carrara, September 25, 1993- January 9, 1994, 24-38.

³¹⁸ De Grazia, *How Fascism ruled women*, 73.

³¹⁹ *Il Selvaggio*, a political and satirical journal, was published between 1924 and 1943. After a beginning clearly orthodox and aligned with the regime, the appointment of the critic and caricaturist Mino Maccari as the director in 1926 produced a big change. The journal claimed to completely abandon politics in order to address only topics related to arts and literature. It advocated art's autonomy and right to satire. See Andrea Tugnoli, *Mino Maccari. Gli anni del Selvaggio* (Bologna: Clueb, 1996).

two stereotypes. His illustration mocks not only the modern and hysterical woman, but also the prolific mother, whose rural and massive figure is over emphasised and whose breast becomes the drink of the child, as the title of the illustration seems to suggest.

Representations of maternity populated the realm of high culture, that is the art of regime, Fascist and Italian, that was supposed to be a universal art of the people. This meant, as Malvano underlined, to use an easily readable and archetypal language and long lasting themes. One of these, simple and universal, was the mother.³²⁰ More than through a specific style, with the exception of the artistic movement Novecento, Fascist art often revealed itself through the choice of themes. For this reason, some historians claimed that Fascism did not create an art that can be defined properly Fascist, as it was characterized by a sort of “aesthetic pluralism.”³²¹ The choice of style and the adherence to an artistic tendency were secondary problems. The primary one was to subordinate the arts to the political contents of Fascism, independently from a univocal aesthetic. Artists had to adhere primarily to the themes of the fascist politics, while the aesthetic research, although important, was a secondary preoccupation.³²²

Examples of *donna madre* populate also scenes dedicated to the theme “Ascoltazioni alla radio di un discorso del Duce.” The 1939 edition of the Premio Cremona (1939-1942) was dedicated to *Ascoltazione alla radio di un discorso del duce*, at Palazzo Comunale, and *Stati d’animo creati dal fascismo*, at Palazzo di Cittanova.³²³ The Premio Cremona (1939-1942), the arts showcase promoted by Farinacci, can be considered the peak of the Fascist intruding upon the artistic field.³²⁴ The choice of the first theme gave the

³²⁰ Malvano, *Fascismo e politica dell’immagine*, 53.

³²¹ Marla Susan Stone, *The Patron State. Culture and Politics in Fascist Italy* (Princeton (N. J.): Princeton University Press, 1998), 5.

³²² Alessandra Tarquini, *Storia della cultura fascista* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2011), 92-96.

³²³ *Premio Cremona: catalogo delle opere esposte alla mostra: Premio A: ascoltazione alla radio di un discorso del Duce, Premio B: stati d’animo creati dal fascismo* (Cremona: Cremona Nuova, 1939). The theme was very popular in the Nazi Germany and in the USA ruled by Roosevelt, where the direct thread between the President and the Führer, on one side, and the masses, on the other, inspired a massive production on the subject. On this topic, see Franco Monteleone, *Storia della radio e della televisione in Italia: un secolo di costume, società e politica* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2003).

³²⁴ Sileno Salvagnini underlined, however, that many contemporary artists, avoided the competition. Therefore, the artists who participated, and their works, are valuable more as documents of the contemporary working and middle class’ imaginary and taste, rather

opportunity to represent mothers and children, alone or surrounded by other members of the families, listening to Mussolini's speeches on the radio. The first prize for that section was given to Luciano Ricchetti's large painting on the theme (fig. 51). This painting was destroyed in 1945 in contempt of Fascism, sharing the destiny of many other coeval works. Only a few fragments survived, such as *Madre e figlio* (fig. 52). Alessandro Malinverni compared it to the Renaissance Madonnas for its rural simplicity, plasticity and emotional strength.³²⁵ Many other examples might be cited, for example Angelo Brando's *Mentre tutto il popolo è in adunata sulle piazze d'Italia, una madre ascolta il discorso del Duce* (fig. 53) and Gherardo Dottori's *Ascoltazione del discorso del 9 Maggio XIV* (fig. 54). All these images show a strict separation between a private space, where the mother holds and breastfeeds her child, and the public one, represented by the radio through which the woman can still listen to Mussolini's words. The radio represents the only contact with the outside world that is left to the woman and mother, sent back to her sphere of action, the house and the family.

Next to these representations of maternity, others underlined the patronizing role of the state towards the mother more openly. A poster realized for the O.N.M.I. in Milan to publicize the Mother's and Infants' Day, for example, shows a mother who is breastfeeding under the protective gesture of a male figure (fig. 55). The caption invites women to put their maternity and their children under the protection of O.N.M.I. Again, the mother is a peasant, as shown by the typical headscarf that covers her head. This poster, like others realized for the same organization, was created by Marcello Dudovich, known also as the "painter of the femininity."³²⁶ The women who populate his previous art nouveau creations for the Rinascente and other Italian firms, however, are very different from those publicizing the Mother's and Infants' Day. The independent, fashionable women of the previous posters make way for mothers completely

than being the expression of the contemporary artistic most advanced results. See Sileno Salvagnini, *Il sistema delle arti in Italia, 1919 – 1943*, 115.

³²⁵ Alessandro Malinverni, "Luciano Ricchetti," in *Anni '30: arti in Italia oltre il fascismo*, eds. Antonella Negri and Silvia Bignami, 155.

³²⁶ Roberto Curci, "L'ansia del manifesto, la nostalgia della pittura," in *Marcello Dudovich. Oltre il manifesto*, ed. Roberto Curci (Milano: Charta, 2002). Exhibition catalogue. Civico Museo Revoltella, December 19, 2002 – April 30, 2003. 24.

absorbed by their children. In a 1935 poster the mother raises a smiling child whose body completely covers her face (fig. 56). In another one, the woman holds and smiles at her child, who returns her smile. He is a boy, the future *balilla* in his uniform who smiles at the viewer from the poster while holding a gun (fig. 57). According to De Grazia, these images, so different from Dudovich's previous works and from the women he used to represent, show an alleged embarrassment of the artist for the commission and in realizing the posters. She speaks of an "effaced individuality" of the women who are "literally faceless, stylized like pillars of sand, backs to the observer."³²⁷ In reality, Dudovich soon abandoned the initial art nouveau to move closer to the style of Novecento. Thus, volumetric emphasis and geometric rigour became features of his work in the 1930s.³²⁸ Moreover, what De Grazia defines the effaced individuality of these women perfectly fits with the Fascist idea of maternity. The focus was on the well-being of the child, while little attention was given to the individuality of the mother, only part of a bigger group of child bearers for the motherland. Women were responsible only for the practical needs of children, whereas all the others, including their education, were in the State's hands. Therefore, rather than speaking of embarrassment, it seems that the artist clearly followed Fascist conventions and visually expressed some basic pillars of Fascist notion of motherhood.

The importance of the topic in the wider economy of Fascist cultural activities is further proved by other exhibitions organized by A.N.F.D.A.L.³²⁹: the 1935 *Sogni di Madre* (Dreams of

³²⁷ De Grazia, *How fascism ruled women*, 72.

³²⁸ Roberto Curci, "Marcello Dudovich," in *Marcello Dudovich. Oltre il manifesto*, ed. Roberto Curci (Milano: Charta, 2002), 33-34.

³²⁹ The A.N.F.D.A.L. (Associazione Nazionale Fascista Donne Professioniste Artiste e Laureate) (National fascist association female artists and graduate women) was responsible for bringing women artists together. Born in 1929, its primary role was the selection of women artists, well known and beginners, worthy of representing Italy at the most important national and international exhibitions, such as those organized by the Sindacato fascista Belle Arti. Yet, despite its role in organizing many exhibitions and its relationships with the regime, the association never achieved real power in the artistic field, which retained a strong gender characterization. No woman sat in juries, with the exception of Margherita Sarfatti, or won major prizes during the Fascist period. Therefore, the A.N.F.D.A.L. represented, in the words of Sabrina Spinazzè, an illusion of power given to women. See Sabrina Spinazzè, "Donne e attività artistica durante il ventennio," in *L'arte delle donne*, eds. Iamurri and Spinazzè (Roma: Meltemi, 2001), 135; Maria Cristina Lopez, "La donna artista e le istituzioni (1920-1940)," in *Donna lombarda: 1860-1945*, eds. Ada Gigli Marchetti and Nanda Torcellan (Milano: Angeli, 1992), 385-394.

mother) in Genova³³⁰ and the 1938 *Mostra dell'Arte nella Vita del Bambino* (Exhibition of the Art in the Life of the Child)³³¹ in Milan. The painting section of the 1935 edition of the Premio Sanremo, one of the most emblematic expression of the culture at the time, was dedicated to maternity as well.³³²

Despite the image of women was dominated by the broad diffusion of these representations of mothers through Fascist propaganda, Italian women were also exposed to other female models. At the end of the 1920s magazines directed at women became more common. They differed in style, target and content, but they had in common a predominant use of images, illustrations, photos and cartoons. These often reproduced stars and starlets, preferably American, and female models that did not fit with the ideal that the regime was trying to spread widely.³³³ Moreover, Nunzia Messina has shown how the myth of Hollywood was born in Italy in the 1920s and reached its heyday in the next decade.³³⁴ Contradictory and ambiguous images, however, were shown also by the Italian cinema. The 1941 *E' caduta una donna* by Alfredo Guarini, for example, addressed a very controversial subject. The film was based on the 1936 book with the same title by Milly Dandolo.³³⁵ The plot, despite the final resolution of the conflicts, started with the refusal of the pregnancy by the protagonist, Dina, who wanted to have an abortion, but was unable to find someone willing to help her. The theme was particularly difficult at the time of publication of the

³³⁰ *Concorso artistico: Sogni di Madre. Tema dettato da s. A.R. La principessa di Piemonte. (Associazione Nazionale fascista artiste e laureate. Circolo di Genova)* (Genova: Siag. Stab. Ital. Arti Grafiche, 1935).

³³¹ A.N.F.D.A.L., *L' arte nella vita del bambino: 2. mostra dell'Associazione nazionale fascista donne artiste e laureate. Sezione di Milano. (confederazione fascista professionisti ed artisti)* (Milano: Tip. E. Gualdoni, 1937).

³³² The institution of the Premio Sanremo (1935-1940) was part of the general politics of increasing control of the regime upon the arts. The themes were chosen by a Committee with a clear propagandistic purpose. The winning artwork would have been assigned to the *Casa della maternità e infanzia* (Childhood and Maternity Home) in Rome, which was never built. On the Fascist control over culture in the 1930s and the Premio Sanremo see Daniela Lauria, *Premi Sanremo d'arte e letteratura (1935-1940)* (Ravenna: Giorgio Pozzi Editore, 2015).

³³³ Raffaele De Berti and Irene Piazzoni, introduction to *Forme e modelli del rotocalco italiano tra fascismo e guerra*, eds. Raffaele De Berti and Irene Piazzoni (Milano: Cisalpino, 2009), X-XII.

³³⁴ Nunzia Messina, *Le donne del fascismo: massaie rurali e dive del cinema nel Ventennio* (Roma: Ellemme, 1987), 45-46.

³³⁵ Milly Dandolo, *E' caduta una donna* (Milano: F.lli Dandolo, 1936).

book, since abortion was considered a crime and punished by imprisonment.

3.3 Women's organizations during the Fascist period between resistance and acceptance

Fascism and feminism were irreconcilable in a fundamental way. As Macaluso Aleo rightly wrote on the pages of *Rassegna Femminile Italiana*, Mussolini wanted to turn Italy again into a rural country in order to stop the development of industrialism and, with it, feminism.³³⁶ According to the regime, an uncorrupted woman could have only one aspiration: to become a mother. Fascist pronatalist politics were strictly connected to anti-feminist politics, since women's emancipation was considered one of the causes of the drop in birth numbers. De Grazia underlined this link as well. Fascists listed under women's emancipation the joy seeking of the young and privileged, female vanity, individualistic liberalism and a false sense of material needs and godlessness.³³⁷

The "Rassegna dei movimenti femminili italiani" in the *Almanacco della Donna Italiana* is a litmus test for the feminist movement during the Fascist period. Writing in Rome in 1922, Laura Casartelli Cabrini underlined the livelihood of the movement, that she divided in different branches: catholic, socialist, communist, nationalist, fascist and liberal. In addition to these, she listed a further declination of the movement, that she defined generic, apolitical, aconfessional, philanthropic, evolutionist and feminist. She underlined that the word feminist was used in the best possible sense, that is underlining its function of development and improvement. She lamented, however, that this branch of the movement did not take a clear position in the political arena, apart from a generic reaffirmation of its pacifist

³³⁶ Giuseppe Macaluso Aleo, "Femminismo e Fascismo," *Rassegna Femminile Italiana*, August 15, 1928, 3-4.

³³⁷ De Grazia, *How fascism ruled women*, 51-52; 72-73.

tendency from the president of the CNDI Gabriella Spalletti Rasponi.³³⁸

Over the 1920s and, especially the 1930s, however, the panorama of the women's associations underwent some major transformations. Existing organizations had to cope with the new political situation finding new ways to survive, at least temporarily. CNDI, for example, was allowed to continue to operate after 1926 as a liberal but harmless organization. However, after the death of Countess Gabriella Spalletti Rasponi in 1931, the new president Daisy di Robilant immediately brought the association closer to the regime by calling women knowledgeable about the Fascist administration in the committee. Other organizations did not adapt so successfully. The Associazione per la Donna, for example, closed in 1925.³³⁹ The FILDIS, Federazione Italiana Laureate Diplomate Istituti Superiori (Italian Federation Graduated Higher Institutes), the organization of the Italian women degree-holders, was invited to dissolve spontaneously in 1935, after its critique of the new legislation against women at work, and became part of the A.N.F.D.A.L.. The Pro-suffragio was disbanded in 1938. The Unione Femminile in Milan managed to remain open, but retrenched to focus mainly on charity. It was eventually forced to close after being accused of harbouring Jewish members in 1938 and of being antinational, sharing the destiny of the long compromised CNDI and of other male bourgeois clubs with international ties.³⁴⁰

While the panorama of existing women's associations was shaken to the core, new organizations for women were born as part of a bigger effort to widen the consensus for the regime.³⁴¹ This

³³⁸ Laura Casartelli Cabrini, "Rassegna del movimento femminile italiano," *Almanacco della Donna Italiana*, 1923, 178-215.

³³⁹ Liviana Gazzetta, *Orizzonti nuovi: storia del primo femminismo in Italia (1865-1925)* (Roma: Viella, 2018), 7. According to Gazzetta this moment, together with the approval of the administrative vote for women, can symbolically represent the end of the first feminist movement in Italy.

³⁴⁰ De Grazia, *How fascism ruled women*, 238- 243. See also Sara Follacchio, "Conversando al femminismo: La donna italiana," in *La corporazione delle donne: ricerche e studi sui modelli femminili nel ventennio fascista*, ed. Marina Addis Saba (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1988), 211-220.

³⁴¹ In the context of the growing organized capitalism favourable to mass consumption, the issue of consensus was a central one within Fascist politics since the beginning and became more evident in the mid-1920s. For this reason, in the next decade, in addition to the Fascist syndicates and professional bodies, associations like Fasci Femminili, Massaie Rurali, Piccole Italiane and Giovani Fasciste were born, in order to obtain also women's support. The first significant step to turn the women's *fasci* into a mass organization happened in

new parallel structure of Fascist organizations dedicated only to women, including A.N.F.D.A.L., was created also in order to attract those who had been part of the feminist movement and were still willing to be active in the public sphere. It aimed at exploiting their patriotic feelings and presenting the regime as supportive towards women. These women's emancipatory ambitions were, then, channeled and transformed.³⁴² Yet, a network of pre-existing associations managed to survive: Pro Cultura in Turin, Nuova vita in Milan, Allenza Muliebre, with its central headquarters in Milan and branches in the rest of Italy, and the Lyceum clubs in Florence, Catania, Milan, Genova and Rome.

3.4. The Lyceum in Florence and its artistic section

The Lyceum of Florence, founded in 1908, was the first one of a series of Lyceum clubs later set up in Rome, Genoa, Catania and Milan. This circuit of sister institutions was part of an international network initiated by Constance Smedley, who actively campaigned to create a network of clubs around the world to promote and support female activities in different fields, such as literature, arts, science and philanthropy and to provide women with prestigious locations to meet and create links with like-minded women.³⁴³ The first Lyceum Club in London and its later branches were characterized by a moderate approach in comparison to the violent actions of the more radical W.S.P.U. (Women's Political and Social Union). It was clear from the

1929, when Paola Benedettini Alferazzi's *Giornale della donna* became the official organ of the *fasci femminili*. The Fascist associations were mass organizations as they gathered millions of members, but, most of all, they grouped people according to sex, class, age, activity, in order to avoid any independent expression of identity or class agreement. See Victoria De Grazia, *Consenso e cultura di massa nell'Italia Fascista: l'organizzazione del dopolavoro* (Roma; Bari: Editori Laterza, 1981), 3-28.

³⁴² This was the case of, for example, Amalia Besso, who was one of the founders of the *fasci femminili*. See De Grazia, *How fascism ruled women*, 34.

³⁴³ Barbara Imbergamo, "Un club femminile del Novecento. Il Lyceum dalla fondazione a anni Settanta," in *Carte di donne II*, eds. Alessandra Contini and Anna Scattigno (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2006); Barbara Imbergamo, *Lyceum (1908-2005) Inventario a cura di Barbara Imbergamo*, (PDF). Available at <http://www.satoscana.beniculturali.it/fileadmin/inventari/LyceumFirenze.pdf> (accessed November 26, 2016).

beginning that they did not intend to negate the traditional roles attributed to women, but simply to widen the scope of women's activity. Thanks to these premises, they did not find much resistance in the cities where they were founded, despite their support of the universal suffrage and the claim that women's economic independence should be achieved through work.³⁴⁴ This moderate position was shared also by the Lyceum in Florence. Nevertheless, its importance in the creation of the "new woman" was underlined on the pages of *La Donna* by Rossana. She described the Lyceum as the first real and complex project of women in Italy, but she also emphasized that the association should not be seen as a "meeting of feminist unintentional spinsters." She added that the Lyceum did not support "the loud and rowdy feminism" and the claims for equality. It was rather a place where new women and mothers would operate, aware of their new duties towards the family and the country.³⁴⁵ Sandiford describes how this moderate position, which tried to reconcile the traditional role of mothers and wives and a public role within society, attracted much criticism from the political feminist movement. The Lyceum was accused of being a group of noble and upper class women who were not really fighting for women's emancipation.³⁴⁶

The social composition of the members of the association was the result of different factors. On one side, the characteristics of Italian society had surely an impact on the associative criteria. Because of the low number of professional, graduate and independent Italian women, the original statute considered possible members professionals, usually teachers, and "women equal to professionals," that is professionals' wives and daughters. In addition to them, the group of ordinary members included noble women with their own private means. A high number of members living outside of the province of Florence was native English speaker and the first president of the Lyceum, from

³⁴⁴ Maria Grazia Beverini Del Santo, introduction to *Lyceum club internazionale di Firenze 1908-2008: cento anni di vita culturale del primo circolo femminile italiano*, ed. Mirka Sandiford (Firenze: Polistampa, 2008), 11-13.

³⁴⁵ Rossana, "Lyceum Femminile Italiano di Firenze," *La Donna*, no. 126, 1910, 12-13.

³⁴⁶ Mirka Sandiford, "Profilo storico del Lyceum Club di Firenze fra cultura e impegno civile, internazionalismo e nazionalismi," in *Lyceum club internazionale di Firenze 1908-2008*, ed. Mirka Sandiford, 41.

its foundation until 1944, was the countess Beatrice Pandolfini.³⁴⁷ The attempt to create a community based on the coexistence of noble and upper class women and of the emerging class of the first professionals was an intentional goal of the Lyceum.³⁴⁸ Another important aspect of the Lyceum clubs was their international character and the capacity to foster cultural cooperation among countries via the contacts among the branches spread all over Europe. According to Brockington, by cultivating connections and exchanges, the Lyceum clubs helped the growing movement towards cultural internationalism that developed between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.³⁴⁹

Spread all over Europe, the general format of the Lyceum had to adapt to the different social and political circumstances of the countries where it was exported, including different positions held by women within those societies. In Italy, for example, this meant taking into consideration the already mentioned lower number of Italian professionals and graduated women. Imbergamo described the Lyceum of Florence as an Italian and specifically Florentine translation of the British format of the association.³⁵⁰ The activities of the Lyceum were usually carried out by different sections, that in Florence encompassed literature; painting, sculpture and industrial art; international relationships; music; science; teaching; philanthropy and public good. The sections of journalism and public offices, active in London, disappeared in Florence.

In addition to representing a space for women, the Lyceum did not play a secondary role in the cultural and artistic sphere of the first half of the 19th century. After studying its archives and the notebooks containing signatures of people who visited the Lyceum, Simona Maionchi has underlined the presence of key figures of the period, from Pirandello to Marconi. Equally noteworthy was the activity of the artistic section. A look at the list of the exhibitions confirms Maionchi's assertions about the central role of the section, which did not only support women artists but was active in the field on a more general level. In

³⁴⁷ Countess Beatrice Pandolfini (Firenze, 1868-1955).

³⁴⁸ Mirka Sandiford, introduction to *Lyceum club internazionale di Firenze 1908-2008*, ed. Mirka Sandiford, 17.

³⁴⁹ Grace Brockington, "A "World Fellowship": The Founding of the International Lyceum Club for Women Artists and Writers," *Transnational Associations* 1, (March 2005): 15 - 22.

³⁵⁰ Imbergamo, "Un Club Femminile del Novecento."

particular, it had a significant role in the first half of the century, when it hosted the *Prima mostra italiana dell'Impressionismo* (First Italian exhibition of Impressionism) in 1910.³⁵¹ The exhibitions organized by the Lyceum, such as those of the artists Tosi, Carrà, Casorati, Carena and an exhibition of Lorenzo Viani in 1935, were often reviewed on the pages of *Emporium*.³⁵² The value of the work carried out by the artistic section further increased at the end of 1934, when the countess Eleonora Guicciardini Corsi Salviati was appointed president of the section, while Elena Salvaneschi, a painter and student of Casorati, became the vice president. The latter, for instance, organized the 1934 exhibition of Leonetta Cecchi Pieraccini, which included a portrait of Sibilla Aleramo. In the following years, many contemporary artists exhibited at the Lyceum, collectively, during the exhibition *Mostra di venti pittori italiani* (Exhibition of twenty Italian painters) in 1938³⁵³ or *Grande mostra di artisti italiani* (Great exhibition of Italian artists)³⁵⁴ in 1939 and, individually, like the one-man exhibition of Ottone Rosai in 1936 and those of Alberto Savinio and Carlo Carrà in 1938. Therefore, the role of the artistic section of the Lyceum should not be undervalued in the more general context of the contemporary artistic scene.

The possibility to remain open and to carry out its activities during years that saw a significant transformation and regression of the feminist movement, after its highest point in the first decade of the 20th century, makes the association an interesting

³⁵¹ The exhibition was not organized by the Lyceum. However, the choice to host it, despite the foreseeable polemics, was a sign of its cultural vitality. For more information on this exhibition see Flavio Fergonzi, "Firenze 1910 – Venezia 1920: Emilio Cecchi, i quadri francesi e le difficoltà dell'impressionismo," *Bollettino d'Arte*, no. 79 (May-June 1993): 1-26; Jean-François Rodriguez, *La réception de l'impressionnisme à Florence en 1910: Prezzolini et Soffici maitres d'œuvre de la Prima esposizione italiana dell'impressionismo francese e delle sculture di Medardo Rosso* (Venezia: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere e Arti, 1994). On the activity of the artistic section of the Lyceum see Giovanna Pistone, "Iniziative della Sezione Arte e grandi mostre del Lyceum," in *Lyceum club internazionale di Firenze 1908-2008*, ed. Mirka Sandiford, 79-92.

³⁵² Raffaello Franchi, "Firenze. Prelittorali - Mostra di Pietro Annigoni - Scampoli di grandezza al Lyceum – Viani," *Emporium* 81, no. 484 (1935): 249-251.

³⁵³ The exhibition included M. Baccio Bacci, Amerigo Bartoli, Ugo Bernsconi, Felice Carena, Carlo Carrà, Felice Casorati, Dafne Casorati, Primo Conti, Giorgio De Chirico, Filippo De Pisis, Ferruccio Ferrazzi, Francesco Menzio, Giorgio Morandi, Enrico Paolucci, Guido Peyron, Ottone Rosai, Mario Sironi, Ardengo Soffici, Arturo Tosi, Gianni Vagnetti).

³⁵⁴ The exhibition included Antony de Witt, Luigi Bartolini, Carlo Carrà, Giovanni Colacicchi, Primo Conti, Achille Lega, Filippo De Pisis, Giorgio Morandi, Enzo Pregno, Romano Romanelli, Ottone Rosai, Arturo Tosi, Mario Tozzi, Gregorio Sciltian, Ardengo Soffici.

point of observation. What it took to be able to survive in such a complicated period, in terms of compromise with the regime, will be discussed in the next paragraph.

3.4.1 The exhibition *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna* at the Lyceum of Florence

In 1933 the president of the art section of the Lyceum, the countess Editta Rucellai, and the vice president Helga Elmqvist Cau³⁵⁵ announced an international competition open only to female artists on the theme *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna*. After noticing that “it is a quite odd thing that this theme has been developed much more often by men instead than by women artists, despite maternity – predominant moment of these representations – is closer to women’s souls and is more deeply felt and understood by them,”³⁵⁶ the organizers decided “to prompt our women artists to work on this sublime theme.”³⁵⁷

The reference to a lack of works by women artists dealing with this specific subject, which is recurrent also in coeval reviews of the exhibition, is not surprising. On one side, fewer women artists represented maternity in comparison to men. This, however, was clearly connected to the lower number of women who could pursue an artistic career. On the other side, the existing works were mainly unknown. In the 1930s women artists who exhibited were still a minority and proper research on women’s art was still far to come.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁵ Helga Elmqvist Cau (1902-1944). Swedish painter and illustrator. She was killed by Nazi troops together with her husband Giovanni Cau in 1944.

³⁵⁶ Lyceum di Firenze, *Un concorso internazionale tra le artiste* (Firenze: Tipografia Enrico Ariani, Via San Gallo 33, 1933), no page.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁸ Even if some women artists of the past were already known, they acquired official recognition only later. The case of Artemisia Gentileschi is meaningful. Anna Banti published her first biography in 1947. See Anna Banti, *Artemisia: romanzo* (Sansoni: Firenze, 1947). Other works on the artist were Roberto Longhi, *Gentileschi padre e figlia* (Milano: Abscondita, 2011) and R. Ward Bissell, “Artemisia Gentileschi -A New Documented Chronology,” *The Art Bulletin* 50, no. 2 (1968): 163-168. However, Gentileschi acquired a new status in art history only after 1989 thanks to Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

To reconstruct an exhibition is a difficult endeavour in general and requires a particular attention to the primary sources. The documents that we have nowadays are often the result of either chance or of a selective process aimed at bequeathing a certain image of an organization or event. This is true also for the exhibition that is the object of this paragraph. On one side, the access to the archive of the Lyceum has proved problematic. On the other, the kind of documents preserved are somehow partial. The archive of the Lyceum in Florence was very untidy until its reorganization by Barbara Imbergamo, who realized its first inventory.³⁵⁹ Hence, it is likely that some materials went lost. Moreover, despite being one of the best documented exhibitions among those organized by the club,³⁶⁰ only a few documents tell the story of its organization. Most of the materials related to the exhibition in the archive are newspapers' reviews. The black and white photos of the artworks that accompanied them are often the only reproductions known of the majority of the artworks, as no image can be found in the existing catalogues.

In order to explain this lack Calcagni Abrami and Chimirri suggested that the missing plates were never actually realized.³⁶¹ Nevertheless, two different documents preserved within the archive tell a different story. In the project of the catalogue a space to include some postcards, meant to reproduce at least the subjects likely to be sold, was planned. Any further reprint or print of new subjects should have followed a request from the public.³⁶² Moreover, a later pre-printed letter communicated to the artists

³⁵⁹ Gabriela Todros, "L'archivio del Lyceum e la sua sistemazione," in *Lyceum club internazionale di Firenze 1908-2008*, ed. Mirka Sandiford, 70-71.

³⁶⁰ The subsection *single mostre* of the *Sezione Arte* of the archive collects material concerning eleven exhibitions organized by the Lyceum for which not only the invitation has been preserved. In addition to the *Concorso internazionale d'arte "Maria Vergine vista dalla donna,"* only documents related to two other exhibitions from the first half of the century have been preserved: *Prima mostra italiana dell'Impressionismo* in 1910 and *Mostra di pitture di Primo Conti* in 1938.

³⁶¹ Artemisia Calcagni Abrami and Lucia Chimirri, eds., *Arte Moderna a Firenze. Cataloghi di Esposizioni 1900 – 1933* (Firenze: Centro Di, 1988). Exhibition catalogue. Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, April 6 – November, 6, 1988. They focus in particular on the catalogues kept at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, at the Fondo Cecchi of the Bonsanti Archive and at the Lyceum's archive.

³⁶² "Per l'Esposizione Concorso "Maria Vergine vista dalla donna". Il catalogo sarà come segue." IV. SEZIONE ARTE, 4.1. Singole Mostre, 2. Concorso Internazionale d'Arte "Maria Vergine vista dalla donna". 1933 giugno- 1934 gennaio 21, Archivio del Lyceum di Firenze, Firenze, Italy.

the possibility to buy the unsold postcards.³⁶³ The amount of sold ones, instead, should have been used to understand which artworks met the visitors' favour. Unfortunately, no postcard has been found so far. Thus, my interpretation of the exhibition is largely based on the mediation of the newspapers and on the images chosen to accompany the exhibition's reviews. Only few artworks were reproduced in the printed media, while the sheer majority was left outside. Thus, the interpretation is necessarily biased. However, precisely because of this selection the artworks chosen by the press suggest what the contemporary taste was.

A central issue in the interpretation of this exhibition is the way of seeing and representing visual arts mediated by photographic reproductions. Berenson spoke of the importance of copies, reproductions and imitations, in order to spread knowledge of art beyond the handful of experts or privileged who have the opportunity to admire them and have some influence.³⁶⁴ Reproductions, however, are even more important for artworks that have been lost or destroyed. Since many works by women artists share a destiny of oblivion, reproductions represent an invaluable source of study in these cases.

The exhibition opened on December 21, 1933, to underline its connection with the religious festivity, and was on for one month until January 21, 1934. The organizers claimed that the response to the call was very high, in spite of their expectations.³⁶⁵ Housed in six rooms at the Reale Galleria dell'Accademia, the exhibition featured 450 artworks by 250 artists. Pictures of the event are proof of how, despite a change of location in order to have more space, the artworks were still very packed (fig. 58-67). The Italian artworks occupied the foyer and the first two rooms. In the third one the German and the Austrian paintings were

³⁶³ "Gentile Signora, a concorso terminato." IV. SEZIONE ARTE, 4.1. Singole Mostre, 2. Concorso Internazionale d'Arte "Maria Vergine vista dalla donna". 1933 giugno- 1934 gennaio 21, Archivio del Lyceum di Firenze, Firenze, Italy. The document, a letter signed by Helga Elmquist-Cau, also lists the prizes assigned, the newspapers who have published reviews of the exhibition and the number of visitors, around 2000.

³⁶⁴ Bernard Berenson, *Estetica, etica e storia. Nelle arti della rappresentazione visiva* (Milano: Abscondita, 2009), transl. Mario Praz, 14.

³⁶⁵ "Promemoria sul concorso esposizione Maria Vergine vista dalla donna" 30 Novembre 1933." A document from June 1933 says that the organizers expected about 100 submissions. A later document, 20 September 1933, says that the submissions' number had already reached 200, therefore it was necessary to postpone the deadline. IV. SEZIONE ARTE, 4.1. Singole Mostre, 2. Concorso Internazionale d'Arte "Maria Vergine vista dalla donna". 1933 giugno- 1934 gennaio 21, Archivio del Lyceum di Firenze, Firenze, Italy.

exhibited, while the fourth room was dedicated to black and white drawings. The remaining artworks from the other participating countries were hosted in the fifth and sixth rooms.³⁶⁶ Artworks arrived from 15 different countries, including Sweden, Switzerland, Netherlands, Poland and France and used a variety of techniques. In addition to oil paintings, tempera and watercolours, the exhibition included etchings, wood-cuts and drawings, paintings on glass, designs engraved on stone and enamel and little silhouette pictures.³⁶⁷ It is interesting to note that a diversity of materials and techniques was a feature also of later feminist art.

According to the documents in the archive, because of the alleged enthusiasm encountered and of the high number of artworks sent, the organization of the exhibition proved more complicated than expected. In addition to postponing the deadline, from September 30 to October 20, a permit to customs authorities for the temporary import of the artworks had to be asked.³⁶⁸ Moreover, a new location had to be found. The exhibition had originally been intended for the premises of the Lyceum in Florence, as it was authorized to host exhibitions and competitions. However, the high number of artworks submitted and the limited space of the original location obliged the organizers to find a different venue. For this reason, at the beginning of November 1933 a request to use the rooms of the Real Accademia was sent to the local Superintendence to Fine Arts and Antiquities.³⁶⁹ At the same time, the necessary authorization to stage the exhibition there was requested.³⁷⁰

The sheer participation in the exhibition that the organizers claimed, and that is proved by the number of artworks exhibited, cannot be easily explained. With the exception of the

³⁶⁶ *La Donna Italiana* – Roma, “A Firenze,” January, 1934.

³⁶⁷ “The Madonna in art as seen by women artists,” *Florence and Tuscany*, December 16, 1933. Unless otherwise indicated, the articles about the exhibition are newspaper clippings preserved at the Lyceum’s archive.

³⁶⁸ IV. SEZIONE ARTE, 4.1. Singole Mostre, 2. Concorso Internazionale d’Arte “Maria Vergine vista dalla donna”. 1933 giugno- 1934 gennaio 21, Archivio del Lyceum di Firenze, Firenze, Italy.

³⁶⁹ The request was also sent to *La Nazione*, in order to be able to use their spaces, but they were not available.

³⁷⁰ “Promemoria sul concorso esposizione Maria Vergine vista dalla donna. 30 Novembre 1933.” IV. SEZIONE ARTE, 4.1. Singole Mostre, 2. Concorso Internazionale d’Arte “Maria Vergine vista dalla donna”. 1933 giugno- 1934 gennaio 21, Archivio del Lyceum di Firenze, Firenze, Italy.

measures and the required presence of a frame, the organizers accorded extreme freedom of expression to the participants by not envisaging an admission jury. This, together with a possible enthusiasm for the subject from all those women who still considered motherhood a fundamental moment of women's life and a lack of spaces and opportunities to exhibit, might have prompted many women to participate. On one side, the lack of a jury can be read as an attempt to escape the new institutional framework created by the Fascist regime to control the exhibition system and an invitation for all women to participate. On the other, by not drawing any distinction between artists and amateurs, the absence of a selection process certainly affected the final exhibition and its quality.³⁷¹ The catalogue lists some affirmed artists, such as the sculptor Lina Arpesani,³⁷² the illustrators Sofia Chiostrì,³⁷³ Elda Cenni,³⁷⁴ Marina Battigelli,³⁷⁵ the painters Maria Colzani and Maria Pensa.³⁷⁶ Nevertheless, many others are unknown and it has not been possible to retrieve any information on them, except for a few sentences in the artistic sections of the *Almanacco della donna Italiana*.³⁷⁷ This is not surprising, as a lack of

³⁷¹ The lack of a jury and the system to assign the prizes stand in high contrast with the exhibition *Sogni di Madre* organized by A.N.F.D.A.L. in 1935, where a selection was in place. Moreover, *Sogni di madre* was open also to men and the first prizes for sculpture and painting were reserved to them. The additional prize for women was won by Adelina Zandrino. See Adelina Zandrino, "Mostra 'Sogni di madre,'" *Lidel*, April 1935, 500-501.

³⁷² Lina Arpesani (Milan 1888-1974).

³⁷³ Sofia Chiostrì (Firenze 1898-1944).

³⁷⁴ Elda Cenni, daughter of the painter and illustrator Quinto and sister of the painter Italo. See Maria Antonietta Trasforini, *Arte a parte: donne artiste fra margini e centro* (Bologna: Franco Angeli, 1999), 131.

³⁷⁵ Marina Battigelli (Cairo 1896-Firenze 1979).

³⁷⁶ Maria Colzani and Maria Pensa were, together with Lina Arpesani, Carla Celesia di Vegliasco, Gilda Pansiotti and Isabella Pirovano, the only women artists accepted at the first exhibition organized in Milan by the Federazione Artistica Femminile Italiana in 1914.

³⁷⁷ The age of some of these unknown artists, reported in the review "The Madonna in art as seen by women artists," *Florence and Tuscany*, December 16, 1933, shows how not only affirmed artists participated to the call, but also young girls who maybe wanted to become artists or simply wanted to participate in the competition. Anna Luisa Delfino from Genoa, for example, was only sixteen years old; Maria Luisa Marena from Rome was fifteen; Giorgia Valensin and Tilde Aprea were also under eighteen. Yet, the young age alone was not an indicator of a lack of experience. Tilde Aprea, for example, had already participated in the exhibition organized in collaboration between the "Amatori e cultori di Roma" and the "2a Internazionale di Fiume." On this see Remigio Strinati, "Rassegna artistica femminile," *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 1928, 246. Some of the unknown participants include Lina Aporti, Tina Arduini, Giuseppina Barabro Rutelli, Jolanda Bezzi, Laura Biaggiotti Capella, Anna Laura Bruzzi, Ada Calzavara, Costantina Jerta Cappelletti, Tosca Cappelletti, Maria Cau, Norberta Cazzulani, Maria Rosaria Ciannella, Nennele Cicognari, Amelia Collacchioni, Luigia Colombo, Giovanna Coniglio, Maria De Maria.

biographical and bibliographical information about women artists of this period is common. However, it has been difficult to establish whether some of them were amateurs or artists we have lost trace of.

Yet, the postponement of the deadline might suggest a different interpretation of the high number of works submitted. An actual lack of interest might have followed the call and oblige the organizers to postpone the deadline in order to increase the number of participants. This interpretation might also explain the high number of German artworks.³⁷⁸ The artistic section of the Lyceum in Berlin was part of the organizing committee in Germany,³⁷⁹ as were the Lyceum branches of all the countries which participated to the exhibition, such as the Lyceum in Amsterdam, London, Bruxelles, Stockholm and one of the branches in Switzerland. Furthermore, Germany participated also with two of its major artistic women's organizations, Gedok and Künstlerinnenverein in Munich. In 1933 Italy and Germany had already set off on the path that would take them to sign the Pact of Steel.³⁸⁰ Moreover, as De Grazia has underlined, both regimes had built a cult of motherhood in order to increase the national state power.³⁸¹ Hence, the high participation of German artists might be explained also as a result of the good relationships between the two countries and the will to strengthen them.

If it is difficult to make some assumptions on the reasons why the response was so high, it is safe to say that *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna* received a higher response in comparison to other competitions announced by the Lyceum. An interesting example is the call, open only to women, organized in 1920 by the *Almanacco della donna italiana* in collaboration with the Lyceum for its front page. The choice of the subject was free and the works had to be sent to the artistic section of the Lyceum that, in

³⁷⁸ The catalogue lists 155 Italian artworks and 201 German ones, which therefore outnumbered the Italian ones.

³⁷⁹ A hand written document defines the Lyceum branches abroad, Gedok and Künstlerinnenverein foreign organizers. In light of this, the exhibition could be seen more as a common endeavor rather than an initiative of the Lyceum in Florence alone. "Comitato organizzatore" IV. SEZIONE ARTE, 4.1. Singole Mostre, 2. Concorso Internazionale d'Arte "Maria Vergine vista dalla donna". 1933 giugno- 1934 gennaio 21, Archivio del Lyceum di Firenze, Firenze, Italy.

³⁸⁰ Hans Woller, "I rapporti tra Mussolini e Hitler prima del 1933. Politica del potere o affinità ideologica?" *Italia contemporanea*, no. 196 (September 1994): 491-508.

³⁸¹ De Grazia, *How fascism ruled women*, xi-xiii.

agreement with the direction of the almanac, chose a commission of artists in order to judge them.³⁸² On that occasion only five works were submitted, prompting Galileo Chini³⁸³ to condemn the poor participation of the Italian women artists.³⁸⁴

The way in which the organizers speak of possible solutions to overcome the organizational problems is interesting in order to understand the level of connections between the Lyceum and the regime. In a memo sent to Jolanda De Blasi Giachetti³⁸⁵ the person writing, that we can hypothesize was the president or vice-president of the art section, wrote that “if there was no other way out” they could “suggest to make the exhibition together with the syndicate in collaboration. Considering that the organization is finished and that from abroad about two hundred works reached Florence [...] it is not possible to withdraw without creating ---- an atmosphere of outrage around the Italian organizations. Adding that especially from Germany the organization has been successful ----- only thanks to sympathy for the Regime.” Moreover, the writer added that, considering the law according to which important international exhibitions were allowed only in Venice, it was necessary to underline that “ours - ----- is not a simple general exhibition of artworks but it is a *competition* of which the artworks are exhibited; there is the need, therefore, to insist on the fact that it is only a competition [...]”³⁸⁶

The syndicate mentioned in the document is the Syndicate of the artists, whose creation was one of the most important changes of the exhibition system during Fascism. Within the context of the approval of several laws and decrees in order to have absolute control of exhibitions and public events in the country, its creation gave the regime a bigger control of national and local artistic organizations as part of a more general process of reorganization of the network of Italian exhibitions. Since the

³⁸² “Concorso a premi dell’Almanacco della Donna Italiana,” *Almanacco della donna Italiana*, 1920.

³⁸³ Galileo Chini (Firenze, 1873-1956). Painter, decorator and ceramist.

³⁸⁴ Galileo Chini, “Relazione per il Concorso copertina dell’ “Almanacco della Donna Italiana” bandito dall’editore Bemporad,” *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 1921.

³⁸⁵ Jolanda De Blasi Giachetti (1888-1964). She was the president of the literature section of the Lyceum of Florence.

³⁸⁶ “Promemoria sul concorso esposizione Maria Vergine vista dalla donna. 30 Novembre 1933,” IV. SEZIONE ARTE, 4.1. Singole Mostre, 2. Concorso Internazionale d’Arte “Maria Vergine vista dalla donna”. 1933 giugno- 1934 gennaio 21, Archivio del Lyceum di Firenze, Firenze, Italy.

end of the 1920s, the exhibitions organized by the syndicate at the level of provinces, but also minor events, became the first step for artists willing to participate to major artistic exhibitions. A law from 1929 attributed to the Syndicate of the artists powers over the organization of the exhibitions. The only cities where these dispositions were not valid were Venice and Rome.³⁸⁷ For this reason, by underlining the fact that *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna* was not an exhibition, but a competition, the Lyceum's members probably hoped to overcome some of this new system's restrictions. The possible collaboration with the syndicate appears in the memo as the last possible solution in case the realization of the exhibition would be seriously threatened. Yet, another document testifies of how the Lyceum asked the syndicate to support the initiative by inviting many artists to respond to the call.³⁸⁸ Unfortunately, this document is not dated. Therefore, it would be difficult to establish whether it was written before or after the need to change the location and whether the syndicate's support was asked from the beginning or as an extrema ratio to overcome the organizational problems. The reference in the document to the high participation of Germany as a consequence of the sympathy towards the regime, instead, seems a blatant way to please the Italian authorities and facilitate the granting of another space to organize the exhibition.

The Lyceum had evident contacts with the Fascist regime, whose representatives often participated to the association's initiatives. According to Sandiford, the Lyceum never took a stand against the regime, but neither did it align with its politics, at least until the acceptance of the racial laws.³⁸⁹ She assumes the coexistence, within the club, of dissident and aligned members, like the president of the literature section De Blasi.³⁹⁰ The Lyceum kept undoubtedly an ambiguous behaviour, tending towards the

³⁸⁷ Daniela De Angelis, "Il Sindacato Belle Arti," in *Arte e Stato. Le Esposizioni sindacali nelle Tre Venezie (1927 - 1944)*, eds. Enrico Crispolti, Daniela De Angelis and Maria Masau Dan (Milano: Skira, 1997), 23.

³⁸⁸ Correspondence from Helga Elmquist Cau to the president of the Syndicate of the Artists, IV. SEZIONE ARTE, 4.1. Singole Mostre, 2. Concorso Internazionale d'Arte "Maria Vergine vista dalla donna". 1933 giugno- 1934 gennaio 21, Archivio del Lyceum di Firenze, Firenze, Italy.

³⁸⁹ Jewish members were expelled in 1939 and readmitted only in 1944.

³⁹⁰ Sandiford, "Profilo storico del Lyceum Club di Firenze fra cultura e impegno civile, internazionalismo e nazionalismi," in *Lyceum club internazionale di Firenze 1908-2008*, ed. Mirka Sandiford, 65-67.

support of the regime. This could have not been different in the political and social climate of the period, though. As De Grazia underlined, “ostentatious servility or keeping a very low profile” were a necessary compromise to survive longer under the dictatorship.³⁹¹ By keeping this behaviour, the Lyceum managed to survive throughout the whole Fascist period and the Second World War.

Nevertheless, if the relationships with the regime cannot be denied, the documents related to the exhibition are useful in order to better clarify the position of the Lyceum, as they show at least a two-fold behaviour on its part. On one side, it emerges an attempt to resist the control of the Fascist syndicate and to keep at least a partial independence from the Fascist institutional framework. On the other side, the request of support to the syndicate seems to suggest the opposite interpretation.³⁹² It is important to keep in mind this ambiguity when looking at the artworks featured by *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna*.

3.4.2 A women’s interpretation?

The art produced during the regime carried the stigma of the influence of Fascism long after the end of the Second World War. Only in 1967 the exhibition *Arte moderna in Italia 1915-1935* used, for the first time, a historical perspective to interpret the difficult and controversial moment of the Italian art during the

³⁹¹ De Grazia, *How fascism ruled women*, 241.

³⁹² In 1925 the Fascist regime founded the *Corporazione nazionale fascista delle professioni intellettuali* (Fascist national Corporation of intellectual professions), which was recognized as an independent corporation under the name of *Confederazione nazionale dei sindacati fascisti dei professionisti e degli artisti* (National Confederation of fascist syndicates of professionals and artists) in 1928. After the institution of the Corporations in 1934, it became the *Corporazione delle professioni e delle arti* (Corporation of professions and arts), whose fourth section was dedicated to artistic professions. On the role and functions of this syndicate see Enrico Crispolti, “Una rilettura non inopportuna,” in *Arte e Stato. Le Esposizioni sindacali nelle Tre Venezie (1927 – 1944)*, eds. Enrico Crispolti, Daniela De Angelis and Maria Masau Dan (Milano: Skira, 1997), 13 – 20; Daniela De Angelis, “Il sindacato Belle Arti,” in *Ibid.*, 21-30; Pia Vivarelli, “La politica delle arti figurative negli anni del Premio Bergamo;” Marla Susan Stone, “The State as Patron: Making Official Culture in Fascist Italy,” in *Fascist Visions. Art and Ideology in France and Italy*, eds. Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 205-238; Salvagnini, *Il sistema delle arti in Italia (1919-1943)*, 13-25.

Fascist period. During that exhibition, Ragghianti wanted to demonstrate that, beyond ideological pressures and artists' individual choices, the quality of the artworks at the time was high and had to be considered the only yardstick to evaluate them.³⁹³ Reading the artworks on show, it is necessary to keep in mind this historical perspective.

As the reproductions in the papers are the main vehicles through which we have the possibility to know some of the artworks featured in *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna*, I will use one of these reviews as a starting point of my own analysis. Maria Luisa Gengaro,³⁹⁴ who reviewed the exhibition for the *Almanacco della donna italiana*, focuses on three artworks, *Mater Salvatoris* by Sofia Chiostrì (fig. 68), the triptych *Nella Casetta di Nazareth, La vergine Maria e Contemplazione* by Gilda Nagni (fig. 69) and *Madonna aspettante* by Antonietta Curadossi Arrighetti (fig. 70). Gengaro considers these artists representative of the three prevailing interpretations of the subject at the exhibition: the extreme realism of Antonietta Curadossi Arrighetti, the primitivism of Gilda Nagni and the attempt of Sofia Chiostrì to balance these two tendencies, but with a composition that tended more towards a religious interpretation rather than an artistic one. Gengaro considered this last artwork superior to the others.³⁹⁵

Sofia Chiostrì was a very prolific illustrator, decorator and painter.³⁹⁶ Her painting *Mater Salvatoris* won the competition's first prize and was one of the most reproduced in the newspapers.³⁹⁷ It shows the Virgin holding an already grown up Jesus and they

³⁹³ Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, introduction to *Arte moderna in Italia 1915-1935* (Firenze: Zincografica, 1967). Exhibition catalogue. I-X

³⁹⁴ Maria Luisa Gengaro (Milano 1907 – 1985). She was an art historian specialized in figurative arts from Tuscany and Lombardy and taught at University Statale in Milan. A biographical profile is in Rachele Farina, ed., *Dizionario biografico delle donne lombarde, 568 – 1968* (Milano: Baldini & Castoldi, 1995), 512-513.

³⁹⁵ Maria Luisa Gengaro, "Panorama artistico del 1934," *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 1935, 97-120.

³⁹⁶ Paola Pallottino, *Caste dive nella vampa stridente. Sessanta illustratrici in Italia dalla fine dell'Ottocento agli anni Quaranta* (Bologna: Kritik, 1982), 26.

³⁹⁷ Prizes were assigned on the basis of a survey distributed to the visitors. They were asked to reply to three questions: which Madonna would deserve the prize from a purely artistic point of view? which Madonna is closer to the period? which Madonna would inspire you to pray? The second and third prizes were assigned respectively to Lilly Ketteler Von Frisching's *Madonna* and to Mara Kraly's *Pietà*. Minor prizes were assigned to Elisabeth Chaplin, Kathe Muentzer-Neumann, Maria Tersilia Prolo, Felicia Desclabissac, Ludmilla Pongraz, Wiktorya Gorynska, Anita Blum, Marina Battigelli, Clelia Bertetti, Ida Schwetzel-Lehmann and Wera Burchardt.

both seem aware of the future. Indeed, the young son is as old as Jesus could have been when found in the temple hearing the doctors and asking them questions, when the first premonition of the future crossed the Virgin's mind. In this case the treatment of the theme can be certainly seen as an example of the "holographic artistic prudery"³⁹⁸ that, according to Lucia Mannini, was inspired by the theme of the exhibition.³⁹⁹ Sofia Chiostrì gave another traditional interpretation of the subject also in the work that she presented later to the exhibition *Sogni di Madre* (fig. 71).

Other works reproduced in the press were Marina Battigelli's *Madonna* (fig. 72), Maria Fernanda Giachetti's *Mater purissima* (fig. 73), Laura Biagiotti Cappella's *Vergine Maria* (fig. 74), Maria Cau's *Madonnina di Barbaglia* (fig. 75), Eleonora de Nobili's *Madonna delle Rose* (fig. 76), Giola Gandini's *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (fig. 77), Isotta Manzoni-Zamfognini's *Madonna dell'aurora* (fig. 78), Maria Magni's *Maria Vergine* (fig. 79), Maria Tarsilia Prolo's *Madonna* (fig. 80). The sculptures reproduced were the statuette in glazed and coloured pottery *Madonna inginocchiata* by Clelia Bertetti (fig. 81), the high relief *Mater purissima* by Vittorina Sirotti (fig. 82) and *Madonna pregante* by Dina Cecilia Pastore (fig. 83). All these artworks treated the subject in a traditional way and did not show any attempt to change the conventions of the representation of maternity.

The only exception to this common impression, among the Italian artworks, is the large oil painting *Verbum caro factum est* by Antonietta Curadossi Arrighetti (fig. 70).⁴⁰⁰ She was a niece of Antonio Ciseri⁴⁰¹ and studied with Cesare Ciani.⁴⁰² She participated in important exhibitions between the 1920s and 1930s, including the *II* and *III Quadriennale di Roma* (Rome Quadriennale) in 1935 and 1939, in addition to all the exhibitions organized by the syndicate from 1928. In 1955 she also became the president of the art section of the Lyceum in Florence.⁴⁰³

³⁹⁸ Lucia Mannini, "NON SI DIREBBE TRATTARSI DI UNA DONNA". Artiste a Firenze tra le due guerre," in *Artiste: Firenze 1900-1950*, eds. Lucia Mannini and Chiara Toti (Firenze: Polistampa, 2018), 52.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ Antonietta Curadossi Arrighetti (Florence 1883 -).

⁴⁰¹ Antonio Ciseri (1821-1891). A Swiss Italian painter of religious subjects.

⁴⁰² A. Del Massa, "Donne che espongono," *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 1940, 212.

⁴⁰³ A. M. Comanducci, *Dizionario illustrato dei pittori, disegnatori e incisori italiani moderni e contemporanei* (Milano: L. Patuzzi, 1962); "Donne nel giornalismo e nelle arti. Scultrici e pittrici," *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 1941, 356.

Despite the scant information about the painter, a 1939 postcard written to Sibilla Aleramo by the artist reveals an interesting aspect. Despite not knowing her, as she wrote, the painter sent her wishes to Aleramo and defined herself one of her devoted admirers. She also mentioned two common friends, Raffaello Franchi and Rosetta Ricci – Crisolomini, with whom she often talked about Aleramo's art.⁴⁰⁴ This is not a minor detail in the understanding of the artist and her paintings. Sibilla Aleramo, one of the most known and radical feminist writers of the beginning of the century, published in 1906 *Una donna*,⁴⁰⁵ a cutting edge and deep reflection on womanhood and maternity based on her personal experience. Her autobiographical book was controversial and ground-breaking, since it gave voice for the first time to feelings and ideas that were usually considered unutterable. However, also later the writer remained a controversial figure and a supporter of women's freedom. The admiration that Curadossi Arrighetti expressed in the postcard suggests a sympathy for the ideas that Aleramo stood for.

The painting submitted to *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna, Verbum caro factum est*, is different from the other artworks in the exhibition.⁴⁰⁶ The Virgin is represented as a pregnant woman, dressed simply with a veil on her head, which is also surrounded by a halo. The figure, in profile, highlights the rounded womb. The representation of the pregnant Virgin and the title of the painting, which can be translated with *the word was made flesh*, seems to draw attention to the human nature of the Virgin. Differently from other representations of maternity, here Curadossi Arrighetti seems to emphasize the earthly nature of the Virgin, instead of her spiritual one. The representation of the pregnant Virgin was an uncommon iconography at the time and it had to be treated carefully to avoid criticism. From the reviews of the exhibition it emerges that also other artists chose the same representation, even if none of these artworks has survived.

⁴⁰⁴ Corrispondenza/700, Sezione cronologica 1939, Fondo Aleramo, Archivio Aleramo. Rome, Italy.

⁴⁰⁵ Sibilla Aleramo, *Una donna* (Torino; Roma: Società tipografico-editrice nazionale, 1906).

⁴⁰⁶ The development of secularized forms of the Madonna and Child in 18th and 19th century art is discussed by Carol Duncan, "Happy Mothers and Other New Ideas in Eighteenth Century French Art," in *Feminism and Art History*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary Garrard (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 201-219, and by Tamar Garb, "Renoir and the Natural Woman," *Oxford Art Journal* 8, no. 2 (1985): 5-15.

However, while some of them were considered too realistic, Curadossi Arrighetti's pregnant Virgin was still considered "graceful."⁴⁰⁷ In 1936 the artist also participated to the exhibition *Sogni di Madre* (fig. 84) and won a golden medal.⁴⁰⁸

The artist Tyra Kleen, one of the founding members of the Society of women artists, participated in the exhibition too. Her oil painting *Madonna and Jesusbarnet* (fig. 85) was on display within the Swedish section. The black and white reproduction of the painting does not make it possible to appreciate the painting's colours. Nevertheless, the artist herself described a detail of her artwork, the child's red puckered face and claimed her different treatment of the subject. As she emphasized, men artists usually painted Jesus not as a new born child but as a toddler.⁴⁰⁹ By underlining the different way in which men artists usually painted maternity, Kleen distanced herself from those previous representations and claimed that her attention to the reality of the representation was a consequence of being a woman, and an artist.

Despite these two attempts, however, a representation of maternity that did not deviate much from its traditional iconography seemed to prevail at the exhibition. With few exceptions, women did not challenge or transform prevailing canons of imagery and did not differ from accepted norms of representations. After all, as already mentioned, the prizes were attributed according to visitors' responses to three questions that did not have much to do with the realization of images from a specifically female point of view or for their originality. Nevertheless, the conclusion that the works presented did not challenge the traditional iconography of the Madonna, based on the artworks at my disposal, does not diminish the interest of the exhibition. The whole idea inspiring it, giving women artists the possibility to give their own version of a subject so often represented as maternity, is the most interesting and innovative aspect of the exhibition. In its ground breaking text *Ways of seeing*, Berger speaks of how the "ways of seeing" in the title imply a man looking at a woman. Men looked at women and women watched

⁴⁰⁷ P. Pio M. Paluzzi, "Maria Vergine vista dalla donna," *Il rosario*.

⁴⁰⁸ Comanducci, *Dizionario illustrato dei pittori, disegnatori e incisori italiani moderni e contemporanei*, 522.

⁴⁰⁹ "The Madonna in art as seen by women artists," *Florence and Tuscany*, December 16, 1933.

themselves being looked at.⁴¹⁰ Despite the actual outcomes and the artworks submitted, the call to create artworks that looked at the Madonna from a women's point of view seems to anticipate later reflections on the nature of the gender relationships inherent in the field of visibility. Yet, despite the declared openness, a doubt remains. Would really innovative works, radically questioning traditional representations of the Madonna, be accepted by the Lyceum, a place where a traditional consideration of women as mothers and wife still undeniably prevailed?

3.5 *La donna e il fantoccio*

Ida Salvagnini Bidoli,⁴¹¹ one of the founding members of the Society of women artists that exhibited during the *Mostra Nazionale di Belle Arti* at the Esposizione Internazionale del Sempione in Milan, painted an interesting image of maternity in 1930. *La donna e il fantoccio* (fig. 86) was included in the last individual exhibition of Ida Salvagnini Bidoli at the Camerata degli Artisti in 1931 and at her last exhibition with A.N.F.D.A.L. in 1936. The image clearly recalls the iconography of the *Pietà*, the representation of the Virgin Mary holding the crucified body of Christ on her lap. The painting, however, breaks with this traditional iconography. The body of Jesus is substituted by a black doll. The position of the arms of the puppet, disproportionately long in comparison to its body, shows the absence of life in the puppet: one arm falls out of the embrace in a pose that is very unnatural, while the woman holds the other against her body. The female figure seems to be twisting on the chair, as it is also shown by the folds of her dress. The body of the puppet follows the movement of the woman and its eyes, wide open, give to it a more human aspect.

⁴¹⁰ John Berger, *Ways of seeing* (London: Penguin, 2008), 41.

⁴¹¹ Born in Trieste, she moved with her family to Venice. Here she met the painter Giuseppe da Pozzo (1844-1919). Despite her husband emphasized that she was a self-taught artist, in Venice she used to paint en plein air amidst the city's canal with da Pozzo. She had solo exhibitions in Paris at the Galerie d'Art Décoratif in 1909 and at the Salon de l'Union Internationale des Beaux-Arts in 1910 and 1911. After the break of the war, in 1927 she had a solo exhibition in Rome at the gallery Fiamma, whose director was Guido Guida.

Dolls, and in particular black dolls, were not new in Bidoli's production. During the First World War, she stopped painting in order to dedicate herself to charitable works.⁴¹² At the same time, she also worked to the realization of dolls that she called FIFA (Fabbrica italiana di fantocci artistici) (Italian factory of artistic dolls), after the name of a factory that should have produced them.⁴¹³ In this way, she also gave work to some women who collaborated to the creation of the *fantocci*. Among the puppets realized in this period some were already black. She did not explain why and whether she was influenced by anything in particular. However, she mentioned that the first attempt resulted in the creation of a doll that seemed half Egyptian.⁴¹⁴

Dolls, a very common and traditional toy, acquired a particularly important meaning during the Fascist regime, which built a whole rhetoric around them. As Ercolano has noticed, Fascism, which shaped every aspect of society in order to support its project, placed playing in a context of ideological significance too.⁴¹⁵ Toys carried specific meanings and were strictly labelled according to gender categories. Dolls, in particular, were given a key role in the education of little girls that would become future mothers. In 1928 Elena Luce described their importance on the pages of *Rassegna Femminile Italiana*. Commenting on the ban that made dolls illegal in Russia, because of their capacity to keep alive the bourgeois idea of family and the love for maternity, Luce emphasized that dolls were needed by the Fascist state precisely for these same reasons. Mothers should teach their daughters how to play with them, in order to prepare girls to be good mothers in the future.⁴¹⁶ Artworks portraying children with dolls in that period can be seen against this background. The 1935 calendar of the *Almanacco della donna italiana* showed, for example, a reproduction of the painting *Baby e la sua pupa* by Gian Paola

⁴¹² As we have seen in the previous chapter, this was a destiny common to many women and artists.

⁴¹³ The factory was never realized for a lack of capitals.

⁴¹⁴ See Francesco Alberto Salvagnini, *L'arte di Ida Salvagnini Bidoli pittrice. Pensieri e Giudizi a cura di F. A. S.* (Roma 1937-XV: Edizioni Enzo Pinci), 46-49.

⁴¹⁵ Martina Ercolano, "I giocattoli dei figli della borghesia fascista. Uno spaccato sulla Napoli di inizio Novecento," *Rivista Italiana di Educazione Familiare*, no. 1 (2017): 201-219.

⁴¹⁶ Elena Luce, "La bambola ed il problema demografico," *Rassegna Femminile Italiana*, May 15, 1928, 8.

Modignani Litta (fig. 87).⁴¹⁷ Here the child is painted with her doll on the lap, in what seems to recall a representation of maternity. The doll in the painting is white, wears a dress and has long hair. It is a very traditional kind of doll, which would have been the perfect toy to teach a little girl to be a good mother.

The *fantoccio* painted by Bidoli in her work, by contrast, is very different and raises some questions. It certainly does not look like a toy anymore and is held by a grown up woman. How can the inclusion of this element into the painting be explained? What is its meaning? Considering the past of the artist, her involvement with the suffragist movement and her important participation in the 1906 exhibition in Milan within the women-only group, the temptation to interpret this image as an act of rupture is strong. One could read the black doll as an element subverting the traditional iconography of the *Pietà* and creating a parody of the Fascist most common representation of maternity. This explanation, however, presents some problems.

Reading this image as a critique to the common representation of women during the Fascist regime seems incompatible with the support that Bidoli received at the time. Even if not much is known about her commitment to the PNF, more elements reveal how the regime appreciated her art. Her painting *La signora dei tulipani* was bought by the Galleria d'Arte Moderna and *Trinità dei Monti* was acquired by the Museo Mussolini.⁴¹⁸ The Minister Balbino Giuliano inaugurated the last exhibition of the artist at the Camerata degli artisti, which received also the praise of the congressman Bodrero, Commissioner of the Confederation of the Artists.⁴¹⁹ Her 1929 painting *L'atteso* (fig. 88) was also likely bought by the government. Despite no information on its current location is available, the caption of the image in Salvagnini's book indicates the Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia in Rome.

La donna e il fantoccio seems to be better understood if contextualized within the period when it was created, characterized not only by pressures on women to become mothers, but also by a pervasive discourse around Italian

⁴¹⁷ A commemorative exhibition collecting twelve of her artworks was held during the 1937 exhibition *L'arte nella vita del bambino* organized by the A.N.F.D.A.L.

⁴¹⁸ Salvagnini, *L'arte di Ida Salvagnini Bidoli pittrice*, 65. The Museo Mussolini opened in 1925.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.* 65; 76.

colonialism and imperialism. Since the very beginning, Fascism considered colonialism a fundamental element of a politics of power, in particular aimed at creating new settlements. Imperialism was considered as the basis of the life of any nation that wanted to expand economically and spiritually.⁴²⁰ The colonial expansion was, nevertheless, presented to the Italian population not only as a way to create new settlements and gain control over new resources, but also as a civilising mission.⁴²¹ The painting, therefore, might also be the proof of the success of the Fascist propaganda, praising the civilizing mission of Italian colonialism in Africa.

Another painting might, nevertheless, help to shed light on the work of the artist. In 1933 Bidoli painted another maternity, *La neonata* (fig. 89). The maternity represented in this painting seems to convey a sense of disquiet. The eyes of the woman, maybe the mother even if the title does not say so, are closed or looking downwards. The little girl, despite being a newborn child, seems to be already standing. There is not much contact between the two figures and the face of the little girl reminds a grotesque mask. Also in this case, therefore, Ida Salvagnini Bidoli creates an image of maternity that does not fit with the traditional representation of maternity nor with the Fascist model of mother. Thus, also in light of this second painting and despite the connections that the artist might have had with the regime, probably difficult to avoid as an artist at the time, I argue that *La donna e il fantoccio* was a radical break of the conventions of the representation of maternity, not only in the context of the Fascist period, but more in general in the tradition of representation of maternity. Thus, after the exhibition in Milan in 1906, this painting confirmed Ida Salvagnini Bidoli's capacity to question the traditional role of women in society and their representations.

⁴²⁰ Enzo Collotti, *Fascismo e politica di potenza. Politica estera 1922-1939* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 2000), 4.

⁴²¹ Angelo del Boca, *L'Africa nella coscienza degli italiani. Miti, memorie, errori, sconfitte* (Roma: Laterza, 1992).

3.6 The representation of maternity in the *Almanacco della Donna Italiana* and in the *Almanacco annuario della donna italiana*

According to Mondello, the *Almanacco della Donna Italiana* showed the discrepancy between the official image of women from their everyday reality more than other contemporary magazines, despite she claims that the little conformism to female models was a feature of many publications dedicated to women, not only those coming from opposition or clandestine groups, but common publications read by ordinary women as well.⁴²² Also De Berti and Mosconi claimed that tensions between female models imposed by the propaganda and those circulated by the press emerged in many publications, such as *Eva, Lei, Grazia* and *Gioia*. They underlined how all of them proposed the Fascist female model only apparently, while actually granting some space to voices at odds with this model. According to them, the survival of opinions that did not completely align with the Fascist regime showed how complex the definition of consensus was.⁴²³

An initial mixture of agreement and disagreement with Fascism was a feature of the *Almanacco della Donna Italiana* too. At the beginning of its publication the almanac was marked by a coexistence of independent and free perspectives next to others more aligned with the Fascist propaganda and politics. From a strictly editorial point of view, the history of the almanac can be subdivided into three phases: 1920-1935, 1936-1938, 1939-1943.⁴²⁴

⁴²² Elisabetta Mondello, *La nuova italiana. La donna nella stampa e nella cultura del ventennio* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1987), 10; 14. For more information on the discrepancy between the official image of women and their everyday life see Stefano Bartolini, "Le donne sotto il fascismo," *Memoria*, no. 10 (1985): 125. On the *Almanacco della donna italiana* see Marisa Saracinelli and Nilde Totti, "L'*Almanacco della donna italiana*': dai movimenti femminili ai fasci (1920-1943)," in *La corporazione delle donne: ricerche e studi sui modelli femminili nel ventennio fascista*, ed. Marina Addis Saba (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1988), 73-126; Simonetta Soldani, Silvia Franchini and Monica Pacini, *Giornali di donne in Toscana: un catalogo, molte storie (1770-1945)* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2007).

⁴²³ Raffaele De Berti and Elena Mosconi, "Nuove forme editoriali per nuovi stili di vita," in *Libri, giornali, riviste a Milano: storia delle innovazioni nell'editoria milanese dall'Ottocento a oggi*, ed. Fausto Colombo (Milano: Abitare Segesta, 1998), 149.

⁴²⁴ During the first period the journal was directed by the wife of the editor Enrico Bemporad, Silvia, assisted by Giuseppe Fumagalli. The economic problems of the editor in 1935 lead to a change of direction. Gabriella Aruch Scaravaglio was mentioned as the new director from 1936. In 1939 the journal had a new editor, Marzocco, and a new director, Margherita Cattaneo.

However, this division does not completely reflect the complexity of the publication whose evolution was, up to a certain moment, independent from official changes of editor and directors. Looking at the themes, and at the way they were discussed, a different temporal breakdown seems to emerge. During the period 1920-1925 the almanac was still eclectic and characterized by the coexistence of different opinions. In 1925 Laura Casartelli Cabrini could still criticize Fascism and its intruding the Italian women's movement in the column *Rassegna del movimento femminile italiano*.⁴²⁵ Despite this caused her substitution with the more conformist Ester Lombardo, her critique was a courageous stance against Fascism. Between 1926 and 1935 the publication showed signs of a progressive adherence to Fascist propaganda, which affected the way women's activities were described. This, however, was different depending on the section. If the *Rassegna del movimento femminile italiano* was substituted in 1929 by the survey *I Fasci femminili*, the *Rassegna letteraria* retained a wider attention to women writers and their works. This interest would come to embrace also foreign writers in 1930s. Eventually, between 1936 and 1943, the almanac definitely abandoned any attempt to independence and strictly followed the regime's guidelines. The publication was then aligned with official positions and mostly abandoned the efforts to support women in the social and political sphere.⁴²⁶ The transformations of the almanac, visible not only in the different structure of the publication, but also in the topics chosen, in the way they were treated and in the choice of images that accompanied them, reflected the evolution of Fascism from its initial stage to the later totalitarian regime, but also the transformations that characterized the Fascist politics on women.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁵ Laura Casartelli Cabrini, "Rassegna del movimento femminile italiano," *Almanacco della donna Italiana*, 1925, 205-207.

⁴²⁶ For a more detailed analysis of these phases see Mondello, *La nuova italiana*, 159 – 196; Elisa Turrini, "'L'Almanacco della donna italiana': uno sguardo al femminile nel ventennio fascista," in *Storia e futuro. Rivista di storia e storiografia online*, no. 31 (March 2013). Available at [<http://storiaefuturo.eu/lalmanacco-della-donna-italiana-uno-sguardo-al-femminile-nel-ventennio-fascista/>] (accessed September 15, 2016).

⁴²⁷ The progressive conformism of the publication was an inevitable consequence of the restrictions applied to the press by the regime. Already in 1923 the Press office strictly controlled newspapers and periodicals. Its role became progressively more invasive and in 1937 it was redefined Ministry of the Popular Culture (Minculpop), with powers over different sectors and over all matters related to censorship.⁴²⁸ In the 1930s also women's press was hit by seizures and censorship. *Elle et lui*, for example, was prohibited in 1937

The freedom that journalists benefited from at the beginning of the publication is proved by an article from 1921. The director of the *Almanacco* commissioned to Margherita Ancona⁴²⁸ a piece about the women suffrage, specifying that it should have been a descriptive and not a polemic one, as the issue had been already solved in Italy.⁴²⁹ Ancona, who had a different opinion, wrote about the need for the Italian suffragist movement and its associations to keep working. She claimed that the goal had not been reached yet and that Italian women's hopes, differently from other countries where women had obtained the vote during or soon after the First World War, had been frustrated.⁴³⁰ The article was accompanied by a reproduction of the suffragist poster *Men! Give women votes to protect the children* designed for the International Woman Suffrage Alliance by Willy Pogány in 1914 (fig. 90).⁴³¹ In the poster a mother, whose wrist still showed the chain that had been broken, carried her child and defended him from death. The caption showed the lower rates of infant deaths between 1906 and 1911 in Australia and New Zealand in comparison with their higher number in the United Kingdom. In the period considered Australian and New Zealand women could already vote, while English suffragettes were still busy with their campaign to obtain this right.⁴³² Thus, the poster established a causal relationship between infant deaths and women's right to vote. As we have mentioned in the first chapter, the idea that the vote should be granted to women in order to better care for their children was, indeed, shared within Italian suffragist circles as well.

The relative freedom that the almanac enjoyed in its first phase is evident also in the low number of images of maternity published. Similarly to *La Donna*, also *Almanacco* published many

and *Vita femminile* seized in 1938. See Philip V. Cannistraro, *La fabbrica del consenso. Fascismo e mass media* (Roma; Bari: Laterza, 1975); Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini il duce. II: Lo Stato totalitario. 1936-1940* (Torino: Einaudi, 1981), 181-187; Paolo Murialdi, *La stampa del regime fascista* (Bari: Laterza, 1980); Tarquini, *Storia della cultura fascista*, 160-163.

⁴²⁸ Margherita Ancona (1881-1966). President of the Associazione Nazionale Pro-suffragio.

⁴²⁹ There was a widespread perception that the right to vote was about to be granted.

⁴³⁰ M. Ancona, "Il voto alle donne," *Almanacco della donna Italiana*, 1921, 83-101.

⁴³¹ The poster is now at the Manuscripts and Archives Division of the New York Public Library. Available at <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e2-7815-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99> (accessed December 15, 2016).

⁴³² Elizabeth Crawford, *The women's suffrage movement: a reference guide, 1866-1928* (London: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2003).

black and white photographic portraits of personalities of the time: female writers, politicians and artists were scattered throughout the publication. Differently from *La Donna*, however, the *Almanacco* emphasized less their role as mothers. Despite maternity became a predominant theme from 1927,⁴³³ the only image representing one of these women with her child is the drawing of Eleonora Duse by Franz von Lenbach (fig. 91).⁴³⁴ Yet, this image was particularly meaningful, since it represented an artist who played a particular role in the feminism of the beginning of the century. As Liviana Gazzetta underlined, despite her moderate position about the women's suffrage, Eleonora Duse demonstrated to be aware of the problems that women had to face and translated this awareness into her acting. She played for the first time Nora in *A Doll's House*⁴³⁵ in 1891 in Milan and asked to maintain the original finale of the play, according to which the protagonist chooses to leave her children to safeguard her dignity.⁴³⁶ Nevertheless, despite the symbolic importance of the representation of Eleonora Duse with her child, maternity does not emerge as a prevalent interest of the almanac in its first phase.

After the change of editor in 1936, the periodical was radically transformed. The visual apparatus became more celebratory of the regime. Between 1937 and 1941 images of Mussolini, next to that of Augustus to underline the connection to the Roman Empire, of the King Vittorio Emanuele III and Queen Elena and of the Prince and Princess of Piemonte opened the almanac. In 1938 and 1939 the Princess of Piemonte was photographed with her children (fig. 92). In this period the influence of the Fascist regime increased and images of maternity were used more openly as propaganda. In the 1937 issue, whose cover was a nativity (fig. 93), some letters of Niccolò Giani, a leading figure of the Fascist regime,⁴³⁷ were accompanied by four photos of his child, Romolo Vittorio Africano Giani, and his mother (fig. 94). The letters describe the moment in which Giani

⁴³³ Turrini, "L'Almanacco della donna italiana'."

⁴³⁴ *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 1929.

⁴³⁵ *A Doll's House* is a play written by Henrik Ibsen in 1879. It told the story of a married woman, Nora, who struggled with the restrictions imposed on her by law and social costumes. The play, which aroused a great sensation at the time of its publication, ended with the female protagonist leaving her family, and children, to finally find her independence and personal fulfillment.

⁴³⁶ Gazzetta, *Orizzonti Nuovi*, 84.

⁴³⁷ Niccolò Giani (1909-1941).

received the telegram announcing the birth of his son and celebrate the Italian attempt to build an Empire in Africa.⁴³⁸

The low number of images of maternity realized by women, at least in the first phase of publication of the *Almanacco*, does not mean that the almanac was less interested in the representation of women and, in particular, in the representation of women by other women. On the contrary, the next paragraph will show how the almanac tried to propose a representation of women, not necessarily mothers, which questioned the pervasive control of Fascism over images of women.

3.6.1 The woman as seen by contemporary women artists

Following an examination of all the issues of the almanac, the years 1934, 1935 and 1936, corresponding to the change of editor, and especially the calendar published in those issues, emerge as the most interesting ones. The calendar, a section typical of this kind of publications, opened all the years of the almanac until 1943, when it was cancelled together with the word *Almanacco* from the title of the publication. For many years, this section was dedicated to the most diverse topics. The selection of images was very varied and included contemporary and old fashion, reproductions of antique printings, artworks representing children and reproductions of tapestries, just to name a few. The choice of images did not show any particular focus in showing art produced by women and, when an interest in women's representations was demonstrated, the focus was on men painters painting women. In 1920 the first number of the *Almanacco della donna Italiana* associated to the calendar 12 artworks, or details of artworks, showing "typologies of female beauties." In 1926, the images associated with the calendar were women's portraits by Italian painters from the first half of the XIX century. In 1928 the focus was more contemporary and the images chosen were 12 portraits of Italian noble women by contemporary painters. All these calendars used women's portraits painted by male artists.

⁴³⁸ Niccolò Giani, "1280 Battaglione CC. NN.," *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 1937, 33-36.

A significant change happened suddenly in 1934, when the *Almanacco della donna italiana* opened with a calendar called *La donna vista dalle artiste di oggi* (The woman as seen by contemporary women artists). Different artworks were arranged in an ideal gallery that showed how contemporary women artists chose to represent women. The result was a collection of portraits of women at different stages of their lives: representations of young girls, like *Ritratto di fanciulla* by Resita Cucchiari, and old women, like *Vecchia signora* by Paola Consolo; artists, like *Ritratto della pittrice Adriana Pinkerle* by Camilla Benaim and Milena Barilli's *Autoritratto*, but also peasants, like the fantoccio by Maria Signorelli reproducing a peasant in a typical dress with the head covered by a kerchief and carrying a bucket. Two paintings from the exhibition *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna* at the Lyceum in Florence were reproduced: *Umile ed alta più che creatura* by Adriana Filippi (fig. 95) and *Mater Salvatoris* by Sofia Chiostrì (fig. 68). *La madre terra* by Elisabeth Chaplin closed this ideal gallery (fig. 96-97).⁴³⁹

Out of twelve images, two represented women artists and other two represented the idealized maternity of the Virgin Mary. Art and maternity, thus, became two fundamental aspects of women's lives in this ideal gallery. Also, the choice to conclude the sequence of images with the painting *La madre terra*⁴⁴⁰ by Elisabeth Chaplin deserves particular attention. The artwork, presented at the Salon in Paris in 1930, should have been the pendant to the *Réveil* from 1925.⁴⁴¹ It showed a woman, exhausted after giving birth, who was surrounded by her hungry children while she breastfed one of them. The painting follows the iconography of the Great Mother. The artist represented the close bond with the earth by placing the woman and her children inside the earth, while the external landscape was covered in snow. Her connection with the earth was further emphasized by the sitting position, typical of the representation of the Great Mother. As Neumann described, the seated Great Mother was also the

⁴³⁹ The other artworks reproduced were *La treccina* by Egle Pozzi, *Buranella* by Virette Barbieri, *Ragazza che canta* by Resita Cucchiari, *Donna mediterranea* by Claudia Formica.

⁴⁴⁰ The original title was *Le sommeil de la terre*.

⁴⁴¹ Giuliano Serafini, *Elisabeth Chaplin. Tre stagioni di simboli* (Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa, Firenze, 1994), 206.

original form of the “enthroned Goddess.”⁴⁴² Her motherliness resided not only in the womb, but also in the seated woman’s broad expanse of thigh, on which the new-born child seated.⁴⁴³ Chaplin’s painting also seemed to perfectly visualize that “sensuous form that shows the capacity to fill the universe and the earth with fertility and abundance” that Neumann indicated as another feature of the representation of the Great Mother.⁴⁴⁴

During 1933 Elizabeth Chaplin participated in three women-only exhibitions, including *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna*. However, according to Serafini, despite the success that she obtained, she did not appreciate to be considered simply a woman painter among women painters and she decided to avoid this kind of exhibitions.⁴⁴⁵ Why is then the reproduction of this artwork so important? The artist painted different images of maternity in her career, including the oil painting *Maria Vergine* (fig. 98), the artwork featured in *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna*. However, she did not show a specific interest in the feminist movement or, as Serafini claims, in women-only exhibitions. Yet, the choice to end the ideal gallery set up by the almanac to celebrate the different phases of the women’s lives and a specific women’s interpretation of them is telling.

The archetype of the Great Mother emerges in different cultural and historical contexts, starting with the first Stone Age little sculptures of the Great Mother as a goddess.⁴⁴⁶ Speaking of the first figures representing the Great mother, Neumann pointed out that, despite their evident relation to a dominance of the matriarchal, they did not prove a lesser power of the men over the contemporary women. The Great Mother Goddess could be worshipped within patriarchal societies as well.⁴⁴⁷ Adrienne Rich, instead, spoke of the Great Mother as a proof of a tradition of female power, as a precedent. “If female biology was ever once a source of power, it need not remain what it has since become: a

⁴⁴² Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An analysis of the archetype* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 98.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴⁴⁵ Giuliano Serafini, *Elisabeth Chaplin: tre stagioni di simboli* (Firenze: Polistampa, 1996), 229.

⁴⁴⁶ Massimiliano Gioni, *La grande madre: donne, maternità e potere nell'arte e nella cultura visive, 1900-2015* (Milano: Skira: Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, 2015). Exhibition catalogue.16.

⁴⁴⁷ Neumann, *The Great mother*, 94.

root of powerlessness.”⁴⁴⁸ In a period in which women were reduced to their biological functions, the choice to include an image that celebrated the power of maternity was an important sign directed to women reading the almanac.

The representation of the Great mother was also put at the service of the Fascist ideology. *La Grande Madre* by Lea D’Avanzo (fig. 99), a sculpture that testified her preference for archaic forms,⁴⁴⁹ was bought for the Palace of the Province in Milan. In 1943 Guido Piovene defined the sculpture a representation of the solemn and holy aspects of maternity, which did not retain any typical feature of feminine art. Paradoxically, despite claiming that the sculpture successfully distanced itself from a work of feminine art, Piovene argued that D’Avanzo’s art originated from a “need of sublimated maternity.”⁴⁵⁰ Recently, Monica Grasso has noted that, despite the celebration of the maternity was a funding point of Fascist ideology, the expressive strength of this sculpture went beyond any propagandist trivialization.⁴⁵¹ Nevertheless, the values that the Fascist regime attached to it seemed to resurface when a photo of the sculpture appeared almost forty years later in the feminist paper *Quotidiano Donna* (fig. 100). The sculpture, a visual representation of the Fascist prolific mother, became the central image of a page reporting testimonies of traumatic experiences of maternity and deliveries. In this case, the juxtaposition of the sculpture with the stories in the articles made them even more dramatic and served the purpose to make a comparison between the Fascist cult of maternity and the 1970s imposition of maternity on women.⁴⁵²

The claim to representation constituted by the 1934 calendar was repeated the next year. The 1935 calendar reproduced twelve women’s artworks that had been exhibited during the previous year. With the exception of *Atleta in riposo* by Lea D’Avanzo, the images created one more time a gallery of women portraits in different ages, including the self portrait of the

⁴⁴⁸ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: motherhood as experience and institution* (New York: Norton& company, 1986), 84.

⁴⁴⁹ Lea D’Avanzo (Marcolini Lea in D’Avanzo) (Padova, 1898 – Segrate (MI), 1975). Sculptor and painter. Farina, *Dizionario biografico delle donne lombarde*, 689 – 690.

⁴⁵⁰ Guido Piovene, *L’arte di Lea d’Avanzo* (Milano: Garzanti, 1943).

⁴⁵¹ Monica Grasso, “Donne e scultura (1920-1943): temi, tecniche, tipologie,” in *L’arte delle donne nell’Italia del Novecento*, eds. Iamurri and Spinazze, 147.

⁴⁵² *Quotidiano Donna*, October 7, 1978, 6.

artist Gina Ventura. This time the representation of maternity appeared with a drawing by Marina Battigelli, *Istinto materno* (fig. 101).

The construction of these ideal galleries was interrupted by the change in the management of the almanac in 1936. The economic problems of the publisher Bemporad and the substitution of the director brought about a radical transformation of the character and graphic presentation of the publication. The outgoing director, Silvia Bemporad, took away with her the idea and reintroduced it in her new publication, the *Almanacco Annuario della donna italiana*, later *Donne Italiane. Almanacco Annuario*. This parallel almanac, published between 1936 and 1939, continued the work done by the *Almanacco della donna italiana*, at least at the beginning. It opened with a calendar presenting twelve women's artworks, including more maternities than ever: the works presented by Marisa Mori and Sofia Chiostri at the exhibition *Sogni di madre, Maternità* by Piera Funaro (fig. 102), *La madre* by Federica Aloisi De Larderel (fig. 103) and *Donna con Bambino* by Egle Giuntoli Marini (fig. 104).

The work presented by Marisa Mori⁴⁵³ at the exhibition *Sogni di Madre* (fig. 105) in Genova allows an interesting comparison with previous works by the same artist. A student and, later, assistant of Casorati in Turin, Mori's paintings showed his influence, in themes and formal choices, until she joined Futurism after moving to Florence in 1932. She was also a member of the Lyceum of Florence between the 1930s and 1950s.⁴⁵⁴ In 1939, after the racial laws, she stopped exhibiting with the futurists. She often referred to Fascism and to its politics of oppressive maternalism and imperialism. For example, Griffiths underlines the satirical implications of *Mammelle italiche al sole*, Mori's contribution to the 1932 book *Cucina Futurista*, a recipe for a dessert accompanied by a drawing.⁴⁵⁵ Griffith also gave a new interpretation of another work of Marisa Mori, the 1936 *L'ebbrezza fisica della maternità* (fig. 106). This work has been read as an

⁴⁵³ Marisa Mori, (1900-1985). *Marisa Mori: pittura, volo, futurismo* (Pontedera: Bandecchi e Vivaldi, 2011).

⁴⁵⁴ On the presence of the artist at the Lyceum see Chiara Toti, ed., *Artiste del Novecento al Lyceum. Marisa Mori negli anni del Lyceum* (Reggio Emilia, 2017). Exhibition catalogue. Firenze, Lyceum Club, April 6, 2017-April 12, 2017.

⁴⁵⁵ Jennifer Griffith, "Marisa Mori's Edible Futurist Breasts," *Gastronomica. The Journal of food and culture* 12, No. 4 (Winter 2012): 20-26.

expression of both the pain and the complex pleasure of the delivery as an exciting and, therefore, according to futurism, lyric and aesthetic experience.⁴⁵⁶ Jennifer Griffith, instead, read it as an image of violence, pain, mutilation and disintegration.⁴⁵⁷ The artwork featured in *Sogni di madre* represented a woman's head surrounded by heads of children that created a halo around her. In the background, it was possible to see what looked like examples of Fascist architecture. Underneath an arch, an army marched towards the foreground. Mori seemed to mock the idea of prolific mother, whose halo of children almost turned her into a Madonna, by also showing their future of soldiers of the Italian Empire.

The 1936 issue of the *Almanacco Annuario della donna italiana* was the last ideal gallery of women represented by women artists. Its last three issues did not continue this project. It is difficult to establish the reasons of this interruption. However, the control of the Fascist regime over press and society was quickly intensifying. Using the almanac to publish artworks by women and, as stated in 1934, to convey a purely women's point of view, had become probably too dangerous under the increasingly restrictive control of the regime.

Conclusion

My initial intentions approaching the research for this chapter was to find images connected to the feminist movement, or what was left of it, that would openly challenge the Fascist ideal of maternity. Yet, if the peculiar context of the period and the transformation of the women's organizations made it difficult to find some open signs of dissent, the period still reserved some interesting discoveries. The effort of the Fascist regime to build a completely new image of womanhood obliged women to rethink their position, not only in family, society and politics, but within the movement itself. The result was a mixture of belief in the

⁴⁵⁶ Lucia Re, "Mater-Materia. Il potere materno e l'avanguardia futurista," in *La grande madre*, ed. Massimiliano Gioni, 54.

⁴⁵⁷ Jennifer Griffith, "Marisa Mori's Edible Futurist Breasts," *Gastronomica. The Journal of food and culture* 12, No. 4 (Winter 2012): 20-26.

regime and compromise, where the borders were often blurred and difficult to spot.

Accepting this ambiguity as a feature of the period, some attempts to create spaces for the autonomous expression of women still seem to emerge in the 1930s. The 1933-1934 exhibition *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna* at the Lyceum of Florence called women artists to give their own interpretation of the theme of maternity. Regardless of the images produced, of the visibility that they might have had at the time and of their actual impact on visual culture and contemporary artistic discussions, *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna* represented an attempt to escape the strict control of the regime. The artists responded to a call for women's artworks on a theme that was heavily used by the regime and, therefore, interpreted by a male and patriarchal culture. It does not seem a coincidence that in almost the same years, 1934, 1935 and 1936, the same issue of self-representation was addressed in the section of the calendar of the *Almanacco della donna italiana* and *Almanacco annuario della donna italiana*, which published ideal galleries of women represented by women artists. The claims of the feminist movements have often been connected to the research of spaces of expression. In this light, I have considered also the participation of the only women group in the *Mostra Nazionale di Belle Arti of Milan* in 1906. However, the research of spaces of expression has found partial solutions in the publication of periodicals dedicated to and made by women. The choice of images published in the 1934, 1935 and 1936 calendars, in the *Almanacco della donna italiana* and in the *Almanacco annuario della donna italiana*, responded to the need to represent women's diversity, also reconnecting to the archetypical figure of goddess, instead of reducing women's representation to the only possible role of mother. Thus, both the exhibition *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna* and the three calendars of the *Almanacco della donna italiana* and of the *Almanacco annuario della donna italiana* responded to the same search for freedom of expression.

The chapter also looked at an image that more directly questioned the traditional representation of maternity: *La donna e il fantoccio* by Ida Salvagnini Bidoli. By looking at other works by the same artist and despite the connections that she might have had with the regime, I argued that *La donna e il fantoccio* was a radical break of the conventions of the representation of maternity

and that this image confirmed the attempts to question the traditional role of women in society and their representations started by Ida Salvagnini Bidoli with the foundation of the Society of women artists in 1906.

CHAPTER 4

4.1 Introduction

The end of World War Two opened a new phase for Italy. The Republic and its new Constitution, the economic miracle and the introduction of the TV are only some of the elements that must be taken into consideration when analyzing this period. All the changes that characterized Italian society after the war should be analyzed against the background represented by the complex and contradictory legacies of Fascism and Resistance. On one side, Fascist policies directed to women changed the way women lived their lives outside the family. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in that period women's first and only responsibility was procreation, seen as a biological function. By placing motherhood in the service of the country, the Fascist regime reshaped the public role of women. Next to this, a different form of public participation specific for women was created through their involvement with the new women's mass organizations described by De Grazia.⁴⁵⁸ On the other side, during the Second World War women were active within the resistance and they formed the GDD, *gruppi di difesa della donna* (groups for the defence of women).⁴⁵⁹ For a long time, however, the recognition of women's participation in the anti-Fascist resistance movement, despite leading to the vote, did not effect a real change in the position of women in post war society.

This chapter focuses on the years that followed World War Two, until the end of the 1960s. The year 1970 is used as a divide between this chapter and the last one, since it plays a symbolic role in the emergence of the new feminism, with the creation of the women-only groups *Rivolta femminile* in Rome and *Anabasi* in Milan. The first and second chapters discussed women's images and endeavors related to a very specific environment. The first

⁴⁵⁸ Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy, 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

⁴⁵⁹ AA. VV., *Donna o cosa: cronistoria dei movimenti femminili in Italia dal Risorgimento ad oggi* (Torino: Milvia, 1986), 150-3. On the *gruppi di difesa della donna* see Marina Addis Saba, *Partigiane. Tutte le donne della resistenza* (Milano: Mursia Editore, 1998), 40-50.

chapter explored the connections between artistic field and feminist movements and used these connections to analyze representations of maternity. It referred to the very specific context of the suffragist and emancipationist movements of the beginning of the century. In the second chapter, spaces of resistance, in the definition that this could have at the time, have been researched during the interwar period, even if, as we have seen, the space for women's initiative was drastically reduced. The new feminism, understood as a movement, did not emerge for more than one decade after the end of the war. Why is it useful, then, to look at the period following the Second World War? Despite avoiding a strictly chronological order and aspiration to completely cover the 20th century, this chapter is a necessary link to the last one. It focuses on two case studies, in the artistic and in the political field, in order to explore how women perceived and represented maternity at the time.

The changes in the situation of women in the Italian post war society did not keep up with the foundations that had been laid during the war. Thus, I begin by briefly describing these changes touching on the presence of women in politics, on the institution of women's suffrage and on the state of women's associations. Then, I look at the presence of women in the artistic world, focussing, in particular, on the work of Carla Accardi. Later, I analyse some posters published by UDI, *Unione Donne Italiane* (Italian Women's Association) until 1969. As we will see later, despite being a women-only association, UDI did not have the revolutionary charge of the new feminism. Thus, it is interesting to look at how they represented maternity before the emergence of the new feminism. Finally, I focus on an advertising campaign realized in 1969 for the firm PRÉNATAL, which I think encompasses some of the main issues that new feminists reacted to in the 1970s. The campaign was realized by the LBG group⁴⁶⁰ of Serge Libiszewski,⁴⁶¹ who created advertising campaigns for Italian

⁴⁶⁰ LBG group was made of Lucia Vecchia, Bruno Pippa and Giulio Consonno.

⁴⁶¹ Serge Libiszewski (1930-). He studied photography at the Kunstgewerbeschule, School of Arts and Crafts in Zurich and influenced Italian advertising and fashion photography between 1960s and 1980s. After moving to Milan in 1956, he became part of the advertising office of Rinascente. Next to this activity, he worked for major Italian brands and fashion magazines. See Alberto Bianda and Nicoletta Ossanna Cavadini, eds., *Serge Libiszewsky: Sergio Libis fotografo a Milano 1956-1995* (Mendrisio: Capelli, 2010). Exhibition catalogue. m.a.x. museo, November 28-January 20, 2010.

brands, such as, in addition to PRÉNATAL, Olivetti, Pirelli, Armani and Alfa Romeo, between the 1960s and 1980s. For this reason, the image here analysed can be considered a symbol of a certain way of representing women and maternity common shortly before the emergence of the new feminism and, thus, paves the way for the next chapter.

4.2 Women after World War II

4.2.1 Women in politics after the War

The post-war years were a foundational moment in which groundwork for later legislation concerning women was laid. In 1947 the parliament ratified the new Constitution that on article three guaranteed equal rights and social dignity regardless of sex, race, language, religion, political opinions, social and personal conditions. This new Constitution was an important point of reference also later, when legislation to expand women's rights had to be approved and discriminatory or unfair laws against women had to be questioned. Molly Tambor refers to this use of the Constitution to facilitate the improvement of legislation concerning women as "women's rights constitutionalism."⁴⁶²

Despite acknowledging the importance of these years for the development of a more equal legislation, Anna Rossi Doria talks about the retreatment of women from politics that characterized the first two decades after the war. A reason for this was, according to her, the disappointment of women for the lack of recognition of their participation in the Resistance.⁴⁶³ Indeed, despite the important role played by women during World War Two, this period of women's history remained undocumented and invisible for a very long time.⁴⁶⁴ This lack of acknowledgement

⁴⁶² Molly Tambor, "Prostitutes and Politicians: The Women's Rights Movement in the Legge Merlin Debate," in *When the War was Over. Women, War and Peace in Europe, 1940-1956*, eds. Claire Duchon and Irene Bandhauer-Schöffmann (London-New York: Leicester U.P., 2000), 132.

⁴⁶³ Anna Rossi Doria, "Italian Women Enter politics," in *When the War was Over*, eds. Duchon and Bandhauer-Schöffmann, 89-92.

⁴⁶⁴ The interest for the participation of women in the Resistance started only in the 1970s in the wake of the new feminism with, for example, Anna Maria Bruzzone and Rachele

left many women who had been partisans disappointed.⁴⁶⁵ Moreover, when women's contribution to the Resistance was acknowledged, it was described as apolitical, a purely emotional act with no political meaning that could better suit the supposed women's character. It is not a case that Anna Bravo describes the participation of women in the Second World War through the lenses of their alleged maternal attitude, as a sort of mass mothering. According to her interpretation, women's participation in the Resistance was a direct consequence of women's capacity to expand their care abilities beyond family. Bravo adds that, despite this mass mothering can be seen as the result of a prescribed role imposed on them, the necessity to open up to the world helped women to explore their identity and discover their centrality.⁴⁶⁶ Yet, this interpretation has its roots in stereotypes about maternal instinct and the notion that women's moral choices have more to do with sensibility than with sense. Anna Rossi Doria noticed that these same stereotypes were the underlying reasons for women's exclusion from politics, considered incompatible with the maternal and sentimental.⁴⁶⁷

Next to the removal of women's participation in the resistance, another element characterized the post war period. Despite the presence of many fundamental figures, such as Teresa Noce and Nilde Iotti, the number of women active in politics was very low and further decreased in the next decades. During the first legislation, between 1948 and 1953, the presence of women in the parliament amounted to 7% in the Chamber of Deputies and to 1,4% in the Senate of the Republic. These low numbers further decreased in the following years. The percentage of women in the Chamber of Deputies dropped to 3% in 1968.⁴⁶⁸ These numbers reflect, on the level of politics, what happened in society at large, where the position of women reverted to a pre-war condition.

Farina, *La Resistenza taciuta: Dodici vite di partigiane piemontesi* (Milano: La Pietra, 1976). In 1965 Liliana Cavani had already realized a documentary, *La donna nella Resistenza*, which was not much distributed.

⁴⁶⁵ Rolando Anni et al., *I gesti e i sentimenti: le donne nella Resistenza bresciana. Percorsi di lettura* (Brescia: Società editrice Vannini, 1995).

⁴⁶⁶ Anna Bravo, "Simboli del materno," in *Donne e uomini nelle guerre mondiali*, ed. Anna Bravo (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1991), 103-115.

⁴⁶⁷ Anna Rossi Doria, "Italian Women Enter politics," 91.

⁴⁶⁸ See Associazione openpolis, *TROVAL'INTRUSA. Le donne nelle istituzioni politiche europee e italiane*, no. 3, March 2016, (PDF). Available at http://minidossier.openpolis.it/2016/03/Trova_intrusa (accessed May 27, 2018).

Traditional behaviors and social customs did not change much and the return to normality resulted in the restoration of the strict separation of roles between men and women.⁴⁶⁹ The contradictions of the 1950s and 1960s society are described by Saraceno who speaks of the coexistence of, on one side, models of behavior that followed the principle of equality of men and women, and, on the other, an idea of normality based on strictly separated destinies.⁴⁷⁰ According to Piccone Stella, a consequence of this ambiguity was a generation of women that did not produce loud collective expressions, which will be a feature of the 1970s new feminism, but that experienced emancipation on a more personal level.⁴⁷¹

Yet, on the wave of a renewed interest in women's suffrage in many European countries after the war, also in Italy a cross-party group of women activists resumed the suffrage campaign. Overcoming their political differences to achieve their aims, UDI and two pre-Fascist feminist associations, *Alleanza femminile pro-suffragio* (Pro-suffrage Women's Alliance) and *Federazione Italiana Laureate e Diplomate Istituti Superiori* (FILDIS: Federation of Women Graduates), started a campaign to obtain the right to vote. Finally, Italian women voted for the first time on the June 2, 1946. The moment has been described by many contemporaries. The words of Anna Banti, for instance, convey the importance of the moment but also the emotion felt, which the writer recalled in difficult moments when she needed to cheer up.⁴⁷²

However, the grant of the voting right was not the moment of recognition that many women had been waiting for. It was given more as a reward for their activities during the war than as a right notwithstanding the participation in the anti-fascist Resistance movement. An achievement arrived after decades of fights, the women's right to vote was received in the indifference of the press, of the women partisans, for whom the right to vote

⁴⁶⁹ On this see Simonetta Ulivieri, ed., *Educazione e ruolo femminile: la condizione delle donne in Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi* (Scandicci: La Nuova Italia, 1992); Luisa Passerini "Il movimento delle donne," in *La cultura e i luoghi del '68*, eds. Aldo Agosti, Luisa Passerini and Nicola Tranfaglia (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1991), 366-380.

⁴⁷⁰ Chiara Saraceno, *Pluralità e mutamento. Riflessioni sull'identità femminile* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1987), 170.

⁴⁷¹ Simonetta Piccone Stella, "Crescere negli anni '50," *Memoria* no. 2 (1981): 15-32.

⁴⁷² Anna Banti, "Il 1946 di Anna Banti," *Mercurio* III, no. 27-28, November-December 1946, 174.

was almost obvious at that point, and of society more in general, where memories of past feminism were very weak.⁴⁷³

To sum up, despite the right to vote and the advanced Constitution, women's condition after the war did not radically change in Italy. This situation was common to other countries as well. The majority of European nations claimed to have achieved equal political rights between men and women by the end of the 1940s, but none had achieved equality in practice. This was evident, for instance, in the low number of women actively participating to politics and elected in governments and parliaments when proper elections were re-established.⁴⁷⁴

4.2.2 Women's associations after the war

As it happened during World War One, also during and after the Second World War women were involved in welfare work, which was political as well as philanthropic. Immediately after the war, women's networks of welfare work developed throughout the country, partly spontaneously and partly on the initiative of two major women's organizations, UDI and Centro italiano femminile (CIF) (Italian Women's Centre).⁴⁷⁵ Both created in 1944, these two organizations were related to two major Italian political parties. The first one was connected to Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party), while the latter to the Azione Cattolica (Catholic Action), with the aim of encouraging women's support in light of the imminent granting of the vote. Despite being set up on political grounds, Anna Rossi Doria underlines how both of them created some spaces of autonomy for women, which were mainly those of welfare work. This sphere had always been considered a prerogative of women, as men never considered it politically important, and the situation did not change after the war. However, women's attempts to give political meaning to welfare work could easily be undermined if this kind

⁴⁷³ Anna Rossi Doria, "Italian Women Enter politics," 94-96.

⁴⁷⁴ Duchén, Claire and Bandhauer-Schöffmann, introduction to *When the War was Over. Women, War and Peace in Europe, 1940-1956*, ed. Claire Duchén and Irene Bandhauer-Schöffmann, 1-11.

⁴⁷⁵ Fiamma Lussana, *Il movimento femminista in Italia. Esperienze, storie, memorie* (Carrocci: Roma, 2012).

of activity was viewed simply as part of a traditionally feminine sphere of action. Their political involvement was perhaps clearer in their participation in local government and food rationing. These experiences were, however, short-lived, due to growing conflicts between CIF and UDI and women gradually returned within the domestic walls.⁴⁷⁶

If new feminism, as a political movement, emerged only between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, some of its ideas started to circulate earlier. Two fundamental works that women had access to in the second postwar period were Simone de Beauvoir's *The second sex*,⁴⁷⁷ published in 1949 and translated in Italian in 1961, and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*,⁴⁷⁸ published in Italy in 1964 as *La mistica della femminilità*. Yet, the movement that emerged at the beginning of the 1970s was radically different from, for example, UDI. The latter's positions were totally irreconcilable with those of the new feminism.⁴⁷⁹

4.2.3 Women in the artistic field

In the introduction to *Il complesso di Michelangelo. Ricerca sul contributo dato dalla donna all'arte italiana del novecento*, Cesare Vivaldi claims that years of Fascist politics against women and feminism had a visible effect on the post war artistic panorama, characterized, according to him, by a lack of women artists. Yet, he mentions some of them, such as Carla Accardi in Forma 1, Carola Rama in the group of the abstract painters from Turin, Regina and Paola Levi Montalcini in MAC (Movimento d'Arte Concreta) and, within realism, Genni, Titina Maselli, Beverly Pepper and Sarai Sherman, just to name a few.⁴⁸⁰

The definition of feminist movement that is at the basis of this research makes approaching this period more problematic.

⁴⁷⁶ Anna Rossi Doria, "Italian Women Enter politics," 92-93.

⁴⁷⁷ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956).

⁴⁷⁸ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin Books, 1992).

⁴⁷⁹ Ida Dominijanni, ed., *La politica nelle riviste delle donne* (Parma: Biblioteca delle donne Mauretta Pelagatti, 1995), 20-21.

⁴⁸⁰ Cesare Vivaldi, introduction to *Il complesso di Michelangelo. Ricerca sul contributo dato dalla donna all'arte italiana del novecento*, by Simona Weller (La Nuova Foglio Editrice: Macerata, 1976), 16.

The active participation in the feminist movement, or in associations that promoted women's rights and activities, has been a requirement to consider images or artworks as a product of a visual culture which was a direct expression of that movement. This is not the case for the artist taken into consideration in this chapter, at least in relation to the time period here considered.

As mentioned in the last paragraph, feminism reemerged as a political movement only at the beginning of the 1970s. Thus, the selection of images that can be considered part of a visual culture related to the feminist movement is, as it has already been in some cases from the previous chapters, problematic. Speaking of the post war years, Lucia Re defined the generation of women born between the early to mid-1920s and the mid-1930s, who became active as artists, writers and critics after the war, feminist pathbreakers in their own way.⁴⁸¹ She considered them "de facto feminists but wary of the label [...] afraid of being perceived as women who identified only with other women and thus of being further marginalized."⁴⁸² Therefore, according to Re, a woman artist or writer did not need to identify with the term feminist or to be active within a feminist group for her work to have feminist implications and consequences. Drawing on a different definition of generation, based on shared experiences rather than common dates of birth, Maria Antonietta Trasforini did not speak of feminism in relation to the postwar period. In a way similar to Piccone Stella, she pointed at a sort of individual emancipation achieved through the arts as the main feature of the women artists of this period. An individuality that, according to Trasforini, made them different from both the group of women that came before them, who had been part of the Resistance, and the group that came afterwards, who took part in the new feminist movement.⁴⁸³

⁴⁸¹ Re includes in this group artists and art critics like Marisa Merz, Carla Accardi, Gabriella Benedini, Mirella Bentivoglio, Tomaso Binga (Bianca Menna), Dadamaino (Eduarda Maino), Giosetta Fioroni, Carla Lonzi, Lucia Marcucci, and Anna Oberto, as well as writers such as Alice Ceresa, Armanda Guiducci, Grazia Livi, Dacia Maraini, Rossana Rossanda, Amelia Rosselli, Giovanna Sandri, Goliarda Sapienza and Carla Vasio.

⁴⁸² Lucia Re, "The Mark on the Wall. Marisa Merz and a History of Women in Postwar Italy," in *Marisa Merz: the sky is a great space*, ed. Connie Butler (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum; Munich; London; New York: DelMonico Books-Prestel, 2017), 37-38.

⁴⁸³ Maria Antonietta Trasforini, "Decostruzioniste ante-litteram: Artiste in Italia negli anni Sessante e Settanta," in *L'arte delle donne nell'Italia del Novecento*, eds. Laura Iamurri and Sabrina Spinazzè (Roma: Maltemi, 2001), 181-199.

Yet, as Leccardi argued, also new feminism was not only made of its most evident expressions, but also of behaviors that every woman put into practice in her daily life, which became a significant space to be explored through the practice of consciousness raising. A culture of the everyday life turned daily life from a site of the banal and trivial and, at the same time, of oppression to a space for creativity and definition of identity from the end of the 1960s.⁴⁸⁴ However, in line with the approach of the whole thesis, I decided to focus on an artist, Carla Accardi,⁴⁸⁵ who was a central figure of post war Italian art and of the feminist movement. Indeed, together with Carla Lonzi and Elvira Banotti, she founded Rivolta femminile, whose *Manifesto* was published in 1970.⁴⁸⁶

The work of Carla Accardi is interesting in the context of this research because it seemed to foreshadow the revaluation of the mother-daughter relationship and the positive feminist reconfiguration of the maternal function and its symbolic value that will be theorized by, for example, Luisa Muraro and Adriana Cavarero in a later stage of the movement. As we will see in the next chapter, before redefining maternity as an exclusively female experience, to be lived in a political way, critically and consciously, feminism marginalized it. There was no discussion on this theme within the movement, at least in the first half of the 1970s.

In 1976 Carla Accardi's *Origine* (fig. 107) was exhibited at the Cooperativa Beato Angelico.⁴⁸⁷ A picture of her great-grandmother was placed close to the entrance of the gallery, while other pictures of her family were juxtaposed on long strips

⁴⁸⁴ Carmen Leccardi, "La reinvenzione della vita quotidiana," in *Il femminismo degli anni Settanta*, eds. Teresa Bertilotti and Anna Scattigno (Viella: Roma, 2005), 99-117.

⁴⁸⁵ Carla Accardi (Trapani, 1924-Roma, 2014). Originally from Sicily, in 1946 Accardi moved to Rome, where she joined the group *Forma 1*. The group, including Ugo Attardi, Piero Mino Guerrini, Achille Perilli, Pietro Consagra, Piero Dorazio, Antonio Sanfilippo and Giulio Turcato, published its manifesto in 1947. They refused any connection with Italian previous painting and the ideological use of art and turned to abstract painting.

⁴⁸⁶ Carla Accardi was also the only woman artist interviewed by Carla Lonzi in her path breaking text *Autoritratto* (1969). On her see also Laura Iamurri, "Una cosa ovvia. Carla Accardi, *Tenda*, 1965-1966," *L'uomo nero* 13, no. 13 (December 2016): 150-165.

⁴⁸⁷ The Cooperativa Beato Angelico, born in 1976, included, in addition to Carla Accardi, LeoNilde Carabba, Franca Chiabra, Anna Maria Colucci, Regina Della Noce, Nedda Guidi, Eva Menzio, Teresa Montemaggiore, Stephanie Oursler, Suzanne Santoro e Silvia Truppi. It was the first exhibition space managed only by women in Italy. However, not all the members were active feminists or members of groups of consciousness-raising.

of Sicofoil hanging from the walls. The choice to put the image of the great-grandmother at the entrance of the gallery suggests an interpretation of her family as a matriarchal one. Inherent to the concept of matriarchy is the idea of a general feminine origin, which Accardi applied to her personal life by using pictures of her family. In this way, she merged her individual story with a universal history whose origins she set in a feminine principle. Accardi explained that *Origine* was a reflection on the relationship mother-daughter, which she experienced in both roles. It did not want, however, to visually celebrate it, but, rather, be “a utopian achievement of liberation of these conflicts.”⁴⁸⁸ It seems to emerge here a critical perspective of the relationship between mother and daughter, which was still positively resolved.⁴⁸⁹ Accardi herself explained how the theme of maternity was at the core of *Origine*. However, the same subject seemed to emerge in its infancy already in some works from the 1960s.

Between 1965 and 1971 Carla Accardi worked on tridimensional environments. The first one, *Tenda* (1965-1966) (fig. 108) was followed by *Ambiente Arancio* (1966-1968) (fig. 109) and *Triplice Tenda* (1968-1971) (fig. 110). Scholars have situated these works in a formalist narrative involving the turn from painting to environments, happening and installations. However, Leslie Cozzi emphasized their ties with Accardi’s growing investment in feminist politics.⁴⁹⁰

Referring to her tents, Accardi said that they had a particular fascination for her, since they represented a different way of living, free and without the superstructures of civilization.⁴⁹¹ Speaking of this period, Anna Marie Sauzeau Boetti wrote: “this creative phase corresponds to a request of unity, the

⁴⁸⁸ Anne-Marie Sauzeau Boetti, “Le finestre senza casa,” *Data*, no. 27 (July-September 1977): 37.

⁴⁸⁹ In 2007 *Origine* was exhibited again. This time photos of Accardi’s mother were juxtaposed to pictures of the artist herself in order to stress the relationship between mother and daughter and suggest a matriarchal vision of individual and collective history. See Micola Brambilla, “Carla Accardi,” in Massimiliano Gioni (ed.), *La grande madre: Palazzo Reale, Milano: 26 agosto-15 novembre 2015* (Milano: Palazzo Reale; Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, 2015), 322.

⁴⁹⁰ Leslie Cozzi, “Spaces of self-consciousness: Carla Accardi’s environments and the rise of Italian feminism,” *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory* 21, no. 1 (2011): 67-88.

⁴⁹¹ Maurizio Vallarino, “Luminous marks,” *Art and Artists*, no. 75 (June 1972): 33. This passage is also quoted in Carla Accardi, *Carla Accardi* (Milan: Charta, 1995), 358.

refusal of fragmentation (the woman present as cultural emancipated but absent as different hypothesis on the world). The end of the 1960s represented for Carla a ferocious introspection, the retrieving of her own historical condition [...] Then she had the vision of the primordial experience of the female desire, the bright and pink labyrinth, the mother, the love preceding castration [...] the circular reality preceding the turning of the woman into a metaphor."⁴⁹² Thus, Boetti spoke of Accardi's refusal of the simple emancipation of women which did not translate into the foundation of a new society. On the contrary, her environments provided an analogue and reevaluation of female difference, blurring the distinction between interior and exterior and representing prototypes of the separatist spaces of the new feminism.⁴⁹³ The environments represented the possibility for women to build a new society free from social impositions.

Boetti also referred to a reality preceding the turning of the woman into a metaphor. Here she seemed to refer to Freud and his lesson on femininity, in which he tried to explain the process of becoming a woman. According to Freud, originally there is always a loving relationship mother-daughter, which turns into hostility and hate because of the castration complex and the resulting girl's resentment over her lack of a penis. Freud claimed that young girls blamed their mothers for this lack and never forgave them. The substitution of the object of the girl's love from mother to father is, according to Freudian psychoanalysis, a fundamental moment of becoming woman.⁴⁹⁴ Thus, the circular reality that, according to Sauzeau Boetti, Accardi was able to finally see is likely the relationship that connects every woman to her mother, her first love, before the intervention of patriarchy. The notion of circularity was used to explain the relationship mother-daughter also by Laura Grasso. She explained that the woman who becomes mother retraces the steps of her mother and, at the same time, identifies herself with the fetus and the newborn. Repetition of the mother and of herself are an essential component of the symbolism of maternity, which

⁴⁹² Anne Marie Boetti, "Carla Accardi," *Data*, n. 20 (March-April, 1976): 73.

⁴⁹³ Leslie Cozzi, "Spaces of self-consciousness: Carla Accardi's environments and the rise of Italian feminism," 68.

⁴⁹⁴ Sigmund Freud, *Introduzione alla psicoanalisi* (Torino: Boringhieri, 1972).

is also connected to the circularity of the feminine and the continuity, from woman to woman, which maternity represents.⁴⁹⁵

This notion of circularity emerged also in Accardi's work in the material used for her tents. After the initial paintings where signs were used in an almost calligraphic way, in the 1960s Accardi turned to use a new transparent plastic material that she painted with her signature wave motif. Sicofoil, used for the first time in her 1965 *Rotoli* and, later, in *Origine* as a support of the photos, was also used to build her tents. When left free to move, Sicofoil tends to roll up creating a kind of circular movement that seems to recall the circularity of the feminine and of the relationship mother-daughter.

4.3 The maternity in the posters of UDI

Between 1943 and 1944 the GDD were born at the initiative of some members of the Comitato di Liberazione nazionale (CLN). These were the premise of the foundation of UDI, which took place on September 12, 1944, even if the founding act of the organization was its First National Conference held in Florence in October 1945. In this paragraph I will focus on some posters published between UDI's foundation and 1969, with only one exception from 1974, in order to understand how the image of maternity was used in the context of this association.

Ilaria Tani grouped the sheer number of posters collected in the archive of UDI in four different categories: informative, celebratory and commemorative, electoral and those more generally aimed at mobilizing women. Tani noticed how even posters that used more images and symbols, like the mimosa on the occasion of the 8th March, mostly conveyed their messages through texts.⁴⁹⁶ Yet, despite the pervasive presence of the written word, an examination of the images used in the posters shows how the representation of maternity was common until 1956, in

⁴⁹⁵ Laura Grasso, "Madri e non madri: la circolarità del femminile," in *L'altra mamma*, eds. Angela Cattaneo and Silvana Pisa (Roma: Savelli, 1979), 101-110.

⁴⁹⁶ Ilaria Tani, "Oltre il grido e il silenzio. La parola nei manifesti dell'UDI," in *Donne Manifeste: l'UDI attraverso i suoi manifesti 1944-2004*, ed. Marisa Ombra (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2005), 23-29.

different contexts and for different kinds of events. A first example is a group of posters realized on the occasion of elections (fig. 111-114). The first one, in 1947, was illustrated by a photo of a mother with her child looking far, likely towards a brighter future (fig. 111). Next to it, women were urged to vote for their rights, the health of their family and the progress of their nation. However, the right to vote had just been obtained by women. Hence, the combination of these words and image easily recalled debates that had been going on at the beginning of the century and that supported the idea that women should be given the right to vote mainly as mothers, that is in order to be able to look after their children. Mothers with children also appeared on the celebratory posters for the International Women's Day (fig. 115-119). The 1950 (fig. 115) and 1954 (fig. 118) posters simply associated the image of a mother and child to the mimosa branch, despite the 1954 one spoke of the emancipation of women. In 1951 there was a more direct reference to women working in the fields and in factories, called to protect peace (fig. 116). In 1952 the celebration was the occasion to remind women again of their role of peace keepers (fig. 117). It was only in 1955 that a poster directly reconnected UDI's origins to the Resistance. It reproduced a photo of Ines Cervi, the widow of one of the brothers Cervi,⁴⁹⁷ with her daughter (fig. 119). In 1950 the image chosen to celebrate the friendship between U.R.S.S. and UDI was a Russian mother with her child (fig. 120). The relationship with U.R.S.S. was particularly strong during the Cold War years and, according to Gabrielli, it reduced the organization's autonomy and identity.⁴⁹⁸ Maternity was also used to remind women to fight against the atomic bomb. On this topic UDI launched a petition and collected three million signatures in 1950. On this occasion, a poster was illustrated with a woman holding a child surrounded by the ruins of a village (fig. 121).⁴⁹⁹ One year before, the image on the poster announcing the III Conference of UDI, held in Rome between October 14 and 16, 1949, represented a mother holding her child and marching against the backdrop of the Italian flag (fig. 122). The author of the

⁴⁹⁷ They were members of the Resistance and were killed by Fascists in 1943.

⁴⁹⁸ Patrizia Gabrielli, "Tra pragmatismo e progettualità," in *Donne Manifeste: l'UDI attraverso I suoi manifesti 1944-2004*, ed. Marisa Ombra, 15-22.

⁴⁹⁹ On the back of the poster *Prima che sia troppo tardi...firmiamo contro l'atomica*, there is the date 1953. However, the exact date, retrieved from the chronological inventory of the archive, is May 1, 1950.

poster, Ezio Rossi, was clearly inspired by Pellizza da Volpedo's *Il quarto stato* and hinted at UDI's commitment for democracy, peace, work and family. Indeed, the slogan of the conference was "For the future of our children, for freedom and progress, no to the war." In the same years UDI was also interested in the situation of women in the South of Italy, in particular farmworkers working off the books in the fields. It organized various initiatives to reawaken consciences. In two posters from 1952 the idea of progress of the South of Italy and of Sardinia was presented as a consequence of the improvement of children's life conditions. Hence, the photos on the posters showed a mother who carried her child on the shoulders and two women from Sardinia dressed traditionally, one of which holding a child (fig. 123-124). The word emancipation was associated with a photo of mother and child again in 1953 (fig. 125). The last poster using the photo of a mother with a child, before a long pause, called women to vote during the 1956 elections (fig. 126).⁵⁰⁰ The poster called women to support, again, not only women's rights, but also the progress of the nation and the protection of the family. The above-mentioned posters showed a mixture of familism and maternage that was characteristic of UDI's post war years and that was further proved by the repeated use of the term mother in the texts to call women to action.

From 1956 the image of maternity disappeared from UDI's posters for a decade. The importance of this year has been noticed by Patrizia Gabrielli, who sees it as a divide. Mobilizing women for peace had been more important in the organization's programs than emancipation, which seemed to resurface only from that moment.⁵⁰¹ This seems to reflect also in the choice of images for the posters. Deciding to avoid the representation of mothers and children on posters connected to the most diverse topics as one of the only possible images on which to leverage seems to prove the beginning of a different reflection within the organization. The image of maternity came back for the first time on the occasion of the 8th March 1967. The poster, realized by Battaglia-Galli, was a summary of the main laws about family, school and job protection, which UDI was asking the Parliament to approve (fig.

⁵⁰⁰ On the back of the poster there is the note "elections 1956," from which date and event have been assumed.

⁵⁰¹ Gabrielli, "Tra pragmatismo e progettualità," 15-22.

127). The satirical cartoons illustrating the poster recall those that soon after appeared on feminist publications. In 1969 *Maternità consapevole*, realized by DN1, for the first time openly questioned the rhetoric surrounding maternity that was still present in society (fig. 128). The poster represented a kind of sphinx born out of the fusion of the famous Capitoline wolf, symbol of the Roman Empire and of the foundation of Rome, with the head of a woman. A group of toddlers seemed to bother her: two of them were climbing into her hair and on her leg, while another one was hanging on her breast. Below, the acronym SPQR stood for Senza Più Questa Retorica, instead of the original Latin abbreviation for Senātus Populusque Rōmānus. During the Fascist regime, the members of the youth organization Opera Nazionale Balilla were called children of the wolf, in order to create a link between the legendary foundation of the city of Rome and the Fascist organization. Thus, the poster seems to acknowledge the persistence of a certain ideal of prolific mother by directly referring to the Fascist ideal of maternity.

To conclude this paragraph, I would like to refer to a poster that was realized by Lalla Fiori⁵⁰² in 1974 (fig. 129). It was created at the time when feminists and members of the Radical party were collecting signatures for the referendum to repeal the article of the Penal Code against abortion. Lalla Fiori modified Leonardo's *Annunciazione* in order to change the Virgin's facial expression and the position of her hand. During an interview the artist explained that with those changes she aimed at representing not a refusal, but rather the hope to choose independently.⁵⁰³ This explanation is interesting, since it seems to emphasize a softer approach to the issue of abortion, an issue on which the 1970s feminism will be divided. Lalla Fiori wanted to represent the right of self-determination over women's body, rather than a simple refusal. After years of celebration of maternity through images, these last ones showed how the critique of a certain idea of womanhood emerged also within UDI and, according to the date of *Maternità consapevole*, at an early stage. At the same time, the

⁵⁰² Laura Fiori (Lalla) (1949-). After the first contacts with some feminist collectives in Turin, she started to study at the Academy of Fine Arts in 1972 and became interested in politics. Then, she started a collaboration with the syndicates, by creating her first posters and comics. She became a member of the Intercategoriale donne Cgil Cisl Uil in 1975.

⁵⁰³ Nicoletta Giorda, ed., *Fare la differenza. L'esperienza dell'Intercategoriale donne di Torino 1975-1986* (Torino: Angolo Manzoni 2007), 91-94.

way in which posters often proposed images of maternity show that for a long period after the war the rhetoric used by UDI could think women only as mothers and called them to action mainly in that role, relying on their sense of protection of children. Thus, the organization approach was reminiscent of a certain maternalism of the beginning of the 20th century.⁵⁰⁴

4.4 Women between objectification and motherhood

To conclude this chapter, I would like to look at an image that summarizes common ideas about women during the two decades after World War Two, while, at the same time, representing a perfect bridge with the future developments of the new feminism in the 1970s. In 1969 the LBG group of Serge Libiszewski created an advertisement campaign for the firm PRÉNATAL. The picture shows a young woman holding a little girl, who has in turn a doll in her arms (fig. 130). When looking at the ad, the traditional Western representation of maternity immediately comes into play and suggests the viewer to read it as an image of mother and daughter. This interpretation is, however, too simplistic. The recognition of the two figures as mother and daughter, which seems its most straightforward reading, has to be paused for the moment.

The image's caption reads "Everything for the future mother and her child." Despite the child in the image being a girl, the caption used the Italian masculine noun for child, *bambino*, instead of the feminine one *bambina*, little girl. The use of masculine gender⁵⁰⁵ to refer to a mix of masculine and feminine is

⁵⁰⁴ After the emergence of new feminism, UDI was considered representative of a traditional politics of women, organized hierarchically, and of the relationship with the left. Despite being a women-only association, they were against the separatism and tried to create a continuity between emancipation and liberation. The conflictual relationship between UDI and the most radical sector of feminism found one of its main touchstones in the law 194, which feminists considered in terms of liberation, while UDI, and women within political parties, still considered within an institutional framework. See Ida Dominijanni, Roberta Tatafiore, eds., *La politica nella rivista delle donne* (Parma: Biblioteca delle donne Mauretta Pelagatti, 1995), 20-26.

⁵⁰⁵ The word gender has different meanings in different disciplines. It has acquired a new meaning after the publication of Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York; London: Routledge, 1990). However, it was originally used as a

usually defined generic masculine. Widespread in the Italian language, despite the absence of a grammatical rule, its use directly reproduces the imbalance between men and women that characterized, and characterize, Italian society.⁵⁰⁶ Linguistic gender, and languages in general, mirrors and, in turn, affects social and cultural stereotypes and the perception of identity.⁵⁰⁷ For this reason, a reflection over the use of language has been central in feminist thought as well.⁵⁰⁸ As Luce Irigaray has explained, language is not neutral. On the contrary, it is the consequence of a patriarchal cultural heritage considering men the only reference model. The point of view expressed by language is often a male's one.⁵⁰⁹ The bias of the use of generic masculine in the caption is even more striking in the PRÉNATAL's campaign. Instead of referring to a group of children, boys and girls, it points exclusively to the little girl in the image. The evident disconnection between text and image reinforces the idea that the choice to represent a *bambina*, despite the caption's message, was necessary to convey the idea of a natural and innate inclination of women to become mothers.

For the same reason, the little girl in the image holds a doll. As we have seen in the previous chapter, dolls carry an important message. During the Fascist period they played a fundamental role in shaping little girls' minds and in educating them to be good mothers. In addition to its educational purpose, however, the doll serves here also another scope. By symbolizing the little girl's future daughter who will, in turn, be a mother, it completes the ideal embodied chain of maternity that is the focus of the image. Woman, child and doll share the same destiny.

linguistic term indicating one of the ways languages categorize nouns and divide them into feminine, masculine and, in those languages that use it, neutral. It is in this sense that the term is used here.

⁵⁰⁶ The debate around the use of the generic masculine is still topical, in particular in relation to job's titles that are commonly used in their masculine declination, such as *avvocato* (male lawyer) instead of *avvocata* (female lawyer), *sindaco* (male major) instead of *sindaca* (female major), *ministro* (male minister) instead of *ministra* (female minister).

⁵⁰⁷ Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald, *How gender shapes the world* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). The recognition of the link between language and society is, however, not recent. De Saussure spoke about a social and individual use of language. See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Corso di linguistica generale* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1970).

⁵⁰⁸ In Italy see, for example, Alma Sabatini, *Il sessismo nella lingua italiana. Commissione Nazionale per la parità e le pari opportunità tra uomo e donna. Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri* (Roma: Libreria dello Stato, 1993).

⁵⁰⁹ Luce Irigaray, *Parlare non è mai neutro* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1991).

The caption not only fails to describe the sex of the child represented, speaking of a *bambino* instead of a *bambina*. It diverges from the image on a more general level, as it speaks of a *future mother* and her child. What does this refer to in the image? If it is related to the older woman, as might seem obvious, then the image should have represented a pregnant woman. If the older woman has to be considered the little girl's mother, the use of *future* is illogical. The only possible explanation is, then, that the use of *future* further reaffirms the perception that all the figures in the image, the older woman, the little girl and even the not yet born baby girl, symbolized by the doll, will be mothers.

In the picture there seems to be no connection or closeness between the woman and the little child. The two figures do not look at each other, but into the camera. Therefore, they do not seem to represent a personal and private mother-daughter relationship. The coldness of the image is increased by the presence of the doll which, like mother and daughter, does not wear any clothes. It is indeed possible to see the juncture between her arm and chest. Avoiding a more personal and private approach, the image seems to stand for a universal representation of inherited maternity as a destiny of every woman. Therefore, everything in the image, from the caption to its composition and main features, conveys what seems to be the main message of the ad: an idea of maternity considered not at the individual level but as a universal unavoidable destiny shared by all women and handed down from mother to daughter.

Nevertheless, the image also embodies a contradiction between two ways of seeing women at the time. The idealization of the woman as mother is mixed with its objectification, a common process in contemporary advertisement campaigns. Between the 1950s and 1960s advertisements, which had become part of people's everyday life and pushed them to identify with the proposed life style and models, represented women mainly in two ways: the *donna consumismo* (consumerism woman) and the *donna oggetto* (object woman). On one side women became the first representatives of the consumer society. During these years of reconstruction, also economic, women became the main users of commercial products. Portrayed as mothers and housewives, busy with activities perceived as female prerogative or trying to comply with beauty ideals, they advertised house appliances or

beauty products. On the other side, women's body was often exploited as sexual object. The sheer quantity of different images that populated advertisement campaigns could be reduced to these two basic messages.⁵¹⁰

These two stereotypes are represented and merged in Libiszewski's image. Both mother and child are naked, perhaps suggesting the viewer that they could find the clothes they need at one of the chain's shops, which sell clothing for pregnant women and children. Nevertheless, the way in which the older woman is represented does not only recall a maternal figure. The child covers almost completely her naked body, whose only arms and legs are visible. The composition of this image recalls another campaign that was circulated a few years later. In 1973 an ad for the Peroni beer showed an almost naked woman whose body was similarly covered by a glass (fig. 131). In this example the model, Jo Wynne, was much more erotically charged than the woman in Libiszewski's ad. Yet, also the appearance of the young woman in the PRÉNATAL's campaign, her hair and make-up, make the viewers doubt whether they are looking at the mother of the child or one of the object women that populated advertisement campaigns. In conclusion, Libiszewski's campaign merged two main stereotypes that characterized the Italian society in the post war period and that will be focus of feminist critique in the next decade.

Conclusion

During World War Two gender roles had been temporarily subverted. Nevertheless, the end of the war seemed to restore the traditional strict separation between men and

⁵¹⁰ Ministero per il turismo e lo spettacolo, Provincia di Roma, Ass.to Pubblica istruzione e cultura, Ass.ne culturale Buongiorno primavera, *100 anni di pubblicità al femminile, 1886-1986* (s.l., s.d., 1986). Exhibition catalogue. Museo del folklore e dei poeti romaneschi, Roma Piazza S. Egidio, December 11-30.

women. Despite the achievement of the vote, the situation for women did not drastically change. Women had been part of the Resistance, but with the effort to rebuild the country stereotypes representing women as mainly mothers and wives were restored, together with traditional behaviors and social customs. An examination of the posters of UDI, one of the first women's associations founded after the Second World War, has shown how the image of maternity was used to create a common shared background to have leverage. The image of mother and child was used to illustrate various typologies of posters until 1956, that is the period in which the interest in the emancipation was less strong. Then, it disappeared for some years and resurfaced, inspired by a new will to question women's role in society, at the end of the 1960s. The chapter also analyzed the work on maternity of Carla Accardi, a key figure of the new feminism, and showed how her treatment of maternity prefigured in some ways later developments of the new feminism. The chapter ended with the analysis of an image from an advertisement campaign created by the LBG group of Serge Libiszewski in 1969 for the firm PRÉNATAL, in order to uncover the main narrative underlining that image and lay the foundations for the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will explore the representation of maternity between the beginning of the 1970s and the first years of the 1980s. Without claiming to be exhaustive, the chapter will identify some of the many ways in which the theme has been represented in this decade in order to confront them with what has emerged from the previous chapters. Although the 1970s and early 1980s were a much more complex period with respect to the representations of maternity and would deserve further exploration, I nevertheless point out some directions to situate the earlier periods that I discussed in previous chapters and highlight continuities and discontinuities among them.

The year 1970 is a key date for the new-feminism.⁵¹¹ Carla Lonzi, Elvira Banotti and Carla Accardi founded one of Italy's first feminist groups and publishing houses, Rivolta Femminile, while another group, MLD (Movimento di Liberazione della Donna), was born within the Radical party. As we have seen in the previous chapters, despite the changes that had transformed Italian society since the fights for equality of the first emancipationist movement, the great expectations born after World War II had been defied and a traditional view of gender roles was still prevailing in the post-war period.⁵¹² The new feminist movement, however, proposed not only a review of the strict separation of gender roles, but a much more radical transformation of family and society. During the 1970s the movement went through different phases, until the beginning of the next decade, when it was difficult to speak of feminism as a homogeneous, even if complex, collective actor in the social and

⁵¹¹ It is difficult to establish an exact starting date of the new feminist movement, since also before 1970s there were many different experiences that anticipated subsequent developments. However, here I follow a periodization which considers the first feminist groups those born in the 1970s, after the diffusion of consciousness-raising. See Maria Linda Odorisio and Monica Turi, *Donna o cosa?: cronistoria dei movimenti femminili in Italia dal Risorgimento a oggi* (Torino: Milvia, 1986), 182.

⁵¹² For an overview of women's situation in post war period see Penelope Morris, ed., *Women in Italy, 1945-1960: an interdisciplinary study* (New York: Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

political sphere in both Milan and Rome.⁵¹³ For this reason Franca Bimbi speaks of post-movement to refer to this period.⁵¹⁴ Marta Seravalli, instead, speaks of “diffused feminism”⁵¹⁵ to describe the situation in Rome already at the end of the 1970s.

The periodization of the chapter is based on different considerations. One reason is that the publications investigated, *Effe* and *Quotidiano donna*, have been published until 1982. Another reason is that the debate on the topic of abortion, which had obvious links with the discourse around maternity, continued throughout the 1970s and the beginning of the next decade. Even though the Law 194⁵¹⁶ was issued in 1978, it was the subject of heated debate until its confirmation after the 1981 referendum. Moreover, I adopt the idea of the ‘long 1970s’ (1968-1983).⁵¹⁷ And finally, the first national conference that gathered representatives of the Italian feminist movement, aimed at reflecting upon the link between academia and activism, took place in Modena in 1982. Marina Addis Saba points out that this event was the moment in which the movement began to think about itself and its history,

⁵¹³ I refer to Milan and Rome as they were two nodal centres of development of the movement. Also, most of the material discussed in this chapter refers to either one or the other city.

⁵¹⁴ Franca Bimbi, foreword to *Dal movimento femminista al femminismo diffuso. Ricerca e documentazione nell'area lombarda*, eds. Anna Rita Calabrò and Laura Grasso (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1985), 9-15. Bimbi focuses in particular on the area of Lombardia. She argues that the periodization is very strict and it is easy to distinguish the feminist movement from the female movement and the “femminismo diffuso” (diffused feminism). In other cities this division was more blurred. Also, for a general introduction to the feminist movement in Milan see Libreria delle donne di Milano, *Non credere di avere dei diritti. La generazione della libertà femminile nell'idea e nelle vicende di un gruppo di donne* (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1987).

⁵¹⁵ Marta Seravalli, *Arte e femminismo a Roma negli anni Settanta* (Roma: Biblink, 2013), 22.

⁵¹⁶ After a long campaign to promote it, the Law 194, *Norme per la tutela sociale della maternità e sull'interruzione volontaria della gravidanza* (Regulations for the social protection of maternity and on voluntary termination of pregnancy), was issued on May 22, 1978. The law decriminalized and disciplined the modalities of access to abortion, which was previously considered a crime according to the Italian criminal code (articles 545 and following).

⁵¹⁷ This concept is generally used to define a period characterized by big transformations on an international level towards a post-industrial society. It has been used by Maude Bracke in order to indicate a significant phase in women's campaigning. See Maude Bracke, *Women and the Reinvention of the Political: Feminism in Italy, 1968-1983* (New York-London: Routledge, 2014), 5.

through a different perspective, in order to undermine a patriarchal, bourgeois and entirely masculine historiography.⁵¹⁸

After briefly sketching the new organization of the feminist movement and the relevance of the topic of maternity at its core, the chapter considers images representative of the strategies used by artists, feminist publications and collectives. The chapter first focuses on artworks. Then, the focus shifts to the representation of maternity in two feminist publications, *Effe* and *Quotidiano Donna*, and to feminist collectives. In particular, the interest lies in the collettivo madri, later Cooperativa Il taccuino d'oro, and the organization of the 1982 exhibition *Maria, Medea e le altre: I volti ambivalenti della madre*. What seems a neat separation in the structure between artistic and non-artistic production has been chosen only for the sake of analytic clarity; categories are much more blurred and continuously overlap throughout the chapter. Anne-Marie Sauzeau Boetti defined feminist art as an ideological and militant iconographic production including a variety of materials, such as satirical cartoons, posters and art works.⁵¹⁹ Following this definition, the chapter investigates various materials in order to show how maternity was represented in the context of the new-feminism. In the conclusion I will compare the representations of maternity of the 1970s with those of the periods discussed in the previous chapters.

5.2 The Italian feminist movement in the 1970s and its new structure

The new feminist movement emerged, like the students' movement, as part of a microcosm of radical political projects in the wake of 1968. It was characterized by a non-institutional basis, a bottom up approach and a rejection of any strong leadership.⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁸ Marina Addis Saba, Susanna Noack and Tobe Levin, "Women's Studies in Italy: The Story of Feminist Historiography," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 20, no. 3/4, Women's Studies in Europe (Fall - Winter 1992): 118.

⁵¹⁹ Anne-Marie Sauzeau Boetti, introduction to *Lessico politico delle donne*, ed. Manuela Fraire (Milano: Gulliver, 1979), vol. 6, 135.

⁵²⁰ See Lidia Piccioni, "Associazionismo di base e movimenti, tra politica, società e cultura," in *Arte fuori dall'arte. Incontri e scambi fra arti visive e società negli anni Settanta*, eds. Cristina Casero, Elena Di Raddo and Francesca Gallo (Milano: postmediabooks, 2017), 201-206.

Yet, this definition is not exhaustive, since it does not show its real depth and complexity.⁵²¹ The movement emerged from a critique of the emancipationist drive in the declination it had been used during the first feminist movement.⁵²² In place of the concept of equality, a rethinking of sexual difference and liberation was at the basis of the critique of society.

In Italy, in particular, feminism established itself following the separation from the groups connected to the left and with the organization of independent groups and collectives.⁵²³ These were the “basic structure of the feminist movement,”⁵²⁴ which spread across Italy well before feminism gained more visibility in the media and on the political scene after the first national demonstration on the 6th of December 1975. In these groups women practiced consciousness-raising and individual experiences were shared in the logic of the “personal is political.” Despite the relationships among different groups were not always smooth, these were the first places in which a new solidarity among women was created.⁵²⁵ It was thought that the transformation of society would come after this solidarity. One of the early battles supported by the movement, since 1971, was the legalization of abortion, which, as we will see, was a turning point of the discourse around maternity as well.

The new structure of the feminist movement had a direct impact on its visual production, whose outputs significantly

⁵²¹ For an introduction to the developments of the movement in these years see Anna Bravo and Giovanna Fiume, “Anni Settanta,” *Genesis. Rivista della Società Italiana delle Storie* 3, no. 1 (2004), 5-15; Rosalba Spagnoletti, *I movimenti femministi in Italia* (Roma: Savelli, 1971); Simonetta Piccone Stella, *La prima generazione. Ragazzi e ragazze nel miracolo economico* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1993); Anna Scattigno and Teresa Bertilotti, *Il femminismo degli anni Settanta* (Roma: Viella, 2005); Fiamma Lussana, *Il movimento femminista in Italia. Esperienze, storie, memorie* (Roma: Carrocci, 2012); Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp, *Italian feminist thought: a reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp, *The Lonely mirror: Italian perspectives on feminist theory* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993). For a long time, one of the few contributions on the topic has been the monographic issue “Il movimento femminista degli anni Settanta,” *Memoria. Rivista di storia delle donne*, no. 19/20 (1987).

⁵²² Manuela Fraire and Biancamaria Frabotta, introduction to *Lessico politico delle donne*, ed. Manuela Fraire (Milano: Gulliver, 1978), vol. 3, 7.

⁵²³ The phenomenon of the *doppia militanza* (double militancy), understood as the double activism of women in feminism and in groups within the parties of the New Left, characterized the first half of the 1970s.

⁵²⁴ Alma Sabatini, “il piccolo gruppo: struttura di base del femminismo” *Effe*, January 1974, 2.

⁵²⁵ On the role of the collectives within the movement see the recent book by Paola Stelliferi, *Il femminismo a Roma negli anni Settanta. Percorsi, esperienze e memorie dei collettivi di quartiere* (Bologna: Bonomia University Press, 2015).

multiplied and diversified. Drawing on a new understanding of creativity and aiming at conveying a new representation of women, the new groups used a great variety of visual tools to pursue a radical critique of society.⁵²⁶

5.3 Motherhood

There are different aspects that is necessary to explore when the theme of maternity intersects with the feminist movement in the 1970s. As it has already emerged in the previous chapters, this was a key topic in the feminist discourse. Manuela Fraire and Biancamaria Frabotta underline how many of the fluctuations in feminist theories and practices can be reduced to the double nature of the maternal figure, between protecting and devouring presence. The claims of the new-feminism applied not only to the political and civil institutions, but also, even foremost, to the private sphere and the family. This is fundamental to understand the way feminists developed their political activity as inextricably linked to sexuality and affectivity. Considered the sites where the oppression of women was first born, the private sphere and the relationships within the family were also seen as the starting point for the transformation.⁵²⁷ The thinking about maternity revolved around some basic pillars: the relationship with the mother,⁵²⁸ identity and creativity and the body.

An important aspect in the perspective of this thesis, which will be further discussed also in relation to the creation of the *collettivo madri*, is the marginalization that maternity suffered at the initial stage of re-emergence of the movement. The new feminism led to a refusal and, sometimes, an open condemn of maternity, at least in the first half of the 1970s. Laura Grasso spoke of the complicity of women in the process through which men had

⁵²⁶ There are many examples that prove how visuality was one of the privileged fields of action for the majority of collectives.

⁵²⁷ Manuela Fraire and Biancamaria Frabotta, introduction to *Lessico politico delle donne*, ed. Manuela Fraire, vol. 3, 6-16.

⁵²⁸ The rediscovery of the mother had an important contribution in the books, among the others, by Lea Melandri, *L'infamia originaria* (Milano: L'Erbavoglio, 1977) and in Laura Grasso, *Madre, Amore, Donna: per un'analisi del rapporto madre-figlia* (Rimini; Firenze: Guaraldi, 1978).

turned the image of the mother into a symbol, thus creating a split between the idea of maternity and real women and mothers. The refusal of maternity at the beginning of the decade signified a removal of any reference to the practical and material sides of maternity and to the subjectivity of women.⁵²⁹ Motherhood was often looked at with suspicion, as one of the main tools of submission used against women. In *The Second sex*, Simone de Beauvoir had described the relationship between women and maternity in all its nuances. She had defined it a creation accomplished only in a passive manner, that justified, with its ambiguities, the ambivalent and subjective behaviours assumed by women towards it.⁵³⁰ *Rivolta femminile* foresaw a transformation of the power relationships between sexes only after a redefinition of female sexuality as completely detached from procreative aims. As written in their *Manifesto*, the obligation to face maternity as if it was an either/or choice was one of the first reasons of women's anger against society. Maternity was paid at the price of exclusion and, through it, women were unaware tools of patriarchy. At the same time, it was claimed back as an intense and valuable experience.⁵³¹ By the end of the decade, however, maternity was revalued precisely as an exclusively female experience, to be lived in a political way, critically and consciously. The book *Of Woman Born* by Adrienne Rich, published in 1976, appeared almost immediately in Italian translation. The idea that before sisterhood, there was the knowledge, transitory, fragmented maybe, but original and crucial, of mother-and-daughterhood was very influential also in Italy.⁵³² The new approach to maternity also needed a completely new definition of maternal instinct, previously defined as an element external to women and unrelated to their will. This definition was questioned throughout the decade and substituted, at the beginning of the 1980s, by the idea of desire, closer to the idea of choice.⁵³³

⁵²⁹ Laura Grasso, "Madri e non madri: la circolarità del femminile," in *L'altra mamma*, eds. Angela Cattaneo and Silvana Pisa (Roma: Savelli, 1979), 101-110.

⁵³⁰ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), 467-504.

⁵³¹ Carla Lonzi et al., "Manifesto di Rivolta femminile," in *Sputiamo su Hegel e altri scritti* (Milano: Rivolta Femminile, 1974), 11-18.

⁵³² Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born. Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976), 225.

⁵³³ Silvana Pisa, "Sostituiamo 'l'istinto materno' con la "scelta di maternità," *Quotidiano donna*, February 13, 1980, 8.

5.4 Ways of representing maternity

The theme of maternity was explored by artists in the 1970s as part of a more general reflection on women's identity as constructed rather than natural. From this perspective, these works investigated maternity as one of the stereotypes traditionally used to represent women. In *L'invenzione del Femminile: RUOLI* (1974)⁵³⁴ (fig. 132), Marcella Campagnano⁵³⁵ used the photographic medium to represent these stereotypes, including the mother. Each picture was a portrait or self-portrait, as the subjects of the photos were Campagnano herself and other members of the collective of Porta Ticinese in Milan disguised to impersonate the different roles.⁵³⁶

Carla Cerati⁵³⁷ included an image of maternity in *case di ringhiera* (fig. 133).⁵³⁸ The series was part of a group work that focused on the representation of women in their domestic environment. The woman photographed in this image was breastfeeding her child in an interior setting, totally absorbed by the task. The photo showed a moment from the everyday life in the typical Milanese railing houses with the photojournalistic eye that characterized Cerati. A different work was, instead, *Professione fotografa*⁵³⁹ where Cerati reflected on what it meant to be a woman photographer and took photos of her colleagues in

⁵³⁴ The series was published in Marcella Campagnano, *Donne immagini* (Milano: Miozzi Editore, 1976) and exhibited at Venezia '79. *La fotografia*. See the exhibition catalogue AA.VV., *Venezia '79. La fotografia* (Milano: Electa Editrice, 1979).

⁵³⁵ Marcella Campagnano (Milano, 1941).

⁵³⁶ On Marcella Campagnano see Raffaella Perna, *Arte, fotografia e femminismo in Italia negli anni Settanta* (Milano: Postmedia Books, 2013), 65-68; Seravalli, *Arte e femminismo*, 101; Raffaella Perna, ed., *L'altro sguardo: fotografe italiane 1965-2015* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2016), 184. Since 1973 the gallery of Porta Ticinese was open to politically involved artists. It was the base of the Collettivo Autonomo Pittori and of the feminist group Le Pezze. See Elena Di Raddo, "Lavorare insieme e per sé. Da collettivo all'individuo nell'arte delle donne tra gli anni Settanta e oggi," *Opera viva*, July 18, 2016. Available at <https://operavivamagazine.org/lavorare-insieme-e-per-se/> (accessed November 10, 2017).

⁵³⁷ Carla Cerati (Bergamo, 1926- Milano, 2016). Photographer and writer. It is interesting noting that in 1990 she wrote a narrative book about a generational contrast between a daughter and her old mother. See Carla Cerati, *La cattiva figlia* (Milano: Frassinelli, 1990).

⁵³⁸ The work featured in the exhibition curated by Lanfranco Colombo, *Contributo per una ricerca sulla donna. 'Dietro la facciata'*, SICO, Quartiere Fiera Milan, 15-23 March 1975.

⁵³⁹ The work featured in the exhibition curated by Lanfranco Colombo, *La donna*, SICO, Gexpo, Milan 1977.

different situations.⁵⁴⁰ The relationship between Cerati and the women in the photos also recalled the new understanding of women's individual and collective identity on which the new feminism developed. In the photographic portrait of Paola Mattioli (fig. 134), Cerati represented the coexistence of two identities, photographer and mother. Mattioli was portrayed holding her daughter while a photograph of the girl, likely taken by Mattioli herself, was visible on the background. The structure of the photo emphasized the relationship of the central group of mother and daughter to the camera, on one side, and to the large photo of the girl, on the other. In *Faccia a faccia*⁵⁴¹ (fig. 135) Mattioli portrayed herself holding the camera, thus reaffirming her role as a photographer. In Cerati's photo, instead, she held her daughter who, in turn, played with the camera. The two identities coexist, but the interplay of references between the group mother-daughter, the camera and the girl's photo represents the problematic relationship between them. Moreover, the presence of a large photo of the girl on the background forces the viewer to think about the ways in which Mattioli is connected to her daughter and her work. Thus, it creates an ideal link between maternity and creativity, giving birth and artistic creation, which is a recurrent aspect in many women artists' work.

The reflection on women's identity and stereotypes also occurred through a direct reworking of religious images of maternity. The 1976 exhibition *Altra Misura* curated by Romana Loda⁵⁴² at Galleria Il Falconiere in Ancona displayed two artworks that directly worked around the Christian icon of the Madonna and child. The exhibition gathered women artists working with the photographic medium who had in common an aggressive and

⁵⁴⁰ In a way this work recalls the women's portraits realized by women artists, and the net of relationships among them, which Cherry has defined matronage. See Deborah Cherry, "Women Artists and the politics of Feminism 1850-1900," in *Women in the Victorian Art World*, ed. C. Campbell Orr (Manchester-New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 61 and Deborah Cherry, *Painting Women: Victorian Women Artists* (London: Routledge, 1993), 102-109.

⁵⁴¹ Paola Mattioli, *Faccia a Faccia*, 1977.

⁵⁴² Romana Loda, a key figure of the artistic system in the 1970s, played a fundamental role in the promotion and circulation of women's art in Italy and in the organization of only women exhibition. On her see Raffaella Perna, "Mostre al femminile: Romana Loda e l'arte delle donne nell'Italia degli anni Settanta," *Ricerche di S/Confine* 6, no. 1 (2015). Available at <http://hdl.handle.net/1889/3265> (accessed January 12, 2018).

direct approach against stereotypes widespread in society.⁵⁴³ Under this more general umbrella, every work was ironic, sarcastic or dramatic, but always retained an element of anguish. As Perna has underlined, this was the only exhibition curated by Loda in which the common thread was the photographic medium.⁵⁴⁴ According to the curator, the figurative component of photography helped artists to overcome the self-referential character of some contemporary conceptual art.⁵⁴⁵ During the exhibition, Verita Monselles and Stephanie Oursler, two foreign artists who had moved and permanently lived in Italy, used the iconography of the Madonna holding a child in their works. In the artwork by Monselles,⁵⁴⁶ the artist wore a lot of make-up and a low-cut shirt (fig. 136). A dummy stood next to her, while the little Jesus was substituted by a female doll. She used again religious imagery in 1975 *Superstars* (fig. 137) and in a photo published in 1975 on the cover of the September number of the magazine *Effe* (fig. 138). Also here the artist reworked the Christian iconography by portraying herself as a contemporary Madonna, wearing again a lot of make-up and holding a male doll, undressed and without arms. The image played a lot with light. The background was very dark, as well as the artist's shirt and hair, which made it difficult to distinguish the figure from the background. The light strongly hit the doll, the face of the artist and her hands with red nail varnish. On the ring finger of her left hand a wedding ring was visible, which clearly defined her as a married woman. As Romana Loda noted in the catalogue of *Magma*, Monselles' artworks were the embodiment of the artist's stated intention to objectify the existential crisis that women were living in the context of the general transformations of society that implied a

⁵⁴³ The exhibition featured works by Verita Monselles, Natalia LL, Annette Messenger, Suzanne Santoro and Stephanie Oursler.

⁵⁴⁴ Perna, *Arte, fotografia e femminismo*.

⁵⁴⁵ Romana Loda, ed., *Altra misura*. Exhibition catalogue. Galleria del Falconiere, Falconara (Ancona), October 1976.

⁵⁴⁶ Verita Monselles (Buenos Aires, 1929- Firenze, 2005). She moved to Florence in the first half of the 1970s and here started her research about stereotypical images of women. She participated in various exhibitions curated by Romana Loda including *Coazione a mostrare* in 1974, when Loda was accused of obscenity and incitement to abortion because of the works by Niki de Saint-Phalle and Andreina Robotti; *Magma* in 1975 and *Altra Misura* at Galleria Il Falconiere of Ancona in 1976. On the artist see also Verita Monselles and Lara-Vinca Masini, *Codice inverso: la dissacrazione dell'archetipo maschile nella fotografia di Verita Monselles: 1970-2004* (Prato: Regione Toscana, 2006).

complete rethinking of maternity, family, religion and sexuality.⁵⁴⁷ In her works the woman, finally active subject, could show her contempt towards the causes of her subordination: the man, the family and religion.⁵⁴⁸ Thus, Monselles directly attacked one of the most common ideal of motherhood, by reworking the image through which maternity had become the ideal of womanhood.

Another work recalling the image of the Madonna and child on display during *L'Altra Misura* was *My First Love* (1973-1975) (fig. 139) by Stephanie Oursler.⁵⁴⁹ She portrayed herself with a skinned lamb on her lap, which substituted the little Jesus of the iconic image of the Virgin and Child. As Perna mentioned, the artwork had a biographical origin,⁵⁵⁰ but also expressed the double dimension of maternity. On the one hand, it referred to the biological and natural world represented by the animal; on the other, it pointed at maternity as a social construction by referring to the iconography that has served as the main model for the representation of maternity in the Western society for centuries.⁵⁵¹

Stephanie Oursler and Verita Monselles directly referred to a symbolic image, and, by subverting it, presented their opinion on women's situation in contemporary society. In order to describe their works, I find it useful to refer to the concept of iconoclasm, a neologism created by Bruno Latour in his introductory essay to the catalogue of the exhibition *Iconoclasm* at the Center for New Art and Media in Karlsruhe. The term is meant to define an action whose interpretation is difficult and ambiguous because there is no way to know, without further enquiry, whether it is a destructive or constructive act. Latour identifies three sources of iconoclasmes: religion, science and contemporary art. He opposes this new term to iconoclasm, which more directly points at an act of destruction.⁵⁵² Even though the word has come to mean also a process of reusing an image in order to transform its meaning, rather than to its physical

⁵⁴⁷ Romana Loda, "Verita Monselles," in *Magma. Rassegna internazionale di donne artiste* (s.l.: Magma, 1977). Exhibition catalogue. Museo di Castelvecchio di Verona, February 1977.

⁵⁴⁸ Romana Loda, "Verita Monselles," in *Il volto sinistro dell'arte* (Firenze: Galleria De Amicis, 1989). Exhibition catalogue. Galleria De Amicis, Firenze, October 29- November 26, 1977.

⁵⁴⁹ Stephanie Oursler (Baltimore, 1938).

⁵⁵⁰ Perna talks of a photo of the artist as a child with a stuffed lamb on her lap.

⁵⁵¹ Perna, *Arte, fotografia e femminismo*, 29.

⁵⁵² Bruno Latour, "What is Iconoclasm? Or is there a world beyond the image wars?" in *Iconoclasm. Beyond the image wars in Science, Religion and Art*, eds. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Karlsruhe: ZKM; Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 16.

destruction,⁵⁵³ the term is generally understood as related to the “destruction and alteration of images or objects imbued with some kind of symbolic value.”⁵⁵⁴ I refer to these works by Monselles and Oursler as iconoclashes to emphasize their transformative and constructive side, rather than the destructive one. Moreover, apart from the links that I find between these works and the definition of iconoclash, I choose to use this word also to expose what I think is a particularly biased argument. Speaking about the idol smasher, Latour said “I guess it is fair to put it in the masculine”⁵⁵⁵ and later added that he kept maintaining the masculine “for rather obscure reasons.”⁵⁵⁶ It could be noticed how, instead, he defined the viewer as indifferently “him or her.”⁵⁵⁷ These words reveal how Latour’s discourse is strongly gender biased, by assuming, for reasons that he himself could not explain, that women could not be idol smashers. Instead, not only there is no reason to make such assumption, but the work of Monselles and Oursler prove in fact the opposite.⁵⁵⁸ Their works subverted the traditional image of maternity precisely in the sense that the neologism iconoclash foresaw. While critiquing the social image of maternity, they already suggested a new one.

5.5 Madre è bello ⁵⁵⁹

A very original representation of maternity is Giovanna De Sanctis’s *Maternità e nascita*. Trained as an architect, De Sanctis also developed an interest in painting and drawing. After her first exhibitions, the X Quadriennale di Roma – “Nuova generazione” and “Donna e Immagine” in 1975, she kept on exhibiting at

⁵⁵³ Tabitha Barber and Stacy Boldrick, eds., *Art under attack: histories of British iconoclasm* (London: Tate Publishing, 2013).

⁵⁵⁴ Kristine Kolrud and Marina Prusac, *Iconoclasm from Antiquity to modernity* (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 1.

⁵⁵⁵ Latour, “What is Iconoclash,” 23.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁸ I also incidentally want to note that later Suzanne Santoro will realize a book titled *Iconoclastia* with a text by Gabriella Dalesio.

⁵⁵⁹ This is the title of the article accompanied by the lithographs of *Nascita tecnologica* sent by Giovanna De Sanctis to *Effe* in 1977. See Giovanna, “madre è bello,” *Effe*, March 1977, 12.

individual and collective shows.⁵⁶⁰ She actively participated in the feminist movement within the collective Donna-Immagine (Woman -Image), within which feminist issues were debated in relation to painting, graphics, photography and cartoons.⁵⁶¹

De Sanctis explored the relationship between women and maternity in the work *Maternità e nascita*. The series was exhibited for the first time at the public library of Cori, in the province of Latina, in 1977⁵⁶² and at the Galleria Sirio, in Rome, the next year.⁵⁶³ The catalogue of this exhibition was presented at the library-shop Ervavoglio. The choice of this space does not seem casual. Ervavoglio, organized by Emilia Siracusa and Carolina Puglignani, was both a children's shop and a cultural centre. Its programme included educational activities for children against sexism and aimed at raising awareness of the role of mothers.⁵⁶⁴

The artwork was made of 5 drawings, *Annunciazione* (fig. 140), *Maternità* (fig. 141), *Offerta* (fig. 142), *Morte per aborto* (fig. 143), *Nascita tecnologica* (fig. 144), and four lithographs (145-148).⁵⁶⁵ In *Annunciazione* mother and child seem to be hanging upside down, almost floating inside a metal cage that reminds us, in some ways, of the Christian cross turned upside down. In this first image the screaming child and the mother are still connected by an external umbilical cord. At the end of the sequence, in *Morte per aborto* and *Nascita tecnologica*, the umbilical cord is cut and they are eventually separated. The woman, now dressed and still floating in the metallic cage, has the eyes closed and her body seems more relaxed, while the child floats alone in the same cage. The sequence includes other two drawings: *Maternità* shows only the

⁵⁶⁰ Giovanna De Sanctis (1939 -). She received her degree in 1964. For a more detailed biography see the artist's website <http://www.giovannadesanctis.com/cv.html>.

⁵⁶¹ In 1976 they organized the exhibition *Riprendiamoci l'immagine*, featuring, in addition to Giovanna De Sanctis, Adriana Argentini, Alessia Fani, Cecilia Capuana, Laura Cretara, Renata Mulas. On the collective *Donna-Immagine* see ARCHIVIA, Archivi, Biblioteche, Centri di Documentazione delle Donne, 1945-2005. Roma, città delle donne (Fondazione Roma: Roma, 2005) (cd-rom).

⁵⁶² The choice to exhibit the work for the first time in an off-centre place like Cori recalls a similar choice of the association *Donna&Arte* to organize their first exhibition in Frascati. This decision was part of a proposal of an alternative model of exhibitions and reflected an understanding of contemporary art with a human dimension and available to the whole community. See *Donna arte. Presenza* (Tip. V. Ferri, Roma), 1977.

⁵⁶³ Giovanna De Sanctis, *Maternità e nascita* (Galleria d'arte Sirio: Roma), 1978.

⁵⁶⁴ On the collective Ervavoglio see Archivia, Archivi, Biblioteche, Centri di Documentazione delle Donne, 1945-2005. Roma, città delle donne (Fondazione Roma: Roma, 2005) (cd-rom).

⁵⁶⁵ The lithographs can be found at the Biblioteca Civica Alessandro Manzoni in Trezzo sull'Adda (MI).

woman's mouth, hands, belly and breasts; *Offerta* represents the same disquieting figure who holds now a child, wrapped in a cloth.

The iconographic novelty of the drawings was not received positively by the public. As the artist allegedly reported, the sophisticated art viewer did not appreciate the violence of the work and she did not know how to make amends for those drawings.⁵⁶⁶ Mario De Micheli commented the artwork speaking of De Sanctis' refusal of elitist jargon. According to him, the choice of a figurative and analytical language was the consequence of a judgment on society and an attempt of the artist to position herself within it.⁵⁶⁷ However, I argue that this artwork and its figurative language can be interpreted in a more complex way.

The woman in the first drawing, with her wide open eyes and black hair that surround the face untidily, might resemble Medusa. The mythological figure's power to turn whoever looked upon her face into stone is common knowledge. However, the reason why she had that power is usually less known. Different versions of the myth have been told, but in the *Metamorphoses* Ovid tells the story of a beautiful young maiden, one of the Gorgons' sisters, who was raped by the god Poseidon in Athena's temple. According to this version, the goddess, shocked by the scene, "held her breastplate up to shield her eyes; as if to warn the girl of carelessness she turned her hair to snakes."⁵⁶⁸ And Ovid continues, "Today Minerva to keep bold strangers at a proper distance wears snakes on the gold shield across her breast."⁵⁶⁹ According to this version, then, Athena turned Medusa into a monster and gave her the terrifying power after seeing her being raped by Poseidon. The Gorgon was punished for her beauty and turned into a monster, so that no one could look at her anymore. The myth also tells that when Medusa was beheaded by Perseus, Pegasus and Chrysaor were born from her blood, "as though it were a mother."⁵⁷⁰ The myth itself, then, is open to different

⁵⁶⁶ Laura Vietti, "Non esiste amore materno nelle arti visive delle donne," *Lotta Continua*, August 13, 1980, 8.

⁵⁶⁷ De Sanctis, *Maternità e nascita*, no page.

⁵⁶⁸ Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, trans. Horace Gregory (New York: Viking Press, 1958), 118.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁰ Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, 117.

interpretations and re-elaborations.⁵⁷¹ Here I would like to draw a direct connection between De Sanctis' work and a famous essay by Hélène Cixous that refers to the myth.

Reading the mother of *Maternità e Nascita* as the mythological figure of Medusa, allows to link the artwork to *The Laugh of the Medusa*.⁵⁷² Here Cixous spoke of Medusa as one of the monstrous myths that men have used to represent womanhood, but she tried to turn it into a positive key. In the essay the feminist theorist claimed that women who did not comply with the models that had been created for them were led to think that they were sick or monsters. Thus, she urged women to claim for their desire, which men had tried to make disappear, together with their body, sexuality and womanly being. If, she argued, men dared to "look at the Medusa straight on" they would see that "she is not deadly, she's beautiful and she's laughing."⁵⁷³ And she wrote "such is the strength of women that, sweeping away syntax, breaking that famous thread (just a tiny little thread, they say) which acts for men as a surrogate umbilical cord [...] women will go right up to the impossible."⁵⁷⁴ Cixous also focused on the connection between the metaphor of flying and women: "flying is a woman's gesture-flying in language and making it fly. [...] We have all learned the art of flying and its numerous techniques; for centuries we've been able to possess anything only by flying; we've lived in flight, stealing away, finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers. It's no accident that *voler* has a double meaning, that it plays on each of them and thus throws off the agents of sense. [...] They go by, fly the coop, take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it, in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values, breaking them all up, emptying structures, and turning propriety upside down."⁵⁷⁵ And she added "airborne swimmer, in flight, she does not cling to herself; she is dispersible, prodigious, stunning, desirous and

⁵⁷¹ See, for example, Griselda Pollock, "From Horrorism to Compassion: Re-facing Medusan Otherness in Dialogue with Adriana Cavarero and Bracha Ettinger," in *Visual politics and psychoanalysis*, ed. Griselda Pollock (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2013), 159-189.

⁵⁷² Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1976): 875-893.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, 885.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 886.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 887.

capable of others, of the other woman that she will be, of the other woman she isn't, of him, of you."⁵⁷⁶

I find some interesting connections between these words and De Sanctis' figurative choices. The smile on the face of the woman/Medusa, the external umbilical cord that gets cut and the woman seemingly floating seem to resonate with Cixous' essay. And also, the woman finally sweeps away the umbilical cord and, by doing so, she gets free of models which are imposed on her. She, then, floats finally free and capable of being a different woman.

In addition to an echo of Cixous' words in the artwork, it is also possible to find a deeper connection between the essay and *Maternità e Nascita*, when the feminist theorist goes into what I see as one of the most liberating ways of seeing women and defining maternity. She calls for a complete freedom, also when this involves maternal desire. On one side, she claims the freedom to express the desire of life, that is of maternity, like the desire of writing and of any other creative endeavour. According to Cixous, the fact that the pregnant woman has always been a taboo, as the pregnant body, says a lot about the power of procreation. The female body is, instead, not a threat. On the other side, a woman who does not have a desire for maternity, should not feel lacking as "each body distributes in its own special way, without model or norm, the totality of its desires."⁵⁷⁷ And she goes on tearing apart all the psychoanalytical takes on maternity. Women know how to live detachment, giving birth is neither losing nor increasing, it's "adding to life an other."⁵⁷⁸ *The Laugh of the Medusa* appeared for the first time as *Le Rire de la Méduse* in *L'Arc* in 1975.⁵⁷⁹ The artist never read the essay.⁵⁸⁰ However, it seems to me that Cixous' words add some layers of possible interpretations to the work.

At the time, as De Sanctis lamented, the drawings had been perceived as very violent. The iconography of the artwork was clearly far from the traditional representation of maternity. The first impression when looking at them is that the artist wanted to convey an idea of maternity as an imposition. Yet, is this the

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 890.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., 891.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ Hélène Cixous, "Le rire de la Méduse," *L'arc* 61, (1975): 39-54.

⁵⁸⁰ Personal communication by telephone with Giovanna De Sanctis on October 21, 2019.

only possible reading of the artwork? Before trying to reply to this question, drawing also on Cixous' words, it is useful to read the artist's own words.

The lithographs *Nascita tecnologica*, which were part of *Maternità e Nascita*, were sent to the magazine *Effe* by the artist in 1977, together with a comment explaining the reasons behind them. The article was a narration of the artist's personal experience of maternity. It spoke from the point of view of an emancipated woman who, before becoming mother, had adapted herself in order to be accepted by men and had been successful in that. After deciding to become a mother and, by doing that, experiencing a part of herself that had been ignored and cut out, she felt completely abandoned. She described the moment of giving birth and the feeling of powerfulness mixed to the extreme violence and pain, for the way the delivery had been treated at the hospital. Most of all, she spoke of this moment as of an epiphany: the power to procreate had always been turned into a trap and isolation. However, women had a choice. They did not have to hide and adapt to a male culture. On the contrary, that moment of epiphany could foster a mutual recognition among women and the creation of a new language. More specifically on the drawings, De Sanctis wrote: "Going back to the drawings, I do not know how much of all this I managed to say through them. Certainly, it almost seems to me that images, without a story, a story made of words, cannot "signify" all that it should; I would like at least that this research made through figures was a little part of a broader discussion on maternity and on the issues that are intertwined with it, discussion that so far we have done less, almost to remove this piece of ourselves so big, so terrible, so difficult to live."⁸¹

Thus, the publication on the magazine did not simply aimed at giving more visibility to the drawings. On the contrary, it was used by the artist to give a key to interpret her work and, at the same time, raise awareness on the theme among the readers. The decision to send parts of the artwork to the magazine seems to be in line with the choice to exhibit it for the first time in Cori and, therefore, part of a bigger strategy. In this way, De Sanctis reached a wider public, including common people in Cori, and women who would read *Effe* and, therefore, were probably more

⁸¹ Giovanna, "madre è bello," *Effe*, March 1977, 2.

directly involved with the movement. She wanted to stimulate a discussion on the topic.

If, as the artist says, images cannot say everything, but need a story, what can that story be? Is the mother in the images only a woman suffering, forced in a cage, whose body is reduced to her breasts and womb and who finally finds peace when the umbilical cord is cut? Or is that mother a woman who, like Medusa, should be just looked at to realize that she is beautiful and smiling? Is she the woman who breaks that surrogate of an umbilical cord to reach the impossible? Is she the woman who is able to reinvent herself, giving voice to her different identities? This is not to say that in the images there is not violence, but that this was not related to maternity itself. De Sanctis chose to be mother and thought that this could foster a change, based on a mutual recognition with other women. As the artist says, this artwork emerged from autobiographical experiences, that art helped her to elaborate.⁵⁸² It was also a way to denounce the way maternity was treated, in society and in hospitals, a topic widely spread in the feminist publications of the time.⁵⁸³

There is, however, a difference between the work published in the catalogue and the lithographs published on *Effe*. In the first case, the drawings could be read as a sequence which unfolded following the pages. There was a story. The lithographs published in the magazine, on the contrary, had a much more dramatic effect. They all represented a child, who was either sleeping or crying. In place of his mother's skin, he was surrounded by the steel, neon and Plexiglas of the hospital's appliances. The *mani di plastica* (plastic hands) that held him were the gloves of a nurse or doctor. In *presenza di mamma* (presence of mother) the mother was summoned by the cold and sterile shiny steel of the leg holder of a gynaecologist's bed. The dramatic effect and the loneliness of the child was further emphasized by the chiaroscuro of the lithographs and by the titles.

⁵⁸² Personal communication by telephone with Giovanna De Sanctis on October 21, 2019.

⁵⁸³ Natalia Aspesi, "Medicina. il parto punitivo," *Effe*, January 1974, 9-13.

5.6 The pregnant body

One of the novelties of the representation of maternity in the 1970s was the rediscovery of the naked pregnant body of women. Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock warned about the dangers of using the naked body of women, even if to celebrate their fertility and sexuality. They claimed that this kind of representations carried with them a history of meanings, uses and associations that would easily turn them into a voyeuristic representation of the female nude.⁵⁸⁴ This paragraph will present some artworks and examples from feminist publications and collectives in order to understand whether it was possible to re-appropriate this kind of imagery without falling in that history of meanings that weighs it down.

5.6.1 The pregnant body in the feminist press

Effe and *Quotidiano Donna* played a key role in the process of dissemination of a new iconography connecting maternity to the female naked body. It is telling that in the first number of the magazine *Effe*, Germaine Greer,⁵⁸⁵ one of the most radical voices of the second-wave feminist movement, urged women to re-appropriate their bodies, including the pregnant one. In order to show how the naked body of women did not necessarily have to be censored and could actually be proposed as an alternative to the images created for the pleasure of the masculine gaze, she compared three photos representing naked female bodies (fig. 149). The first one was a photoshopped picture of a pin-up girl published on the cover of the issue of October 1973 of the Italian edition of *Playboy*. This was compared to other two images of naked women in profile, one of which was pregnant. Greer claimed that, despite being the only photo where the woman was

⁵⁸⁴ Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, "Fifteen years of feminist action: from practical strategies to strategic practices," in *Framing feminism: art and the women's movement 1970-1985* (London: Pandora, 1987), 5.

⁵⁸⁵ Germaine Greer (n. 1939). She moved to Tuscany in 1971 and was one of the most radical voices of the journal and of feminism in the 1970s.

dressed, the pin-up girl's image had an erotic connotation stronger than the other two. And she tried to explain the mechanism that lied behind its construction. In her opinion, the *Playboy's* cover focussed on the sexual characters of the model, without emphasizing them. By doing so, it took advantage of the taboo object without provoking disgust.⁵⁸⁶ The photos have, indeed, different effects. The *Playboy's* cover was evidently built to stimulate the interest of the viewer, likely a man. The model smiled at him and winked. The other two women photographed, instead, were turned in such a way that it was not even possible to see their faces. In this way, the naked body of women did not serve the masculine pleasure and could be appropriated and freely used by women themselves.

Another interesting point of the article was Greer's reflection on the role of techniques and their implications on the effects of the images. In particular, she focused on the differences between painting and photography, blaming only the latter for the exploitation of the female body. She claimed that even if painters often used the female body as an ornamental motif, they did not use it in a pornographic way, but rather as an aesthetic proposal since in paintings the body of women was subject to the laws of composition. On the contrary, she considered the photo more deceptive for its nature of analogue, which increased its capacity to mystify reality, and, in this way, serve the male pleasure.⁵⁸⁷ If an understanding of the impact of using different techniques, as we will see, is fundamental, the role played by photography in the redefinition of women's identity in the 1970s has to be acknowledged as well.⁵⁸⁸

New feminists reaffirmed their rights not only over the pregnant body, but also over the moment of delivery, which had been too much medicalized and during which women's will was often ignored. This translated, for example, in support for home deliveries, perceived as a more natural way of giving birth. This led to a multiplication of images of naked pregnant bodies and

⁵⁸⁶ Germaine Greer, "Il nudo non è in vendita," *Effé*, November 1973, 46-47.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁸ The relationship between women and photography, however, is not new. Some women artists between 19th and 20th century already used it to create different imaginaries and start a reflection on the definition of their identities. See Federica Muzzarelli, *Il corpo e l'azione. Donne e fotografia tra Otto e Novecento* (Bologna: Atlante, 2006).

deliveries.⁵⁸⁹ *Effe* used photos taken from *Prenatal Yoga & Natural Birth*⁵⁹⁰ by Jeannine O'Brien Medvin and Raven Lang's *Birth Book*⁵⁹¹ for the dossier on the delivery (fig. 151).⁵⁹² *Quotidiano donna* also published photos of pregnant women accompanying articles on the delivery without pain (fig. 152)⁵⁹³ or photos of the moment of the delivery itself (fig. 153-156).⁵⁹⁴ These photos, in particular those about the delivery at home, were very powerful. The childbirth was represented without any censorship, from the moment in which the head started to come out, to the actual birth and the first moments of life of the child. The low perspective chosen for the photos portraying the moment of birth made the viewer enter the photo and participate in the event. Another shot portrayed the mother while she lovingly looked and smiled at the child. Yet, the scissors used to cut the umbilical cord were still visible and the mother's shirt, still rolled up on the tummy, was stained because of the delivery.

This kind of pictures was, and probably would still be, very controversial. A sample of the extreme reactions aroused by them was summarized in a letter sent to *Quotidiano donna* one month after their publication. A group of women employees of a little company in the North of Italy reported the reactions that the pictures, hung together with the article on the notice board of the company's canteen, had provoked. People, both men and women, were outraged. The employees who wrote the letter concluded that, despite the disgusted reactions, men kept looking at the photos, trying to catch a glimpse of a female naked body nonetheless.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁸⁹ One example is an article denouncing what was defined the punitive delivery in January 1974. It was accompanied by an image taken from Margaret Sheffield, *Where do babies come from?* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973). The children's book, an adaptation to the printed page of a BBC program used throughout the primary school system, replied in a simple way to questions about birth usually asked by young children. The illustrations by Sheila Bewley, who graduated from St. Martin's School of Art, represented the different stages of pregnancy and delivery in a very detailed way, almost mimicking the style of scientific images (fig. 150).

⁵⁹⁰ Jeannine O'Brien Medvin, *Prenatal Yoga & Natural Birth* (Albion, CA: Freestone publishing company, 1974).

⁵⁹¹ Raven Lang, *Birth Book* (Genesis Press: USA, 1972).

⁵⁹² Mimma De Leo, "Dossier parto. Parto: quali metodi," *Effe*, June 1982, 16-21.

⁵⁹³ *Quotidiano donna*, December 5, 1979, no. 43.

⁵⁹⁴ *Quotidiano donna*, November 14, 1979, n. 40, 8-9.

⁵⁹⁵ Delegate e dipendenti della r.c.s. sweda di trezzano, "leggono i giornali porno, ma trovano oscene le foto sul parto," *Quotidiano donna*, no. 43, December 5, 1979.

5.6.2 Sara è incinta

In 1978 the “Gruppo del mercoledì” (group of Wednesday)⁵⁹⁶ published the book *Ci vediamo mercoledì. Gli altri giorni ci immaginiamo*,⁵⁹⁷ which gathered individual and collective works by the group’s members. The book included the series *Sara è Incinta* by Paola Mattioli (fig. 157-158). Her long-lasting involvement with feminism goes back to 1975, year of her daughter’s birth, with her participation in *Dietro la facciata: contributo per una ricerca sulla condizione della donna*. The exhibition presented the work of four women photographers who explored the theme of women’s isolation at home from different points of view.⁵⁹⁸ As Casero has underlined, Paola Mattioli always merged the practice of photography with the political and social activity. Her connections with Ugo Mulas, Enzo Paci and Marisa Dalai Emiliani shaped her understanding of the photographic medium as a tool not only to reproduce but also to understand reality.⁵⁹⁹

In relation to *Sara è incinta* Mattioli explained how the work was a response to an input received after reading *L’infamia originaria* by Lea Melandri, where the author speaks of the “lack of image” of women, of their impossibility to see themselves and confront with the representation of the origin, of the maternal body.⁶⁰⁰ The work was also a response to a “[...] need for reflection

⁵⁹⁶ Cristina Casero, “‘Ci vediamo mercoledì. Gli altri giorni ci immaginiamo’. La nuova immagine femminile nelle ricerche di alcune artiste e fotografe italiane negli anni Settanta del Novecento,” *Between* 5, no. 10, December 2015. Available at <http://www.betweenjournal.it> (accessed February 18, 2018).

⁵⁹⁷ Bundi Alberti et al., *Ci vediamo mercoledì. Gli altri giorni ci immaginiamo* (Mazzotta: Milano, 1978). The editor Mazzotta was renowned for its interest and support for feminist collective works. See Elena Di Raddo, “Lavorare insieme e per sé. Da collettivo all’individuo nell’arte delle donne tra gli anni Settanta e oggi”, *Opera viva*, July 18, 2016, <https://operavivamagazine.org/lavorare-insieme-e-per-se/>

⁵⁹⁸ Lanfranco Colombo, ed., *Dietro la facciata: contributo per una ricerca sulla condizione della donna*, Milano: SICOF, Sezione culturale, Padiglione 14, Quartiere Fiera Milano, 1975. In addition to Paola Mattioli, the exhibition featured Carla Cerati, Anna Candiani and Giovanna Nuvoletti.

⁵⁹⁹ See Cristina Casero, *Paola Mattioli. Sguardo critico di una fotografa* (Postmedia books: Milano 2016).

⁶⁰⁰ Paola Mattioli, Raffaella Perna, “Autocoscienza per immagini. Intervista a Paola Mattioli di Raffaella Perna,” *Opera Viva*, July 18, 2016. In the text that accompanies the images Mattioli quotes also *Speculum* by Luce Irigaray. The same difficulty in connecting with the origin of the maternal figure will be the focus of Luisa Muraro, *L’ordine simbolico della madre* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1991).

and confrontation on maternity. Two questions, two choices, to do or not to do, in the meantime...a hug."⁶⁰¹

The sequence of photos portrays two women, naked. One of them is pregnant, the other is not. In two of the three images the women face each other and it is as if they were looking into a mirror. They have similar black curly hair and also their bodies look alike, with the exception of the height and of the pregnant woman's fuller breast and rounded womb, which touches the other woman's womb in one of the photos. This mirroring is emphasized when they lift their hair while looking at each other, as if looking for themselves in the other's gaze. The atmosphere of the images is very playful, especially when the women hug each other, this time looking into the camera. As Casero underlines, a playful approach was a characteristic not only of Mattioli, but also of the other members of the group.⁶⁰²

In the text accompanying the images, *La frase dello specchio*, Mattioli speaks of the need of women to look into the mirror and, instead of trying to correspond to the stereotypes of the male gaze, to start a real search of themselves.⁶⁰³ The use of the photographic medium was here fundamental in order to represent the naked body in a new and original way. Mattioli spoke of the possibility of creating a new language based on female gaze through a different use of the photographic medium in her text *L'immagine fotografica*. Here she argued that many women photographers shared a use of the photographic medium aimed at representing the crisis of the female image as proposed within the mass communication. However, despite the intention to develop a new and authentic language, this was not always achieved. According to Mattioli, photos working on a simple sociological and emancipatory level failed to create an original expression. A deeper analysis of the self could be initiated by photography only after overcoming a photojournalistic style.⁶⁰⁴ The artist herself had to overcome this more photojournalistic approach to the feminist

⁶⁰¹ From the caption of the image.

⁶⁰² Cristina Casero, "'Ci vediamo mercoledì. Gli altri giorni ci immaginiamo.'" <http://www.betweenjournal.it>

⁶⁰³ Alberti, Bond, Cuman, Mattioli, Monti, Esperanza, Truppi, *Ci vediamo mercoledì*, 18-27.

⁶⁰⁴ Paola Mattioli, "L'immagine fotografica," in *Lessico politico delle donne*, ed. Manuela Fraire (Milano: Gulliver Edizioni, 1979), 175-6. See also Vanessa Martini, "L'estrema critica di Carla Lonzi: 1968-1978," in *Il gesto femminista. La rivolta delle donne: nel corpo, nel lavoro, nell'arte*, Aa. Vv. (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2014), 161.

movement in order to develop a research played on a more intimate and personal level.⁶⁰⁵

In *La frase dello specchio* Mattioli also recognized and underlined the violent element involved in the images of maternity as they had been traditionally interpreted: "And then violent in its fixity the image of the mother. Like big Renaissance Madonna this image, which already in the text is given as "painting," like moment of realization of the female potentiality, realization of the ultimate scope, the activity of breastfeeding and of managing the child, the only positive and codified image. The violence of the idea, the univocal dimension of this mother, the obligation to be of this mother, is the triumph of the male gaze."⁶⁰⁶ And she continued: "...precisely because it was the only image allowed it has to be broken. Broken and recomposed. Because if I refuse it completely, I refuse that link that connects me to a female point of view that is the origin of a relationship among women refused even before I have the possibility of remembering it."⁶⁰⁷ On the contrary, *Sara incinta* is the triumph of the female gaze, of the photographer's and of the two women photographed. In one of the photos, Mattioli defies the viewer's (male) expectations and, at the same time, mocks a pose that has a long tradition in the history of Western art. Sara is represented lying down, holding her head with one hand. The photo recalls the erotic pose of paintings like Tiziano or Goya nudes, but the photographer introduces an unexpected element, the pregnant body, in so doing creating a discrepancy between the viewer's expectations and the image.

5.6.3 "Donne, usciamo dall'isolamento costruiamo insieme il nostro Movimento!"

In 1975 the centre Erbavoglio promoted a meeting using a collage representing a naked pregnant body. The poster (fig. 159), likely realized by the feminist collective-laboratory Fimmini cu

⁶⁰⁵ Cristina Casero, *Paola Mattioli*, 35.

⁶⁰⁶ Alberti, Bond, Cuman, Mattioli, Monti, Esperanza, Truppi, *Ci vediamo mercoledì*, 24.

⁶⁰⁷ Alberti, Bond, Cuman, Mattioli, Monti, Esperanza, Truppi, *Ci vediamo mercoledì*, 26.

fimmini,⁶⁰⁸ was marked by the words “Donne, usciamo dall’isolamento costruiamo insieme il nostro Movimento!” (women, let’s get out of the isolation let’s build together our Movement). Two sign systems, images and language, were combined in order to produce the figure of a pregnant woman, with her fist raised in sign of protest. Words related to the feminist fights⁶⁰⁹ were mixed with images such as the feminist gesture of the triangle,⁶¹⁰ a shouting woman that recalled an iconic cover of the magazine *Effe*,⁶¹¹ the head of the Venus by Botticelli and a mother with a pram.

After a long history in the arts of the 20th century,⁶¹² the collage became one of the privileged mode of expression of feminist artists, to the extent that Lucy Lippard defined it as the predominant aesthetic in the feminist arts.⁶¹³ In Italy representatives of the visual poetry like Mirella Bentivoglio and Lucia Marchi merged words and images to critique society. Despite different declinations, artists of visual poetry shared an interest in the everyday life, which provided them with hints to be used in their critical analysis.⁶¹⁴ In this poster, the pregnant body became a visual battlefield where images and words of feminism fought against those of the mainstream and patriarchal discourse.

⁶⁰⁸ The feminist collective-laboratory fimmini cu fimmini was usually responsible for the posters and leaflets distributed by the centre. See <http://www.herstory.it/collettivo-laboratorio-femminista-fimmini-cu-fimmini> (accessed September 19, 2016).

⁶⁰⁹ Some words are connected to the feminist fights, such as “aborto libero gratuito assistito” (abortion free assisted) “lotta” (fight) “basta” (enough) “ribelliamoci” (let’s rebel). Others are taken from advertisements of cosmetic products directed to women: “ma snellente alle er” stands likely for “crema snellente alle erbe” (slimming cream with herbs) “labbra del colore giusto” (lips of the right colour) to single words like “madre” (mother) “corpo” (body) “sesso” (sex) “sposa” (bride) “putta” that likely stands for “puttana” (prostitute).

⁶¹⁰ On the origin of this gesture and its meaning see AA.VV., *Il gesto femminista. La rivolta delle donne: nel corpo, nel lavoro, nell’arte* (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2014).

⁶¹¹ Cover, *Effe*, January 1977.

⁶¹² For a use of the collage by the avant-garde movements see Mario De Micheli, *Le avanguardie artistiche del Novecento* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1988). Yet, the origin of collage has also been predated and attributed to women, non-Western and folk-artists. On the use of collage in feminist arts and its origins see also Gwen Raaberg, “Beyond Fragmentation: Collage as Feminist Strategy in the Arts,” in *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 31, (September 1998): 153-171.

⁶¹³ Lucy Lippard, *The Pink Glass Sawn. Selected Feminist Essays on Art* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 25.

⁶¹⁴ For a summary of the development of visual poetry since the 1950s see Giosuè Allegrini and Lara-Vinca Masini, eds., *Visual poetry: l’avanguardia delle neoavanguardie: mezzo secolo di poesia visiva, poesia concreta, scrittura visuale* (Milano: Skira, 2014).

5.7 The collettivo madri

The Collettivo Madri was founded in 1976 in Rome by feminist activists with different backgrounds⁶¹⁵ who shared an interest in the topic of maternity.⁶¹⁶ The reasons behind its creation were told in a letter sent to *Effe* in 1977 by the members of the collective.⁶¹⁷ Preceding the considerations that Giovanna De Sanctis expressed only two months later on the pages of the same magazine, the letter lamented the atmosphere of unease surrounding the announcement of a pregnancy in feminist groups⁶¹⁸ and the lack of debate on maternity in the movement in general. The members of the collective claimed that abortion was considered a political issue and raised complicity and understanding, while maternity was relegated to the private sphere. Instead, they recognized how missing to see the relations connecting abortion and sexuality, on one hand, and maternity, on the other, had led to the divisions internal to the movement on the topic of abortion.⁶¹⁹ As Rich later claimed, the demand for abortion rights was used to distort and distemper the meaning of the feminist movement. According to her, abortion was a concrete issue, but “hardly the issue women would have chosen to symbolize our struggle for self-determination, but one which has been perhaps more mystified, more intellectualized and emotionalized, than any other, and which glares out from the

⁶¹⁵ Some members of the collective had already been members of small groups and other collectives; others were active in left wing parties.

⁶¹⁶ The group included Valeria Barchesi, Francesca Bonato, Pinella De Riu, Silvana Pisa, Patrizia Regazzoni, Rosa Romero, Anna Rita Sciortino, Rosalba Spagnoletti, Gabriella Spigarelli. The information on the collective can be retrieved in Archivia-Archivi, Biblioteche, Centri di Documentazione delle donne (from now onwards Archivia), archivio collettivo madri, folder Coll. Madri. Materiali mostra fotografica Maria Medea e le altre Coop. Taccuino d'oro (collettivo madri).

⁶¹⁷ Angela Anna Maria Brunella Fiorella Laura Patrizia Rita, “Il nostro essere madri,” *Effe*, January 1977, 15.

⁶¹⁸ A similar remark is also in the section *about* of the *Effe*'s website, collecting all the digitized numbers of the journal. Here the writer describes the suspicion aroused in many members of the collective when Donata Francescato and Daniela Colombo, who had been part of the group working on *Effe* since the beginning, became pregnant in 1974. See <http://effervistafemminista.it/about/> (accessed September 23, 2016).

⁶¹⁹ The movement was internally divided on the topic of the abortion. On one side, the *MLD Movimento di liberazione della donna*, born in 1970 and close to the Radical Party, supported its legalisation in order to give back to women control over their bodies. On the other, *Rivolta femminile* believed that the regulation of abortion would not improve the sexual subordination of women.

complex spectrum of issues surrounding women's claim to bodily, and hence spiritual, integrity."⁶²⁰

The collective denounced the role of "silent outcast"⁶²¹ played by mothers in the movement, which had prompted Adrienne Rich, not long before, to write her foundational *Of Woman Born. Motherhood as Experience and Institution*.⁶²² Likely a consequence of this initial apparent difficulty of the movement to incorporate maternity in its discourse, the Collettivo madri did not have many relationships with other collectives at the beginning, apart from those working on childbirth and women's health, to the extent that they defined themselves a semi clandestine group. The complaint about the lack of discussion on the topic, however, mingled with a wider reflection evidenced by the transcriptions of the discussions carried out during the meetings of the collective.⁶²³

The group worked towards raising knowledge about maternity and changing its perception, inside and outside the movement. Visuality played a key role in this process. Their initiative was part of a reflection on and a critique of the image that cut the whole movement transversely. Many groups and collectives were born on the basis of an interest for the arts and female creativity. The cooperative Beato Angelico,⁶²⁴ the

⁶²⁰ Adrienne Rich, *On lies, secrets, and silence: selected prose, 1966-1978* (New York; London: Norton & Company, 1995), 12-13.

⁶²¹ Andrea Liss, *Feminist Art and the Maternal* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xv.

⁶²² In 1986, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the publication of her work, Adrienne Rich wrote that she wanted to fill a hole in feminist theory, which had left the topic of motherhood still unexplored.

⁶²³ The broad range of topics discussed shows how the issue of maternity was progressively perceived as a political issue, after being confined into the private sphere for a long time. Themes encompassed post-partum depression and the importance of mothers as role model, the possibility of building a relationship with daughters, the figure of the traditional mother and the acknowledgment of maternity as work. This last point was aimed, more than at the payment of a salary, at a social recognition based on the valorisation of the role of mothers. Some women felt the birth of a child as a powerful moment that would improve and empower them, others were worried because they perceived the impossibility to reconcile their needs with the child's ones. The issue of time emerges as well. Many spoke of being always in a hurry without reaching a proper realization. The contrast between movement and maternity emerges also here in the tales of women who desired a child, but perceived this desire at odds with their role within the movement. The topic of creativity in relation to work, also intellectual, and maternity, was debated as well.

⁶²⁴ The cooperative provided women with a space to exhibit and fostered research and the rediscovery of women artists. Despite not all its members were part of feminist groups, the collective had its roots in feminism.

cooperative of Porta Ticinese in Milan,⁶²⁵ the association Donna&Arte⁶²⁶ and the collective Donna-Immagine, for example, shared an interest in visuality. However, far from being the exclusive interest of these groups, the image was central also in the practices of collectives that did not have a direct relation to visuality. Marta Seravalli has noticed that many of them used images as “visual metaphor of the feminist novelty.”⁶²⁷ For example, on May 9, 1971, during one of the first public appearances of the movement, the collective Pompeo Magno, later Movimento Femminista Romano, organized *Chi sei veramente? (Who are you really?)*, an open-air exhibition denouncing the influence exercised by mass-media on women. The exhibition consisted of collages made of magazines’ clippings showing the stereotypes that women were pushed to identify with.⁶²⁸ The photos were used as a tool of political intervention also in the book *Riprendiamoci la vita. Immagini del movimento delle donne. Foto di Paola Agosti*.⁶²⁹

The Collettivo madri demonstrated its interest in images in more than one occasion. From 1977 it collaborated with the collective on the delivery⁶³⁰ on the translation of the 1972 *Birth Book* by Raven Lang, one of the first books on birth written from a female perspective. It described birth as a natural and empowering process.⁶³¹ The Italian translation *Riprendiamoci il parto! Esperienze alternative di parto: resoconti, testimonianze, immagini*⁶³² was curated by Stefania Ciavattoni, Laura Laureti,

⁶²⁵ See Fernanda Fedi, *Collettivi e gruppi artistici a Milano: ideologie e percorsi 1968-1985* (Roma: Endas, 1986).

⁶²⁶ The association, born in 1977, brought together professional women artists and, according to Seravalli, had even more direct contacts with the feminist movement than the cooperative Beato Angelico. See Seravalli, *Arte e femminismo*, 88.

⁶²⁷ Marta Seravalli, *Arte e femminismo*, 91.

⁶²⁸ The book *Donnità. Cronache del movimento femminista romano* documents this exhibition and other initiatives of the group. See AA.VV., *Donnità. Cronache del movimento femminista romano* (Roma: Centro di documentazione del Movimento femminista romano, 1976).

⁶²⁹ Paola Agosti et al., *Riprendiamoci la vita. Immagini del movimento delle donne. Foto di Paola Agosti* (Roma: Savelli, 1977). On the work behind the publication see Silvia Bordini, “Il dentro e il fuori,” in *Il gesto femminista. La rivolta delle donne: nel corpo, nel lavoro, nell’arte*, eds. Ilaria Bussoni and Raffaella Perna (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2014), 40-45.

⁶³⁰ The collective was born out of an interest in the material and psychological conditions in which women were obliged to give birth. Among the members there were also two gynecologists: Cristina Damiani and Ida Volpi.

⁶³¹ Raven Lang, *Birth Book* (Genesis Press: USA, 1972) was written by a homebirth midwife.

⁶³² *Riprendiamoci il parto! Esperienze alternative di parto: resoconti, testimonianze, immagini* (Roma: Savelli, 1978).

Silvana Pisa e Patrizia Regazzoni. It was a photographic book that followed the birth of seven children. As Regazzoni has underlined, while the text was too much ideological and emphatic, the photos were very impactful and presented a completely new point of view on birth.⁶³³

The collective was not only interested in the way maternity was discussed in society, but also in how it was accepted, lived and talked about within the movement. In 1978 they organized a national conference on the topic. The daylong meeting, held in Governo Vecchio, was documented by Patrizia Regazzoni and Gabriella Mercadini.⁶³⁴ The book *L'Altra mamma*, published following the conference, ended with their pictures. According to Regazzoni, despite its limits, the book, which recorded all the different positions emerged during the conference, brought out ambiguity and contradictions of the maternal role.⁶³⁵ The photos showed different moments of the conference but also more intimate photos of mother and daughters during the meetings of the collective. Here the members were portrayed in their double role of activists and mothers.⁶³⁶

⁶³³ See Patrizia Regazzoni, "Dal Gruppo madri al gruppo donne," December 5, 2013. Available at <http://self-helpriparliamentone.blogspot.com/2013/12/dal-gruppo-madri-al-gruppo-nonne.html#more> (accessed October 13, 2016).

⁶³⁴ Gabriella Mercadini's photos were exhibited during the exhibition *L'Altro sguardo: fotografie italiane, 1965-2015*. See Raffaella Perna, ed., *L'Altro sguardo: fotografie italiane, 1965-2015* (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 2016). Exhibition catalogue, 5 October 2016-8 January 2017. La triennale di Milano. The exhibition, which included works from the Donata Pizzi's archive, included also works by Paola Agosti, Martina Bacigalupo, Isabella Balena, Marina Ballo Charmet, Liliana Barchiesi, Letizia Battaglia, Tomaso Binga (Bianca Menna), Giovanna Borgese, Marcella Campagnano, Silvia Camporesi, Monica Carocci, Lisetta Carmi, Gea Casolaro, Elisabetta Catalano, Carla Cerati, Augusta Conchiglia, Paola De Pietri, Agnese De Donato, Paola Di Bello, Rà di Martino, Anna Di Prospero, Bruna Esposito, Eva Frapiccini, Simona Ghizzoni, Bruna Ginammi, Elena Givone, Nicole Gravier, "Gruppo del mercoledì" (Bundi Alberti, Diane Bond, Mercedes Cuman, Adriana Monti, Paola Mattioli, Silvia Truppi), Adelita Husni-Bey, Luisa Lambri, Lisa Magri, Lucia Marcucci, Raffaella Mariniello, Allegra Martin, Paola Mattioli, Malena Mazza, Libera Mazzoleni, Marzia Migliora, Verita Monselles, Maria Mulas, Brigitte Niedermair, Cristina Omenetto, Michela Palermo, Lina Pallotta, Beatrice Pediconi, Agnese Purgatorio, Luisa Rabbia, Moira Ricci, Sara Rossi, Marialba Russo, Chiara Samugheo, Shobha, Alessandra Spranzi, Francesca Volpi.

⁶³⁵ See Patrizia Regazzoni, "Dal Gruppo madri al gruppo donne," December 5, 2013. Available at <http://self-helpriparliamentone.blogspot.com/2013/12/dal-gruppo-madri-al-gruppo-nonne.html#more> (accessed October 13, 2016).

⁶³⁶ Mercadini also collaborated with Silvana Pisa on the book *L'allattamento al seno* (The breastfeeding). The text was a sort of manual with information and suggestions to enjoy this experience, without making the women who decided not to breastfeed feeling guilty.

5.7.1 The exhibition *Maria, Medea e le altre: I volti ambivalenti della madre*

In 1982 the Cooperative Il taccuino d'oro⁶³⁷ organized *Maria, Medea e le altre: I volti ambivalenti della madre* at Palazzo Valentini, seat of the Province of Rome. The exhibition was part of a wider event, organized with the collaboration of the municipality of Rome, that tried to give an overview of the ways in which maternity had been discussed and represented through “images, cinema and words.”⁶³⁸ Beside the exhibition and a press review,⁶³⁹ also a conference⁶⁴⁰ and a film festival⁶⁴¹ were organized. The initiative was meant to be a reflection on maternity as a turning point in every woman's life and on what was perceived as a fake distinction between good and bad mothers.⁶⁴²

“Maternity goes through all of us, mothers and not mothers: our body implies it, our identity of women has been sketched “upon” or “against” the model of our mother. Not every woman chooses to have children. Many of those who choose it, anyway, do not want that maternity becomes their only reason to live. However, for the majority of women being mother is still the only area of expression, the only measure of the passing of time

⁶³⁷ In 1981 the collective mothers became the cooperative “Il taccuino d'oro. Gruppo di studi e ricerche sulla maternità e sulla condizione femminile.” The new title recalled the 1962 narrative book *The Golden Notebook* by Doris Lessing, whose ideas and language foresaw the feminist movement that was born a few years later.

⁶³⁸ “Flyer 8 marzo” Archivia, Coll. Madri, Materiali mostra fotografica *Maria Medea e le altre 1982*. Coop. Taccuino d'oro (collettivo madri).

⁶³⁹ Provincia di Roma, Cooperativa Il Taccuino d'oro, *Maria, Medea e le altre. Il materno nelle parole delle donne: rassegna stampa* (Cosenza-Roma: Lericì 1982). The book collected articles on maternity published on various journals between the 1970s and 1980s.

⁶⁴⁰ The conference saw the participation as speakers of Rossana Rossanda, Manuela Fraire, Anna Rossi Doria, Elena Gianini Belotti, Maria Grazia Minetti e Giglia Tedesco.

⁶⁴¹ The film festival included: *Bellissima* by Luchino Visconti, *Georgy, Svegliati* by Silvio Narizzano, *A woman under the influence* by John Cassavetes, *Maternale* by Giovanna Gagliardo, *Sinfonia d'autunno* by Ingmar Bergman, *Les Hérétiques* by Márta Mészáros and *Germania pallida madre* by Helma Sanders.

⁶⁴² Between 1981 and 1982 the ambiguity of maternal was the topic of the courses at the cultural centre Virginia Woolf. This, created in 1977 by the collective *Donne e cultura*, was one of the privileged places of elaboration of a separatist culture. The courses included: “The maternal instinct and its functions in the medical ideology” by Luisa Appicciutoli, “Bad mothers in painting of the '700 and '800 – Body. Maternity. Nature” by Silvia Bordini and “Maternity and death in the Venetian painting of Renaissance” by Federica di Castro.

[...] To fix through different forms – from religious iconography to the most recent images of ads – the different images of motherhood that have been imposed upon us for centuries, and to which we have more or less consciously conformed. Every Maria has inside a bit of Medea and the other way around.”⁶⁴³ The words used by the cooperative to present the initiative summarize some of its main highlights: the importance of maternity for women, both mothers and not mothers; the focus on the relationship mother-daughter; the concept of motherhood as creativity, and sometimes the only creativity left to women; the role of images in establishing the stereotypes that have been imposed on women for centuries. No catalogue of the exhibition was published. However, some pictures on display ended the press review published on that occasion. Nevertheless, thanks to the archive it is possible to partially reconstruct the planning process of the exhibition, which involved two different plans in addition to the final one, and to get an idea of the totality of images used.⁶⁴⁴

The exhibition was divided into twelve sections: everyday gestures, fatigue, conditioning, body and intimacy, mother and daughter, moments for herself, the ambivalence, good mothers and bad mothers, pride, pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding.⁶⁴⁵ The rich archival material reveals the extent of the meticulous research that Silvana Pisa and the other members of the collective undertook in planning the exhibition. The choice of images reflected the mixture of high and low culture that was a peculiar character of feminist visual culture. Images taken from the most different fields, from religious iconography to fine arts and advertisements, were selected. Many reproductions of Madonnas,

⁶⁴³ From the flyer of the initiative.

⁶⁴⁴ One of the other two plans was subdivided into 7 parts: everyday gestures, separation, pride, body and intimacy, conditioning and fatigue, good mothers and bad mothers, pregnancy. In addition to these, the final version of the exhibition included only a section dedicated to birth and breastfeeding and another one dedicated to the mother-daughter relationship. Thus, this plan seemed closer to the final version of the exhibition. The second alternative plan found in the archive was much more articulated and included sections that disappeared in the final version.

⁶⁴⁵ This plan of the exhibition is taken from the last section of the book collecting the articles on the topic of maternity, which showed a small selection of the works displayed during the exhibition and, therefore, seems the most reliable source to establish its final organization. See Provincia di Roma, Cooperativa Il Taccuino d'oro, *Maria, Medea e le altre*.

for example by Bellini, were preserved together with extracts from Kristeva's *Motherhood According to Bellini*.⁶⁴⁶

Some photos (fig. 160-167) show the layout of the exhibition, which consisted of moveable panels on which reproductions of artworks and collages, likely realized by the members of the collective, were juxtaposed to excerpts from texts, which have been preserved as well. Flipping through them in the archive, the variety of written sources used by the collective emerges. The texts included not only feminist thinkers like Simone De Beauvoir, Adrienne Rich, Laura Grasso, Luce Irigaray, Luisa Muraro and Julia Kristeva but also Roland Barthes, Jung and Nietzsche, thus proposing a complete and diverse overview of the discourse around maternity as it had unfolded along the centuries.

The photos of the setting of the exhibition become an object of interest in their own right. The photographer is unknown. However, she⁶⁴⁷ seems to choose the shots in order to create a dialogue between the members of the collective and the reproductions of the artworks behind them. To the point where she photographed one of the members of the collective, pregnant, in front of the panel where Klimt's *Hope I* was hanging, with almost an ironic effect (fig. 154).

As previously mentioned, the exhibition was organized in collaboration with the municipality of Rome. In a written piece included among the materials about the exhibition, this collaboration and the choice of the location were considered positively as they allowed the collective to get out of their ghetto. According to this testimony, even the images of birth, despite some curiosity and some angry reactions, stimulated debate more than opposition.⁶⁴⁸ The debate around the necessity to work with the institutions or without them was central in the Italian

⁶⁴⁶ Julia Kristeva, "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini," in *Desire in language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* by Julia Kristeva, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, transl. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine and Leon. S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 237-270. Kristeva wrote an interesting examination of images of maternity by Giovanni Bellini, but also a more articulated reflection on the way motherhood and "becoming a mother" are treated in science and Christian theology.

⁶⁴⁷ I assume, as it was often the case, that the photographer was one member of the collective or of the movement.

⁶⁴⁸ "Materiali del collettivo madri (1976-2010...)," in Archivia, archivio collettivo madri, folder Coll. Madri Materiali mostra fotografica Maria Medea e le altre Coop. Taccuino d'oro (collettivo madri), 228-229.

movement. The strict separatism that characterized the work of the first feminist groups diminished already in the second half of the 1970s, when the collaboration with institutions and women's organizations closer to political parties, like UDI, was considered more acceptable. Nevertheless, this process did not happen without being subject to harsh critique. It does not seem a chance that on the special issue for the 8th of March of the same year, published just a few days before, *Quotidiano donna* strongly ironized on the celebration day and, also, on the organization of an exhibition on that occasion.⁶⁴⁹

The translation of the text *Birth Book* by Lang, the appendix of photos by Gabriella Mercadini in *L'altra mamma* and the exhibition *Maria, Medea e le altre* testify of the importance attributed to images as a political instrument by the collettivo madri. They wanted to bring out the cultural meanings hidden within images and raise questions about ways of seeing maternity. By showing all the ways in which maternity had been represented, the exhibition aimed at denouncing the stereotypes that had been imposed on women for centuries. Yet, the collaboration with the municipality is telling of a less radical spirit that animated the exhibition. After all, 1982 was also the beginning of that "diffused feminism" that Seravalli speaks about and that coincided with the end of the more radical experience of the movement.

5.8 The representation of maternity in feminist publications: *Effe* and *Quotidiano donna*

The chapter has already shown how feminist magazines and papers contributed to change the image of maternity through the publication of photos of naked pregnant bodies. This paragraph will explore two other strategies that *Effe*⁶⁵⁰ and

⁶⁴⁹ *Quotidiano Donna*, no. 1, March 5, 1982.

⁶⁵⁰ *Effe*, issued between 1973 and 1982, was published by the Editore Dedalo for two years before becoming fully self-managed by the Cooperative Effe. During the almost ten years of its publication, it changed its nature several times, going from representing the whole movement to becoming the voice of selected groups within it. A more detailed history of the journal, in addition to all its digitized issues, can be found on the website www.efferivistafemminista.it

*Quotidiano Donna*⁶⁵¹ used to convey a different idea of maternity. Plenty of articles discussed maternity from a new and original perspective in both publications. Considering the number of articles published on the topic by *Effe*, the issue of January 1977 represented a crucial point. The whole issue was dedicated to maternity and it brought out the debate that was still lively within the movement through the accounts of its members, who expressed their different opinions. On one side, maternity was represented as irreconcilable with feminism. On the other, however, also a positive view of maternity was expressed.

Competing views of maternity were conveyed not only through the choice of the articles, but also through images. Ida Dominijanni claimed a specificity of the ways in which feminist publications conveyed their political message. Every magazine spoke on behalf of the group that worked on it, through its contents, language, structure and graphics, which established priorities in the hierarchies of topics and issues addressed. Dominijanni suggested that this was valid in particular for feminist publications. Since they were born out of the desire of women to overcome the limits posed to their own representation of the world and of themselves, their refusal of the traditional separation of disciplines and of the dichotomy between private and political, reason and sensibility, directly impacted the publications.⁶⁵² An article in *Quotidiano Donna* confirmed the attempt of the paper to provide readers with a key to interpret the reasons behind the choice of topics and understand the importance attributed to them as a way to convey the paper's political message.⁶⁵³ The role of images in the general organization of the paper was acknowledged also in a letter⁶⁵⁴ published with the title *Immaginiamoci la nostra immagine* (Let's imagine our

⁶⁵¹ *Quotidiano Donna* was published between 1978 and 1982 and had its first headquarter in one of the occupied rooms of the Nardini palace in Rome, the core of the movement at the time. A supplement to the *Quotidiano dei lavoratori* at first, *Quotidiano donna* became completely self-managed in December 1978 and opened a new branch in Milan in 1979. See Elisa Salvati, *Donne senza veline: l'informazione e le sfide del movimento femminista attraverso le pagine di Quotidiano donna* (Roma: Teseco, 2010).

⁶⁵² Ida Dominijanni, Roberta Tatafiore, Maria Luisa Boccia, Roberta Stella, Clara Jourdan, *La politica nelle riviste delle donne* (Parma: Biblioteca delle donne Mauretta Pelagatti, 1995), 6.

⁶⁵³ Enrica Coll. Informazione del Governo Vecchio, "La penna, il microfono e la macchina fotografica," *Quotidiano donna*, no. 07, June 17, 1978.

⁶⁵⁴ *Quotidiano donna* was made of letters sent by the readers. Hence, there was no difference between these letters and the articles written by the readers.

image). The writer praised the presence of a page inside the paper dedicated exclusively to images as the best way to use their immediate power, usually used against women, this time on their side.⁶⁵⁵

Effe and *Quotidiano Donna* reproduced many artworks on the topic of maternity,⁶⁵⁶ but they both also published a high number of photos of mothers and children that, at first sight, might not seem particularly new (fig. 168-174). In 1980 the issue number 5 of *Quotidiano Donna*, for example, included a dossier on maternity. This explored the theme from many different perspectives and was accompanied by photos taken from *L'altra mamma* (fig. 175).⁶⁵⁷ On the cover page of the same issue an image of mother and daughter was associated to the title "sospendiamo la maternità" (let's suspend maternity) (fig. 176).⁶⁵⁸ Despite the title, all the images represented mothers and their children behaving very affectionately, while hugging, kissing or playing. Many other images of the contemporary feminist movement represented mothers and children, showing the re-evaluation of the mother-daughter bond and the positive feminist reconfiguration of the maternal function and its symbolic value initiated in the second half of the 1970s.

These images, however, were not particularly original on their own. At the time, many magazines and papers, often run by men and totally integrated within the mainstream patriarchal culture, were targeted at women.⁶⁵⁹ Images of mothers and children were not uncommon there. However, as this paragraph will show, the images published on *Effe* and *Quotidiano Donna* changed the representation of maternity according to the debate on the theme that was happening within the movement.

⁶⁵⁵ Anna Trapani, "Verso le dieci del mattino," *Quotidiano donna*, no. 07, June 17, 1978.

⁶⁵⁶ Some examples are Paola Mattioli, "rivoglio la mia immagine. Anche per giocarci. anche per guardarla. anche per mostrarla," *Quotidiano donna*, no. 04, January 27, 1979; Campagnano, *Quotidiano donna*, no. 36, October 17, 1979.

⁶⁵⁷ "inchiesta sulla maternità. L'altra mamma," *Quotidiano Donna*, no. 5, February 13, 1980, 8-9.

⁶⁵⁸ "sospendiamo la maternità," *Quotidiano Donna*, no. 5, February 13, 1980.

⁶⁵⁹ This kind of publications wanted to keep women in their traditional cultural and psychological inferiority by proposing, and stimulating identification with, traditional models. An interesting analysis of some journals for women, the weekly *Amica*, *Annabella*, *Confidenze*, *Gioia*, *Grazia*, *Intimità* and the monthly *Arianna* (later *Cosmopolitan-Arianna*), is in Giovanna Pezzuoli, *La stampa femminile come ideologia* (Milano: Edizioni il formichiere, 1975).

Appearing in these publications already slightly shifted the meaning of those images. Designed, run and realized by women, they were part of the publishing houses, leaflets, posters and magazines, self-published and self-managed by collectives and groups of women, which appeared in the first half of the 1970s in order to give visibility to the movement, in the streets and on the political scene.⁶⁶⁰ *Effe* and *Quotidiano Donna* were distributed in most newspapers' kiosks and, therefore, attempted to reach a wide public, including women not related to the feminist movement, with what Seravalli called a "politics of social diffusion of feminism."⁶⁶¹ Hence, they were clearly political magazines and this alone already influenced the way in which their readers understood the images' message.⁶⁶² Aside from this precondition, I will analyse few examples to see which "connotation procedures"⁶⁶³ were used to add different meanings to the published photos and how these were used in a political way. Indeed, as Barthes clearly explained, the photographic message, especially in the press, is never purely denotative and needs to be deciphered.⁶⁶⁴

The representation of maternity has traits of originality from the very beginning of the publication of *Effe*, in its issue number 1.⁶⁶⁵ In November 1973 the article "Sopravvivere in borgata" was accompanied by a photo (fig. 177) which seemed to catch a moment of a demonstration, as it is clear from the presence of the banners.⁶⁶⁶ It is possible to read two of them. One says "Figli desiderati=figli amati" (Wanted children=loved children), the other "NO all'aborto di classe" (NO to class abortion). The first

⁶⁶⁰ See Piera Codognotto and Francesca Moccagatta, *Editoria femminista in Italia* (Roma: Associazione italiana biblioteche, 1997).

⁶⁶¹ Seravalli, *Arte e femminismo*, 29. The debate on which periodical could be defined feminist was very lively. In the first number of *Differenze* only *Sottosopra* and *Operaie della casa* were included among the feminist publications. *Effe*, on the contrary, was highly criticized as a journal realized by a group of women "who considers making the magazine their feminist activism and who addresses non-feminist women, and mainly from the province." See "Secondo noi," *Differenze*, no. 1, 1976, 4.

⁶⁶² Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," in *Image, Music, Text; essays selected and translated by Stephen Heath* (London: Fontana press, 1977), 16.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁵ There had been already an issue zero in February 1973, but November was the first issue of the publication.

⁶⁶⁶ "Sopravvivere in borgata," *Effe*, November 1973, 6. This image was also published on the cover of *Effe* in June 1975, collecting photos by Daniela Colombo.

one was hanging from the neck of a woman, who stood next to, and seemed to look at, a group of people. This, which is the heart of the image, consisted of a woman and arguably her four children. The mother held the youngest in her arms, while standing surrounded by the other three. The two oldest children seemed to look at the banner and wore, like the mother, a kerchief on their head. The clothing and, in particular, the kerchiefs suggest their belonging to a low social class. The woman in the photo probably did not have any other choice than becoming a mother of four children, and seemed at odds with the other women protesting in the background of the photo. Yet, she was there to protest next to them. The juxtaposition of this mother and the slogan on the posters is striking. Children had to be desired so that they would be loved, but also abortion should not be a consequence of social inequality. The image clearly wanted to define maternity as a choice, but also visually represented it as connected to contemporary fights for abortion and against a background of economic and social problematics.

Page 22 in the same issue was covered by images (fig. 178-180). This time a caption explained how the photos represented some workers during the occupation of a factory when, for the first time, women workers were allowed to bring their children with them. In the photo on the left a woman was feeding a child whom she held on her legs. An activity traditionally carried at home, in a private and familiar space, had been transferred to the space of the factory, where women performed a kind of work that was usually perceived as opposed to their duties of care for children inside the house. By changing location and juxtaposing this photo to one representing a woman working at a sewing machine, the photo reversed this traditional perception and suggested an equivalence between the work at home and the work at the factory.

Other images deviated from the traditional representation of mother and child by showing them in new and unexpected contexts and spaces. In a photo published in November 1974 the mother held the child in her arms, while standing in a square and carrying a banner with the message "Maternità come libera scelta non come catena imposta. M.L.D." (Maternity as a free choice not as an imposed chain. M.L.D.) (fig. 181). The representation of maternity outdoor, and at a demonstration, was a political act,

since maternity had always been considered something private, usually represented in the house. In this way also the separation between the private, inside, as pertaining to women and the public, outside, as the domain of men was overcome. Maternity was represented at protests more often. This was the case also for the photo by Daniela Colombo portraying mother and daughter on the wagon of Pompeo Magno (fig. 182).⁶⁶⁷ In this case, the photo did not only represent mother and daughter in a different space, but also played with many symbols. The mother was hugging the daughter, in what seems a very protective gesture, but at the same time she was singing or shouting, likely a feminist slogan or song. She was sitting on the wagon of Pompeo Magno together with more women and children. A woman making the feminist sign of the triangle and a giant feminist fist in a circle were part of the wagon's scenography. The contrast between these two elements and another element in the background, the church's dome, symbolizing one of the institutions that has imposed on women a model of ideal maternity and womanhood in the figure of the Virgin Mary, was very powerful.

These representations of maternity seem to stem out of the new female expressivity that Anne-Marie Sauzeau Boetti described in 1978. She defined it as a culture made of individual and collective signs that, despite being banished for a very long time, had not been completely forgotten. Women felt the need to transform those pre-linguistic signs into a significant and articulated body, which expressed itself through a different affectivity, a new kind of gestures and body language and a new female creativity. These signs resurfaced also in the new way of coming together that women were experimenting within the groups or during gatherings in the streets.⁶⁶⁸ Among these signs there was also the rediscovery of the maternal body, whose shadow, according to Sauzeau Boetti, was behind any other woman's body.⁶⁶⁹ This, however, was not to claim the existence of a specific *female art*. Sauzeau Boetti also warned against a possible

⁶⁶⁷ The photo was also reproduced on the June 1975 cover of *Effe*, which was made of photos by Daniela Colombo.

⁶⁶⁸ On this new way of being together see Silvia Bordini, "Il dentro e il fuori," in *Il gesto femminista. La rivolta delle donne: nel corpo, nel lavoro, nell'arte*, eds. Ilaria Bussoni and Raffaella Perna (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2014), 40-45.

⁶⁶⁹ Anne-Marie Boetti, *Lessico politico delle donne. 6: Cinema, letteratura, arti visive* (Milano: Gulliver, 1979), 155.

misunderstanding of her discourse. This new way of being did not imply that this womanhood would be the motivation, conscious or unconscious, of women's art, which she did not intend as the illustration of a biological existence. Yet, she spoke of a new way of being within culture and new ways of expression born out of the activation of new sensations and the subversions of gestures that had been taught to women along the centuries.⁶⁷⁰ Maternity was one of the aspects of women's life that underwent a complete transformation, both in the ways it was lived at a personal level and in society. These photos embodied the new female expressivity that involved all the aspects of women's lives, including maternity.

Next to photography, drawings had a privileged role in the representation of maternity in *Effe* and *Quotidiano Donna*. I would like to start this section by looking at a drawing that was published on both, in January 1977 in *Effe* and two years later on the cover of number 6 of *Quotidiano Donna* (fig. 183). The drawing was taken from the book *Perché non i fiori* by Gruppo per l'espressione della donna (Group for the expression of woman).⁶⁷¹ The text, published in 1977, collected a visual translation of the conversations that the group had during their meetings. The members chose to translate their discourses into images because language, written and spoken, was seen as a privileged tool of expression of rationality considered as a masculine characteristic. Images, on the other hand, were deemed more appropriate to express emotions. Drawing, in particular, was preferred to other medium because it was considered more immediate. Even when words were used, they were simply functional to the drawings. Hence, the book used a kind of diary style to bring up questions related to nine aspects of women's lives: childhood, work, sexuality, virginity, wedding, maternity, beauty, age and feminism. The group, as it is clear from its name, was meant to give every woman the possibility of expression, without any aspiration to professionalism.⁶⁷² Thus, every member could

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., 151-155.

⁶⁷¹ Born in 1974 as a consciousness-raising group, it later focused on researching and practicing new ways of channelling creativity.

⁶⁷² The issue of the distinction between professionals and amateurs, which keeps emerging in the chapters, was crucial also in the 1970s. Part of the movement criticized professional artists, while supporting dilettantism and handicrafts. The opinions of this part of the movement emerged, for example, in the criticism of Simona Weller's *Il complesso di*

contribute, without any preference given to those more talented or more familiar with the medium. Despite being inspired by the members' lives, the drawings wanted to speak to all women as they represented common experiences. Hence, the personal was not individual anymore, but collective, therefore political. The drawing reproduced in both publications represented a crying mother sharing the playpen, a cage really, with a child. This drawing, like others from the book's section on maternity, mainly reflected upon maternity as an imposition.⁶⁷³ Nevertheless, next to these expressions coming directly from collectives, many illustrators, graphics and cartoonists collaborated with the publications (fig. 184-190).⁶⁷⁴

Among these, the works of Lydia Sansoni⁶⁷⁵ on maternity stand out for their originality. In many drawings published in *Effe*, Sansoni mocked the cult of motherhood typical of dictatorial regimes in drawings like the woman holding a broom and a pan while giving birth to a full army (fig. 191) or the mother breastfeeding her child while doing the Fascist salute (fig. 192). However, other drawings used a more imaginative style (fig. 193-194). In one of the artist's catalogues, Lalla Romano claimed that in these images Sansoni used the symbol of the egg to celebrate the reproductive powers of maternity.⁶⁷⁶ On the contrary, I think that the egg referred to the women's reproductive system and, hence, to a Fascist ideology reducing maternity to a simple natural and biological fact. Hence, her figures of women turning into trees blossoming with eggs and carrying dozens of eggs in their oversized wombs were another way of mocking the idea of a

Michelangelo. *Ricerca sul contributo dato dalla donna all'arte italiana del novecento*. Riccarda Pagnozzato on the pages of *Effe* criticized the introduction, written by a man, and the whole idea behind the book. See Riccarda Pagnozzato, "Il mercato del femminismo," *Effe*, June 1976, 41; Seravalli, *Arte e femminismo*, 174.

⁶⁷³ Gruppo per l'espressione della donna, *Perché non i fiori* (Milano: La Salamandra, 1975).

⁶⁷⁴ The illustrators collaborating with *Effe* and *Quotidiano Donna* were, among the others, Monica Incisa, Cecilia Capuana, Marika Vila, Elle Kappa, Giulia Maldini. In 1980 they participated in the first exhibition on the feminist comics. See Luisa Cargiani, Carla Guidi, "contra trentatré...ed è la prima mostra femminista," *Quotidiano Donna*, no. 7, March 5, 1980, 8-9.

⁶⁷⁵ See the catalogues of the artist's exhibitions *Lydia Sansoni: agosto settembre 1975* (Forte dei Marmi: Galleria comunale d'arte moderna, 1975). Exhibition catalogue; *Lydia Sansoni: dipinti e disegni: al 9 al 30 aprile 1975, Studio Schubert, Milano* (Milano: Studio Schubert, 1975). The artist did not only realize drawings, but also assemblages, like *Maternità*, 1975 (fig. 195).

⁶⁷⁶ Lalla Romano in *Lydia Sansoni: dipinti e disegni: dal 9 al 30 aprile 1975, Studio Schubert, Milano*, 1.

woman who should just be a mother and give birth to as many children as possible. Nevertheless, I agree with Romano when she speaks of the capacity of Sansoni to retain a strong component of polemic charge through a skilled use of drawing and humour.

5.9 Making a parody of maternity

I would like to conclude this chapter by looking at a photo that seems to summarize some strategies used in the representation of maternity throughout the 1970s. The photo (fig. 196), by Agnese De Donato, documents a moment from the feminist march organized in Rome on 18 January 1975 against the arrest of the gynaecologist Giorgio Conciani and other women prosecuted for abortion in Florence.⁶⁷⁷ De Donato was one of the founders of *Effe* and often documented the lives of the collectives and feminist protests. She defined herself a photo reporter, always trying to document political demonstrations and conduct social inquiries.⁶⁷⁸ Nevertheless, despite acknowledging the role of documentation of the photographic medium implied in the use of the term photo reporter, De Donato also explained how photography became in fact an integral part of those situations. The activists were happy to be photographed while exhibiting with pride their feminist gestures.⁶⁷⁹ The woman in this photo was wearing a kerchief on her head, similar to those traditionally worn by women in order to cover their heads in churches, while some

⁶⁷⁷ An abortion clinic was discovered in a villa in Florence in January 1975 and the gynaecologist Conciani was arrested with other people working there. "Clinica degli aborti. 36 rinvii a giudizio," *Corriere della Sera*, December 10, 1975.

⁶⁷⁸ Agnese De Donato, "Fotografare per il femminismo? È stata come una liberazione," in *Il gesto femminista. La rivolta delle donne: nel corpo, nel lavoro, nell'arte*, eds. Ilaria Bussoni and Raffaella Perna (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2014), 52-54.

⁶⁷⁹ On her see also Laura Iamurri, "Agnese De Donato, il movimento femminista e la rivista 'effe'," in *Arte fuori dall'arte. Incontri e scambi fra arti visive e società negli anni Settanta*, eds. Cristina Casero, Elena Di Raddo and Francesca Gallo (Milano: postmediabooks, 2017), 137-144. A different perspective on the relationship between feminist activists and photography during protests is given in Anna Maria Zanetti, ed., *Le ragazze di ieri. Immagini e testimonianze del movimento femminista veneto* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2000). The photos that accompany the book, taken between 1975 and 1977 by Luccia Donesin, are presented as indispensable sources for historical research. They give an impression of the social tensions and the political climate of those years. Yet, Donesin emphasize how in Padova, because of the political climate of those years, women protesting and police present at the marches did not like being photographed.

dolls, naked and probably male, according to their short hair, were hanging from her neck. The photo is the document of what seems to be a playful performance that mocked the traditional role of the woman-mother and, at the same time, drew attention on the controversial theme of abortion. The dressing-up is another example of how the playful component merged and fit with the ideological basis in the visual expressions of the feminist movement.⁶⁸⁰

Conclusion

This thesis has examined selected examples of representation of maternity by women involved with feminist movements in the 20th century Italy. The last chapter has identified, as a critical exercise and not with the intention of circumscribing or rendering absolute, certain trajectories in the representations of maternity in the 1970s and early 1980s. This last paragraph will highlight the main differences and correspondences identified in the timeframe of the entire thesis. The first chapter retraced the participation of the members of the Society of Women Artists in the *Mostra Nazionale di Belle Arti* at the Esposizione Internazionale del Sempione in Milan in 1906. The chapter focused on the discrepancy between the participation, clearly political, and the artworks on display. Indeed, despite the lack of an overarching political content, the group's participation in the exhibition has been considered a political act in and of itself attesting the gendered consciousness of the participating women artists. Later in the chapter, this has worked as a frame within which it has been possible to interpret works like the painting *L'uomo di domani* by Carla Cesia di Vegliasco, the images of maternity by Adelina Zandrino and the women writers' photographic portraits in *La Donna*. All of them have been considered part of a visual culture that used different strategies to reflect the diverse and fragmented panorama of the feminist movement of the beginning of the century.

⁶⁸⁰ Silvia Bordini, "Il dentro e il fuori," in *Il gesto femminista. La rivolta delle donne: nel corpo, nel lavoro, nell'arte*, eds. Ilaria Bussoni and Raffaella Perna (Roma: DeriveApprodi, 2014), 42-43.

The second chapter followed the developments of this visual culture within the broader panorama of transformations involving feminist movement and organizations during Fascism. Due to the strong control exercised by the regime over women's associations, the spaces where women could freely express their point of view and their own representations of other women were dramatically cut. Yet, emphasizing the necessarily ambiguous mixture of consensus and dissent of the period, the chapter investigated two instances in which women tried to reaffirm their right to self-representation. The first one was the section of the calendar of the *Almanacco della donna italiana*, especially with respect to the years 1934, 1935, and the 1936 calendar of the parallel publication *Almanacco Annuario della donna italiana*. The second example was the 1933-1934 exhibition *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna* at the Lyceum of Florence. These attempts to give women a possibility to represent themselves coincided with a more stringent control over women's activities. Even though most of the images of maternity did not question traditional representations of maternity per se, the chapter provided some evidence of attempts to challenge a prevailing masculine visual culture also during the Fascist period. I claim that also the 1930 painting *La donna e il fantoccio* by Ida Salvagnini Bidoli fell within these attempts.

Chapter three followed the development of the representation of maternity in the post war period, when for some time women's condition did not seem to radically change, despite the recognition of the right to vote. The chapter focused in particular on the works *Origine, Tenda, Ambiente Arancio* and *Triplice Tenda* by Carla Accardi, where the artist prefigured some core elements of the future developments of the theme. The chapter also examined the posters published by UDI and showed how in the immediate post-war period they reflected the persistence of a model of womanhood heavily relying on the image of mother.

The analysis in chapter four, far from trying to be exhaustive, has highlighted some interesting points in comparison to the previous ones. With the new-feminism, representations of maternity have been central in the elaboration and critique of women's identity. In this period, photography played a key role in denouncing stereotypical images as fabricated rather than

natural and helped to shift preconceived ideas about maternity. Iconic images of maternity were transformed by artists like Monselles and Oursler, but completely reinvented as well in, for example, Giovanna De Sanctis' drawings and lithographs. The ways in which maternity was represented in the 1970s reflect the developments of the more radical critique of images and ways of seeing developed within the movement. A critique that the first feminist movement, in particular in its maternalist declination, lacked, together with a critique of the structure of the family itself. Indeed, the representations of maternity from the first feminist movement investigated the material conditions of women rather than questioning the representation of maternity itself and its position in relation to women's identity and role in society. The images appeared as the most logic outcome of a movement where, despite the internal divisions and the attempts to provoke a change of the position of women in society, as for the Society of women artists, a moderate feminism was still prevailing.

Precisely thanks to the analysis of a visual culture related to the feminist movement at the beginning of the century, the thesis brings out the 1970s as a real breaking point also at visual level. While images played a key role in the critique of the traditional definition of womanhood and maternity with the emergence of the new feminism, the representation of maternity within the feminist movement at the beginning of the century followed a traditional ideal of womanhood, more compliant with social standards, with the exception of few examples, such as *L'uomo di domani* by Carla Celesia di Vegliasco and *La donna e il fantoccio* by Ida Salvagnini Bidoli. In the photos published at the beginning of the century maternity was still represented mainly within the family boundaries, inside the family house, therefore in the traditional domain of women. The mothers with their children were photographed at the table where also the husband was sitting, on the sofa, in the studio, or, if outside, in the family garden. On the contrary, the mothers of the new feminism were portrayed in the squares and in the streets, during protests, or at meetings of the collectives. Moreover, they were often represented with other women. Thus, while reclaiming the role of maternity and the relationship mother-child, these images celebrated the collectivity at the basis of the movement as well.

Space, real and virtual, was another key interest in the movement throughout the whole century. In 1906 the women of the Society of women artists successfully managed to obtain a room in a traditionally masculine space and, thus, challenged women's usual inferior position within the mainstream exhibition system. Meanwhile, the painting *L'uomo di domani*, a politically charged image by Carla Celesia di Vegliasco, was refused by the Venice Biennial. Attempts to find new spaces, of expression but also of personal development, were at the core of the new feminism as well. These spaces, eventually conquered, entered the images in the 1970s and radically transformed the representation of maternity.

Suggestions for further research

As a first analysis of feminist visual culture in Italy, this study has ambitiously covered most of the 20th century. The breadth of the period considered has led to a productive overview of the connections between visual culture and feminist movements. Yet, as already mentioned, this broad perspective forced me to make a selection and did not allow me to explore in depth all the possible paths. Further research could certainly focus on the visual culture produced by ONMI and other Fascist women's associations through their exhibitions and publications. Moreover, women-only exhibitions from the first half of the century that have not been explored in this study could be examined as well. Furthermore, more biographical information about the artists could be retrieved and their connections with feminist associations further investigated. Finally, it would be interesting to keep exploring the representation of maternity during the 1970s and beyond, in connection with the contemporary developments of the feminist movement.

APPENDIX

Italian original texts translated in the thesis.

Pag. 1

“per aumentare soprattutto nei giovani la conoscenza sulla propria salute riproduttiva e fornire strumenti utili per tutelare la fertilità attraverso la prevenzione, la diagnosi precoce e la cura delle malattie che possono comprometterla”

“La bellezza non ha età. La fertilità sì”

Pag. 43

“se non si tenta non si ottiene niente”

Pag. 48

“artista della casa”

“senza mai esagerare”

Pag. 54

“Qualcuno osservò che il semplice fatto di essere artiste non bastava a giustificare la costituzione di un gruppo, al che è facile rispondere che – mentre nessun articolo del Regolamento vieta ad artiste di fare un gruppo – sta di fatto che a comporre il nostro gruppo si sono chiamate, tra le artiste, soltanto quelle che presentavano, a giudizio delle proponenti, una speciale affermazione di personalità artistica. Altri osservò che il gruppo non era regionale; ma neppur questo è prescritto dal Regolamento, il quale ammette la regionalità come giustificazione dei gruppi in difetto di qualsiasi altra fisionomia. Del resto confidiamo troppo nella larghezza di vedute degli egregi

componenti la Commissione per poter dar peso ad argomenti di questa natura”

Pag. 55

“sarei ben contenta di una risposta affermativa”

Pag. 59

“...Sulla cultura della donna c’è poco da star allegri; dico però: “Chi l’ha fatta così? Chi la vuole così? Vuoi uomini e nessun altro che voi! [...] Voi che trattate questa donna come un giocattolo degno di un benevolo compatimento, in null’altro serie che in materie di far marmocchi”

“Il fiore di loto deve crescere sotto il fiume prima di sbocciare in un gioir divino [...]”

Pag. 61

“presa per imitazione, non oso dire per obbedienza, dal padrone di casa, sia insomma un’altra virtù domestica che sarebbe mancata in loro se il capo di casa fosse stato medico o agricoltore”

“a separar così l’arte di queste pittrici e scultrici dall’arte dei loro uomini si rischia di non capirne più la ragione intima e la causa prima”

Pag. 62

“la percentuale delle infime — delle impossibili — non è superiore a quella dei maschi”

Pag. 65

“Incertezza sul valore dei miei lavori. Incertezza sul lavoro degli altri che al mio si collega; apprezzamenti e

sghignazzamenti di chi non sa, non comprende e ride [...] Tutto assai difficile. Ma vado avanti [...]"

"Il giudizio severo non mi ha meravigliato affatto e tantomeno impressionato"

"un tentativo verso quello che mi pareva e mi pare tuttora sia missione dell'arte: esprimere cioè, un pensiero [...] con una armonia di linea e colore serbando quell'equilibrio sia nel soggetto come nella forma"

Pag. 66

"la tristezza di molte maternità"

Pag. 73

"fu sposa e madre, tutta assorta nei familiari affetti; ella fu donna solamente, e la penna stette inoperosa per alcuni anni"

"adempie il suo compito di madre"

Pag. 74

"la mia ricchezza"

"nonostante sappia vivere così nobilmente nel mondo delle idee [...] si occupa a meraviglia dell'amministrazione domestica, anche di quella dei suoi due figli"

"vissi come vivono le ragazze educate a divenire buone spose e buone madri"

Pag. 75

"semplicemente un individuo spregevole"

“piuttosto, quella donna, che ha la consapevolezza di possedere una così prepotente personalità [...] sappia rinunciare ai figli”

Pag. 76

“seppe accogliere, in egual misura, i tre amori più grandi e puri che sempre sublimano la donna: amore di madre, amore dell’arte e devozione filiale”

Pag. 80

“le sue indipendenze e tutte le sue irrequietudini”

“Arte è sorriso anche nella tristezza [...] vuole tutto da chi sceglie, chiede tutto alla madre. E la madre trova nell’arte la sua sublimazione”

Pag. 81

“Farò il ritratto di mio figlio in pittura. Voglio avere il bel volto consolatore vivo, dinanzi alla mia angoscia”

Pag. 98

“conciliabolo delle femministe zitellone involontarie”

“femminismo chiassoso e facinoroso”

Pag. 101

“È un fatto abbastanza strano che questo tema sia stato svolto assai più spesso dagli uomini che non dalle donne artiste, sebbene la maternità, - momento prevalente in queste rappresentazioni - sia più vicina all’anima femminile e da essa più profondamente sentita e compresa”

“Incitare le nostre artiste ad occuparsi di questo tema sublime”

Pag. 107

“se non vi fossero altre vie d’uscita”

“suggerire di fare la Mostra assieme al sindacato in collaborazione. Dato che l’organizzazione è compiuta e che dall’estero circa duecento opere sono giunte a Firenze [...] non è più possibile ritirarci senza creare ----una atmosfera di indignazione verso le organizzazioni italiana. Aggiungere che specialmente dalla Germania l’organizzazione ha avuto successo ---- soltanto per simpatia verso il Regime.”

“la nostra ----non è una semplice esposizione generale di opere ma è un concorso le cui opere vengono esposte; bisogna perciò insistere sul fatto che si tratta soltanto di un concorso [...]”

Pag. 140

“Questa fase creativa corrisponde ad una istanza d’unità, al rifiuto della parcellizzazione (la donna presente come emancipata culturale ma assente come ipotesi diversa sul mondo). La fine degli anni '60 rappresentò per Carla l’introspezione feroce, il reperimento della propria condizione storica, l’immersione nel sogno/segno. Allora ebbe la visione dell’esperienza primordiale del desiderio femminile, il labirinto rosa e luminoso, la madre, l’amore anteriore alla castrazione e all’intervento rivale del padre, la realtà circolare anteriore alla metaforizzazione della donna”

Pag. 153

“struttura di base del movimento femminista”

Pag. 165

“Tornando ai disegni io non so quanto di tutto questo sono riuscita a dire attraverso di loro. Certo mi sembra quasi che l’immagine senza un racconto, una storia fatta di parole non riesca più a “significare” tutto quello che dovrebbe; vorrei almeno che questa ricerca fatta con le figure fosse un pezzettino di un discorso più vasto sulla maternità e sui nodi che vi si intrecciano, discorso che fino ad ora abbiamo fatto poco, quasi che rimuovessimo questo pezzo di noi così grosso e così terribile, così difficile a viverci.”

Pag. 170-171

“[...] necessità di riflessione e confronto sulla maternità. Due domande, due scelte, fare o non fare, intanto...un abbraccio”

Pag. 172

“E poi violenta nella sua fissità l’immagine della madre. Come grande madonna rinascimentale questa immagine, che già nel testo si dà come “quadro”, come momento di realizzazione della potenzialità femminile, realizzazione del fine ultimo, l’attività dell’allattare e del gestire il bambino, unica immagine positiva e codificata. La violenza dell’idea, l’unidimensionalità di questa madre, il dover essere di questa immagine, è il trionfo dello sguardo maschile”

“[...] proprio perché è stata l’unica immagine concessa va rotta. Rotta e ricomposta. Perché se la nego completamente, nego quel nesso che mi lega a un punto di vista femminile che è l’origine di un rapporto tra donne negato prima ancora che io abbia la possibilità di ricordarmene.”

“La maternità ci attraversa tutte, madri e non madri: il nostro corpo la prevede, la nostra identità di donne si è abbozzata “sul” o “contro” il modello di nostra madre. Non tutte le donne scelgono di avere figli. Molte di quelle che lo scelgono non intendono comunque che la maternità debba diventare l’unica ragione della loro vita. Ma per la maggior parte delle donne l’essere madre significa ancora l’unico ambito di “espressione”, la sola scansione del tempo [...] Fissare attraverso varie forme – dall’iconografia religiosa alle immagini della pubblicità più recente – le differenti immagini di maternità che ci sono state per secoli imposte e a cui abbiamo, più o meno consapevolmente aderito [...] In ogni Maria c’è un po’ di Medea e viceversa.”

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IMAGES



Fig. 1. Campaign for the "Fertility Day" organized by the Italian Ministry of Health in 2016.



Fig. 2. Letterhead of the Società delle artiste, Archivio Storico dell'Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan, Italy.

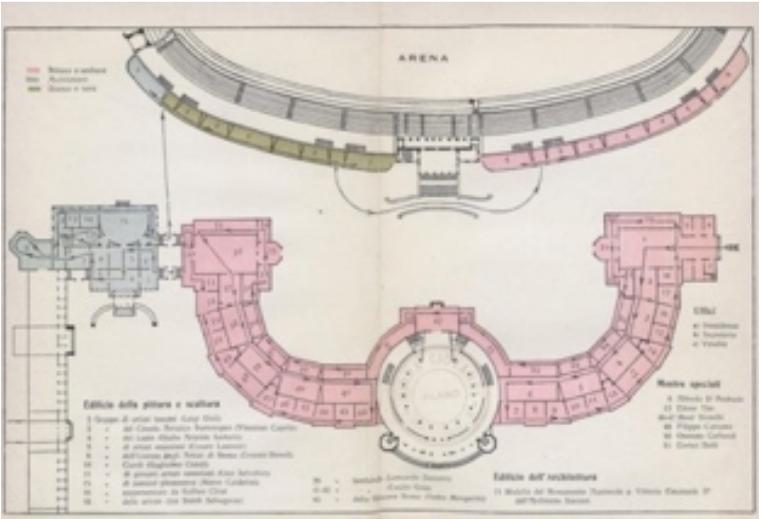


Fig. 3. Layout of the *Mostra nazionale di Belle Arti, Esposizione Internazionale del Sempione*, Milan, 1906.



Fig. 4. Carla Celesia di Vegliasco, *L'uomo di domani*, 1903. Reproduced in Francesca Cagianelli, ed., *Carla Celesia di Vegliasco e il Camposanto di Pisa. Le decorazioni inedite della Villa "Il Poggio" a Collesalvetti (1924)* (Debate Otello: Livorno, 2002).

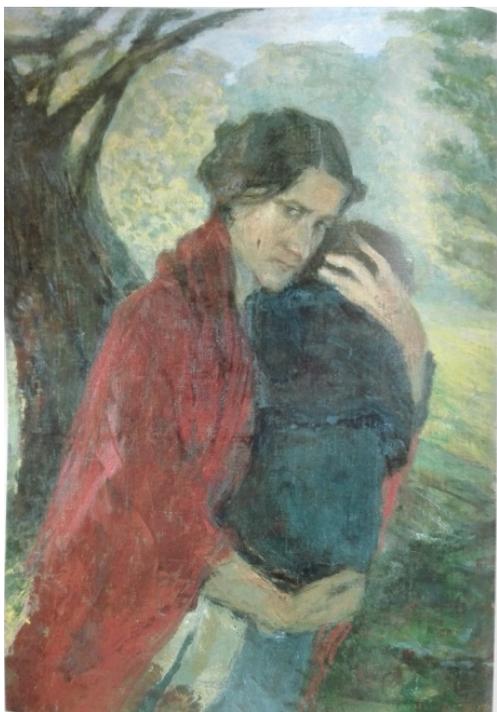


Fig. 5. Carla Celesia di Vegliasco, *Maternità - Studio per L'Uomo di domani*, 1903.

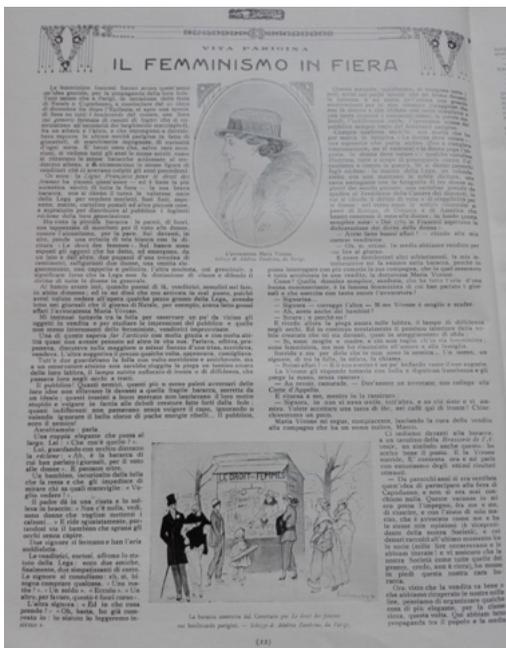


Fig. 6. Ernesta Campolonghi, "Il femminismo in fiera," *La Donna*, no. 218, 1914, 22. Illustration: Adelina Zandrino.



Fig. 7. Ernesta Campolonghi, "Il femminismo in fiera," *La Donna*, no. 218, 1914, 22. Illustration: Adelina Zandrino.



Fig. 8. Ernesta Campolonghi, "Il femminismo in fiera," *La Donna*, no. 218, 1914, 22.
Illustration: Adelina Zandrino.



Fig. 9. Adelina Zandrino, *Alba Mater*, no date.

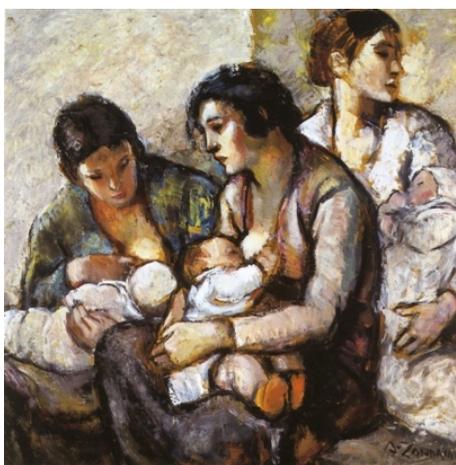


Fig. 10. Adelina Zandrino, *Madre*, 1933.



Fig. 11. Adelina Zandrino, *Sogni di Madre*, 1935.



Fig. 12. Adele Rovito Bresciano, "Grazia Deledda," *La Donna*, no. 15, 1905, 12.

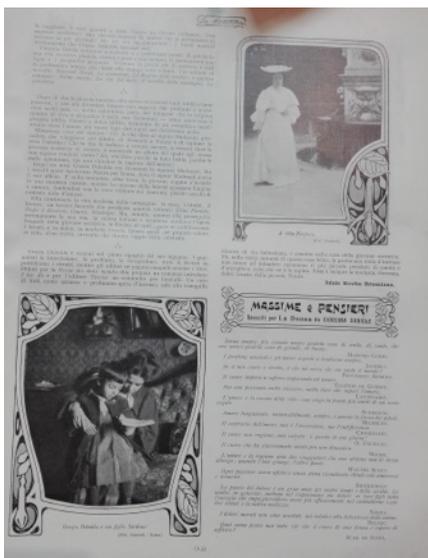


Fig. 13. Adele Rovito Bresciano, "Grazia Deledda," *La Donna*, no. 15, 1905, 13.



Fig. 14. Enrica Grasso, "Jolanda," *La Donna*, no. 18, 1905, 14.



Clarice Tartufari sempre al suo lavoro di modo amabile il figlio nel divano di
sotto e si agghia con l'opera di mano.

Clarice Tartufari nella figlia di la giornalista italiana si fissa di un giardino.

L'AMICIZIA

Alla cortina della nostra collaboratrice Dora Blagich abbiamo il permesso di pubblicare questa breve cronaca del suo matrimonio e cercare di farci l'idea del primo. - Federico de qua (Fiorio, editore Fischbacher).
È tanto un tale che il giorno dopo il matrimonio, si è recato a casa con un'opposta madre da una donna. In un'occasione avrebbe fatto un'opposta madre da una donna. In un'occasione avrebbe fatto un'opposta madre da una donna. In un'occasione avrebbe fatto un'opposta madre da una donna.

gentile lavoro della di questo cattivo trattamento del mondo, l'entusiasmo che non si prova mai più. In questo caso è diverso come una donna. Il vantaggio italiano di questo paese nella guerra tra i due non è mancato. La donna che abbiamo incontrato nel tempo è diversa da una moglie italiana di questo. Gli uomini del nostro paese per questo hanno in un'occasione di più. In un'occasione avrebbe fatto un'opposta madre da una donna. In un'occasione avrebbe fatto un'opposta madre da una donna.

Dora Blagich

SUSPIRIA

*Per la ruota di Calcedonia affretta
 sanguigna, non scheggia così il pavore
 ed addormenta. L'acqua si addormenta,
 tanto è la ruota come un cimitero.*

*Ma della ruota è quella via infredda
 quanto ha così l'armonia perduta.*

*Il più la donna, di tanto allora che tanto
 sempre lacrima in di qualche occhio.*

*Soniglia il canto suo quello di Veranda,
 alla la donna, il compasso sotto
 d'un occhio, che come volando,
 è la ruota pare la ruota avvista
 a ruota di un'ora ma che di via
 avverte, manda come una ruota.*

Luca Rossini

Villa Dora, dicembre 1915.

Fig. 16. Pilade Vecchietti, "Profili letterari femminili. Clarice Tartufari," *La Donna*, no. 25, 1906, 21.



Profili Letterari Femminili

FANNY ZAMPINI-SALAZAR

che esordisce a...

Quando come la mensile, qui a Roma. In...

La sua forza...



La scrittrice nel suo studio, insieme dei ritratti dei suoi figli...



La signora Zampini-Salazar, con i figli Margherita e Rosa.

(15)

Fig. 19. A. Agresti, "Profili letterari femminili. Fanny Zampini Salazar," La Donna, no. 77, 1908, 16.



Fig. 37. Altea, "La casa e la famiglia d'un mago moderno," *La Donna*, no. 86, 1908, 19.

La Donna

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DIR. G. CARLI, EDITORE



LA FAMIGLIA DI UN RASO MODERNO: La moglie e i figli di Thomas Alva Edison.
In alto a sinistra: Madamje Edison, a destra Carlo, in piedi, presso la mamma, Tessler.

Fig. 38. *La Donna*, no. 86, 1908, 11.



Il mondo del paese.
La moglie del pittore e lo squallido Liana
a Napoli.
(Ha. della sign. Maria Labiano)

ritra, medita e guarda, curiose anime contornate, stando già, ma con
involontaria, una sua infuata vita agitata. Non ha del buco della prodiga,
potere l'essere onestato: è onesto e prende questo fatto. Ac-
cettare è la distanza di casa: mi figura via lei che alata la mamma e
disciplinate neppure il buco della tra le donne indolenti e i ragazzi
colorati feroci, imprecocciati e operosi come quelli analfati,
che un tanto, lo zuchio Origo, ha portato di Firenze, certo è
l'unico della coppia che dà il lato appieno per il che. Noni, non
ha ancora avuto, ma Liana è sempre come in un quadro. E un po' di
fede fingeva una creatura più ridotta, prima un regno di non
lasciando, ma, come nonno. Nel viaggio, un grillo d'oro, un ginepro,
un ricettacolo fieno e quercione. E' un piccolo albero adorno che
raggiolava qua e là, comparso questo verso se ne aspetta, sempre
punto, ancora aspettava, che (ha stacci) da un solo braccio o tronchi
lungo una rete e salotti da fibre e fibre di oro, cacciando l'aria,
spuntando negli aerei, ogniquali gli occhi di meraviglia, il cuore
di tanta vita e le tavole di rassonore con profumi, profumi, orna-
menti, ulivici, erbe, coralline. L'aria
non ha avuto mai altri modelli: i
suoi, l'aria è una moglie, quando il
guarda, gli contornano i suoi quadri:
in una sua non la dipingeva una, non
che il mondo di lei che gli ha
figliati al suo aprito, a questo non gli
si accostava la faccia di lei, in una
sua stessa anima di vita era come che
il cuore della beatitudine e della felicità
che sentirebbero, in lei, un bel
dono della notte e forse altro, non
non che una coscienza della sag-
gezza.



Del lavoro (del).

(14)

Il mondo pama e grande: ma si
sofferma talora. Inesplicito — lo dice
lui — ma è un selvaggio. Lo dice
con parole, rappresenti in faccia gli
suei occhi saliti, e a scendere
sempre in lato, si sono fatti anche
gli salotti più belli, ve lo affermo
come un se debbano... E invece
non sono da dubbia. Basta il sorriso
con cordato, l'entusiasmo franco e
tanta che accoglie il visitatore, o
inconoscenza anche il più risale in
quel tema che l'immortale dice: —
Ma non c'è niente da vedere! —
pena che non abbia mai che volere,
smentito, tutto quello che lo stato
accetta, non molto, perché i conti
di nessuno che fanno e nella
abitudine di tornare indietro dalle
spuntate, ma sono per il nostro
dono, l'ultima essenza di quelli che
non riprova negli altri.

Che non c'è niente da vedere lo
amparo sempre ed è tutti a in buona
fede, si guarda in faccia proprio
collata di dire. Che distanza voluta
che ci sia? Ed è così profondamente
perché la nostra vita è stata
insulto e che davvero non sente
così di andare di la, nel mondo, a

corriere ciò che non esiste, da dipingere naturalmente ad una certa po-
sibilità. Voi però, che avete fatto il viaggio scelto per il piacere e almeno
per l'indole, giudo dire subito e l'onesto: il realtà che, sem-
pre, stava latente; ma ormai, già, non ci si vede più. (L'auso
discreto in scegliere l'ora per essere visti, è stata l'assoluta e la stessa
comprensione commossa, ed è invece il più generoso e arguto degli
oggetti, l'onestamente e volentieri concesso: è la familiarità nuova,
quello che si divide la sua faccia più morbida. Scedo a recitarsi
la signora Girolina, prima da due giorni, quando non che Liana,
vede il sole cadere in mare, oltre la cortina invisibile dei due compagni
e chi profumano. Ha prima di arrivare l'aria, l'atmosfera e così un
arrivano allora e tutti della strada che guarda. Falce italiana e
il chi profumano. Ha prima di arrivare l'aria, l'atmosfera e così un
di sorpresa, contenti del sorriso realistico della signora Girolina che
vi guarda senza dir nulla, colle ciglia che palpitano in poco sugli occhi
gestolente delati, voi rimasta a pensare nello studio —, quando
non ci sia proprio nulla da vedere —, sempre sempre, conterrà senti-
rando una donna, almeno, di tanta delizia. In coltura acquistati per
il peso di Giovanni. Danti e il car-
tellone di Africana che è appena ab-
baziata, ma è già bellissima.

La mattina, con lui, vi aspetta
quando l'altro è più spesso. Girolina
Liana, oltre quale avete veduto,
più se ora la strada tutta pensata
di noi. Fanno la moglie, trovano
tutto il costume nuovo, esigevano,
questi tempi. E' è un altro fondo
del pittore, come Sarda e Frau, i
suei fatti e costumi, biondi, sono
i compagni più cari di Victor: perché
la via della fronte dell'Alone, dal
faccitore, quando la segue sono quasi
distanza a marca d'aver mostrato la
padre non fatica: viene dall'ave
mano e un'esperienza in società, e il
pensione anche essere circostanze, il
non sono trova un po' il mal-
tore della moglie non fatta. Con
lei sono spesso Arturo Enzo e Cesare
Viani. Vi sono Giulio Cico, Giacomo
Giorgio Costi, Augusto Novelli.
Basta, appassiti, della sua Torre
del Lago che lo già a lungo residenza
del pittore, vi, la Torre (fascino,
Giacomo Pardo). Il viaggio Salomone
Cassanese e Isabella Pardo, uomini
di gloria e di bellezza, da una vicina
ma ad avere pure, che prima, a
spontanea, si guarda che pianissimo
di Eliconora Dore. Non pensa di
vare, da Vignone, notizie, avvia,
mentre, che non si faccia addio
orda al voglioso, dell'anno che si
accoglie con tanta gentile l'emo-
della città sono.

Il convento arguto del tempio vi
lo possono le ore. La strada e gli
apparecchio sotto l'ombrello di un
pane e tutti volentieri provano, e
si affilano gli istanti, questi e
questi decorati il sole a strano

Fig. 42. Térésah, "I nostri grandi artisti. Plinio Nomellini a casa sua," *La Donna*, no. 217, 1914, 14.

LE DONNE E LA GUERRA

La più grande guerra dell'umanità è scoppiata, e ancora una volta le donne non hanno avuto voce in capitolo. Le tremende distinzioni di campo, di sangue e di rissa, concepito la stessa linea d'un servizio facile, non sono conosciute nel segreto dei cuoristi degli uomini. A nessuno è mai passato per la mente di chiedere il consenso delle donne. Il femminista confonde il sospetto circa un tal servizio non si fosse chi uomini. Alla donna non si è fatto l'onore di venire. Si è considerato l'umanità come un solo insieme senza maschile, e come un altro campo. Il femminile (che è pure il maschile), non soltanto. In campo di guerra, si è detto, ci occorre la donna, l'ultima della terra, e non si è più curato. I femministi femministi della nostra cultura fanno e morio della donna, l'esclusione dalla lotta e dalla patria.

In la battaglia.

Eppure le donne sono state le prime vittime della guerra. Gli uomini di combattimento hanno aperte le prime file nel loro campo, hanno sparato nelle loro vive carni con la stessa onnipotenza della guerra e della estetica. Eppure in questo grande di guerra dove ha sofferto con loro come queste ferite. In trasparenze sul quale le lacrime, ha compreso che si di ogni della guerra dell'uomo e della sua donna e la patria, ha spinto con l'azione sanguinaria l'anno verso la fronte mischiata e umana. Ha combattuto, anche.

No, non si dimenticano le donne, nelle guerre. La patria è un loro che non si può mettere in crisi, come l'industria, e delusione, e Sarcina fido e morali e compromessi, si fondono e formano questi spazi femminili che si è opere della guerra. E si ha tutto di credere che nei segreti momenti del partito la donna si strappa vittima, signora della debolezza e della patria. La storia parla, insomma. Le donne sono sempre e tutte il punto dell'essere, se sono, sono costituite.

Il discorso è un campo tutto femminile che pensa le armi e via per le loro paragonando, possiamo dire che un'emozione indotta. E il popolo della guerra, chiamato dagli loro sforzi cioè a dire conosci. E si parla di donna, nel suo libro di Malpasano, chiamano i loro disonori, tendono alla morte, rassegnate spavergamente e giavano anche. Battute dai loro, che ne fanno prigioniere sono queste un'emozione in un certo, opero loro battute nel mare e il riciclaggio tutti. Si danno poi a prendere i tecnici fertili, e (sindacalisti) d'umenti di cavalli aiutando con estremo ardimento gli loro, terrili man-

giatori di carne umana i grandi, credendosi simili da uomini, si assuefiscono il sforzo in noi, fatta una prigione, d'accontento d'aver e che fare non danno. Allora possono e combattere non più con le armi, ma con l'istinto: facili le mazzette e d'essere loro esili. Le donne scottarono, ma a punto di ricarsi e fondere un nuovo gruppo di la del fuoco. Tutti. Così avevano. Non disastrosamente però le donne, la loro religio e impare a sfiorarsi alla caccia e alla guerra con gli uomini e senza gli uomini, naturalmente. Ripete: si si mentono sono forti e fertili, che nessuna funzione potera restanti se non avesse accio almeno un mento, così che alcune riuscivano scollate dalla a martire nel perché non avevano potuto adempiere a questa legge naturale.

In donna secolo vi è la Italia tutta, nessuna una fare l'immagine. Caterina Sforza, la madre dell'eroe Giovanni dalle Bande nere. Era bellissima, saputa, avveduta, combattiva, generosa, le perfino stesi a tenero l'ora di Malinardi. In guerra a Cesare Borgia. Il suo grido confortavano uno fu l'invocò a Cesare di Roma. C'era Caterina, e voleva far sfuggire un Papa a suo piacere. Per questo risse impetuosamente e penetrare nella stanza e ad un'ora con proprio ardore. I Cardinali portavano sgarbati, il Cardinal non poteva avere luogo, la vittoria della donna era certa, operando giunto un ordine capitale al quale si cedeva. Così quanto vino e vestito sono, ferita di otto anni!

Il secondo esempio era la la donna della guerra di Fiume contro gli Italiani, capi d'una prigione, avevano accio a Caterina il marito. I maschi riuscivano a penetrare i figlioli e mormoravano di questo o di quello cosa cedeva la donna al suo uomo. La sua risposta fu questa: — Il soldato non può, però, non sia una parte del Malinardi, e non sono il mio a ricarsi degli altri. Ripete: se si può desiderato che la storia resti!

Ma la storia insegna di questo. Antonia fu una più tremante. Cesare Borgia, con un esercito di quattordicimila su basi, cavalli, fusti, carri, partecipi e velle marziali, aveva sventato la nuova storia di Italia che Caterina aveva appoggiata alla donna. L'ardimento di quella donna che, volse in Italia, era conosciuta a Cesare Borgia, chiamarlo. Tutte le fortune italiane prese di mira da quell'eroe sanguigno e perfino erano condite: una sola cosa restava, e difese da una donna. Avevano tremato simili sanguigni. Caterina afflavo le mille volte, le contenevano, le dettava. Quando, in un estremo analisi, restava a



Le donne guardano gli uomini mentre hanno colono alle parate dei loro che possono i politici come la guerra.
(La fotografia rappresenta un gruppo di militari alle stazioni di La Spina di a riproduzione del P.M. Ingegn. rappresenta l'immagine del Redice Topazio).

(11)

Fig. 45. Napoleone Battaglia, "Le donne e la guerra," *La Donna*, no. 233, 1914, 11.



Fig. 46. Emilio Zanzi, "Inaugurandosi L'esposizione di Venezia. Una storia pietosa d'amore e d'arte," *La Donna*, no. 176, 1912, 14.



Il Concorso per fotografie più
belle, originali e artistiche di bam-
bini organizzato da "DONNA"

!!! ALCUNI CONCORRENTI !!!

(segue dal N. 373 di DONNA
e continuerà nei numeri suc-
cessivi).



N. 11. Franco Delli.
(Fot. Gig. Zanoni - Milano).



N. 25. Vito Pozza.
(Fot. Gig. Zanoni - Milano).



N. 45. Emilio Lurbeck.
(Fot. Gig. Zanoni - Milano).



N. 28. La giocola Franca Caproni sulla
sorella nipotina Nella Caproni Pasotti.
(Fot. Gig. Zanoni - Milano).



N. 20. Vincenzo J. Mili e Anna Mili
sorella Anna Mili (Bianchi).
(Fot. Gig. Zanoni - Milano).



N. 30. Chi ad un'ora? Questioni di anni (1).
(Fot. Grandioli - Firenze).

Fig. 47. *La Donna*, no. 374, 1922, 20.



Il Concorso di fotografie artistiche e originali di bambini organizzato da "DONNA",



N. 31. Marco Sanna.
(Fot. Ott. F. Sanna - Cagliari)



N. 32. Francesca Girasole di Giuseppina
sulla braccio della sua mamma.
(Fot. Cesare Grassi)

... ALCUNI CONCORRENTI ...

Scelte dal N. 375 di DONNA
e contraddistinte nel numero successivo.



N. 33. Rosetta Okone.
(Fot. M. Carboni - San Remo)



N. 34. Piri Sisti.
(Fot. G. Bongiorno - Milano)



N. 35. Giuseppina Castagnoli.
(Fot. Castagnoli - Torino)



N. 36. Mirinda Belli Pad.



N. 37. Giuglietta Sironi.
(Fot. Sironi - Roma)



N. 38. I. Sordani della Marchio
Federico Sordani.
(Fot. Castagnoli - Torino)

Fig. 48. *La Donna*, no. 377, 1922, 24.

Il Concorso di fotografie artistiche e originali di bambini organizzato da "DONNA".

ALCUNI CONCORRENTI
Segue dal N. 377 di DONNA e continuerà nel numero successivo.



N. 60. Ritorno di bambini. (Fot. Basso - Genova)



N. 44. La mamma Ezzard e Tronciotti e la piccola Stella Nery. (Fot. Cusiavich - Milano)

N. 62. La piccola Polina. (Strada 34, Zucchi, Maraglio - Torino)

N. 56. Roberto Garbi. Sign. Lucchi, Knack di New York una delle personalità i bambini del gran mondo.



N. 49. Lina e Nivella Galassi. (Fot. Tracchi - Roma)

N. 66. Scugnizi. (Fot. Traci - Roma)

N. 67. Dario Ciavelli. (Fot. Eug. Ciavelli - Torino)

Fig. 49. La Donna, no. 378, 1922, 21.



Fig. 50. Mino Maccari, *Cocktail*, *Il Selvaggio*, June 1930, 30.



Fig. 51. Luciano Ricchetti, *In ascolto*, 1939.



Fig. 52. Luciano Ricchetti, *Madre e figlio*, 1939.



Fig. 53. Angelo Brando, *Mentre tutto il popolo è in adunata sulle piazze d'Italia, una madre ascolta il discorso del Duce*, 1939.



Fig. 54. Gherardo Dottori, *Ascoltazione del discorso del 9 Maggio XIV*, 1939.



Fig. 55. Marcello Dudovich, poster O.N.M.I., *Giornata della madre e del fanciullo*, 1936.



Fig. 56. Marcello Dudovich, poster O.N.M.I., Giornata della madre e del fanciullo, 1935.



Fig. 57 Marcello Dudovich, poster O.N.M.I., Giornata della madre e del fanciullo, 1939.



Fig. 58. Photo of the exhibition *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna*, December 21, 1933 – January 21, 1934. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 59. Photo of the exhibition *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna*, December 21, 1933 – January 21, 1934. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 60. Photo of the exhibition *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna*, December 21, 1933 – January 21, 1934. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 61. Photo of the exhibition *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna*, December 21, 1933 – January 21, 1934. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 62. Photo of the exhibition *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna*, December 21, 1933 – January 21, 1934. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 63. Photo of the exhibition *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna*, December 21, 1933 – January 21, 1934. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 64. Photo of the exhibition *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna*, December 21, 1933 – January 21, 1934. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 65. Photo of the exhibition *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna*, December 21, 1933 – January 21, 1934. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 66. Photo of the exhibition *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna*, December 21, 1933 – January 21, 1934. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 67. Photo of the exhibition *Maria Vergine vista dalla donna*, December 21, 1933 – January 21, 1934. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 68. Sofia Chiostrì, *Mater Salvatoris*. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.

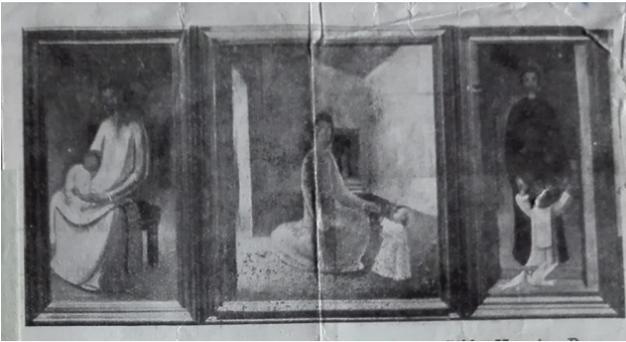


Fig. 69. Gilda Nagni, *Nella casetta di Nazareth, La Vergine Maria e Contemplazione*. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 70. Antonietta Curadossi Arrighetti, *Verbum caro factum est*. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 71. Sofia Chiostrì, *Sogni di madre*. *Almanacco annuario della donna italiana*, 1936.



Fig. 72. Marina Battigelli, *Madonna*. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 73. Maria Fernanda Giachetti, *Mater purissima*. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 74. Laura Biagiotti Cappella, *Vergine Maria*. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 75. Maria Cau, *Madonnina di Barbagia*. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 76. Eleonora de Nobili, *Madonna delle rose*. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 77. Gioia Gandini, *Ecce ancilla domini*. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 78. Isotta Manzoni-Zamfognini, *Madonna dell'Aurora*. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 79. Maria Magni, *Maria Vergine*. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 80. Maria Tarsilia Prolo, *Madonna*. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 81. Clelia Bertetti, *Madonna inginocchiata*. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 82. Vittorina Sirotti, *Mater purissima*. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 83. Dina Cecilia Pastore, *Madonna pregante*. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 84. Antonietta Curadossi Arrighetti, *Sogni di madre*. *Almanacco annuario della donna italiana*, 1936.



Fig. 85. Tyra Kleen, *Madonna and Jesusbarnet*. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.



Fig. 86. Ida Salvagnini Bidoli, *La donna e il fantoccio*, 1930.



Fig. 87. Gian Paola Modignani Litta, *Baby e la sua pupa*, no date.



Fig. 88. Ida Salvagnini Bidoli, *L'atteso*, 1929.



Fig. 89. Ida Salvagnini Bidoli, *La neonata*, 1933.

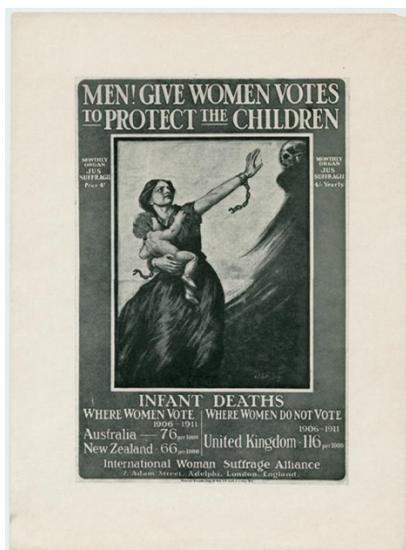


Fig. 90. M. Ancona, "Il voto alle donne," *Almanacco della donna Italiana*, 1921, 83-101. Illustration: Willy Pogány, *Men! Give women votes to protect the children*, 1914.



Fig. 91. Franz von Lenbach, *Eleonora Duse*. *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 1929.



Fig. 92. Principessa di Piemonte, *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 1938, 4.



Fig. 93. Cover, *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 1937.

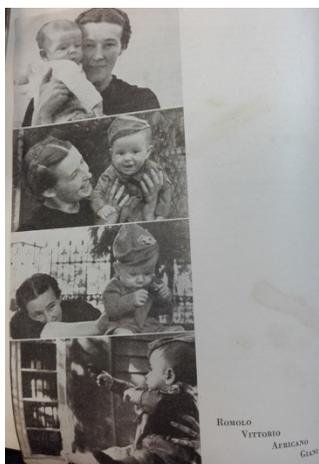
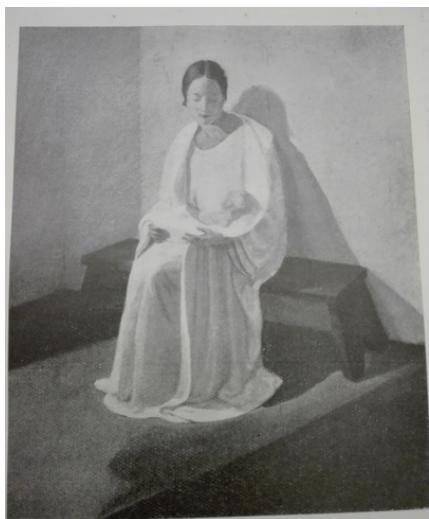


Fig. 94. Niccolò Giani, "128o Battaglione CC. NN.," *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 1937, 33-36.



ADRIANA FILIPPI. — "Umile ed alta più che creatura"
 "Maria Vergine vista dalla donna". Concorso indetto dal *Lyceum*

Fig. 95. Adriana Filippi, *Umile ed alta più che creatura*. *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 1934.

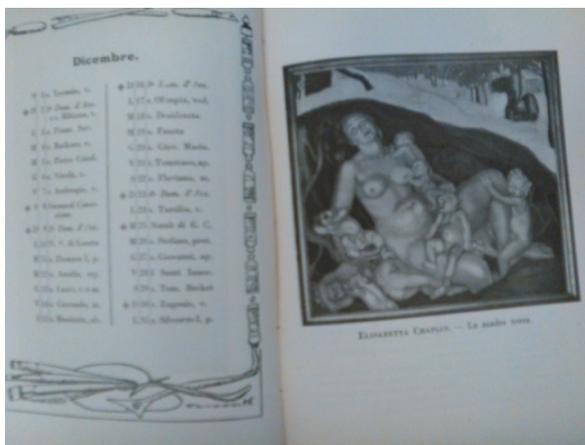


Fig. 96. Elizabeth Chaplin, *La madre terra*. *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 1934.



Fig. 97. Elizabeth Chaplin, *La madre terra*, 1929.



Fig. 98. Elizabeth Chaplin, *Maria Vergine*. Archive of the Lyceum of Florence, Florence, Italy.

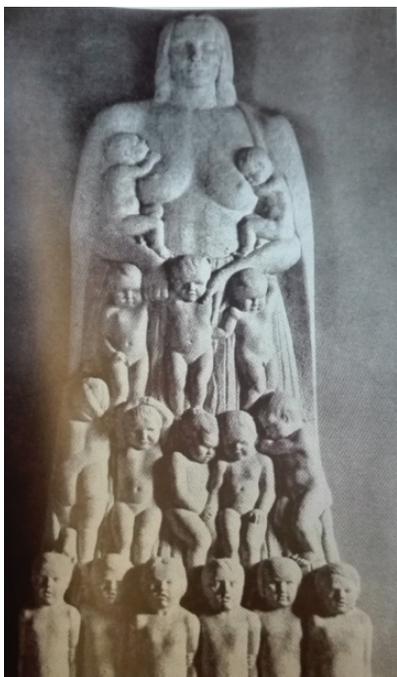


Fig. 99. Lea D'Avanzo, *La Grande Madre*, 1938-1941.



Fig. 100. *Quotidiano Donna*, no. 20, 1978, 6.



Fig. 101. Marina Battigelli, *Istinto materno*. *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 1935.



Fig. 102. Piera Funaro, *Maternità*. *Almanacco Annuario della donna italiana*, 1936.

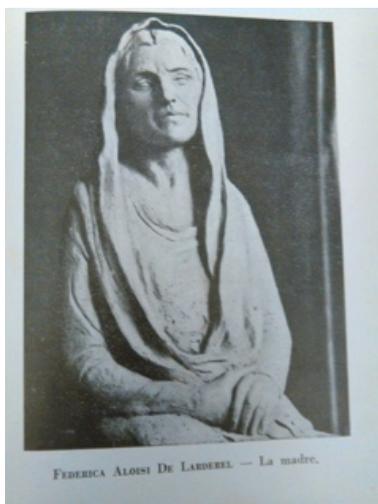


Fig. 103. Federica Aloisi De Larderel, *La madre*. *Almanacco Annuario della donna italiana*, 1936.



Fig. 104. Egle Giuntoli Marini, *Donna con bambino*. *Almanacco Annuario della donna italiana*, 1936.

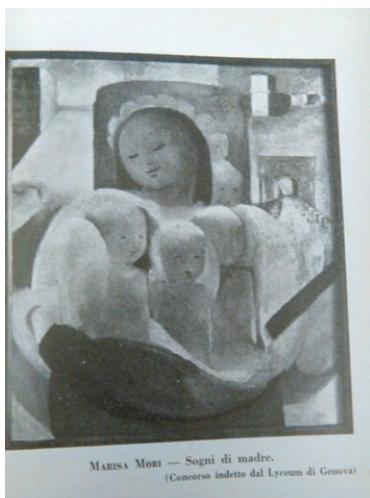


Fig. 105. Marisa Mori, *Sogni di madre*. *Almanacco Annuario della donna italiana*, 1936.



Fig. 106. Marisa Mori, *L'ebbrezza fisica della maternità*, 1936.



Fig. 107. Carla Accardi, *Origine*, 1976.



Fig. 108. Carla Accardi, *Tenda*, 1965-1966.



Fig. 109. Carla Accardi, *Ambiente Arancio*, 1966-1968.



Fig. 110. Carla Accardi, *Triplice Tenda*, 1969-1971.



PER
i diritti delle donne
il benessere della famiglia
il progresso del Paese

DONNE VOTATE
per i candidati e le candidate di sinistra,

che soli hanno preso l'impegno di realizzare il programma da noi indicato e che garantiscono col loro passato fedeltà alle esigenze di rinnovamento e democrazia della nostra popolazione.

U. D. I.

Fig. 111. UDI, *Donne votate per i candidati e le candidate di sinistra*, 8 March 1947.



Fig. 112. UDI, *Vota blocco del popolo*, 20 April 1947.



Fig. 113. UDI, *Votate per i candidati dell'autonomia, della rinascita e della pace*, 12 May 1950.

**CONVEGNO DELLE FAMILIARI
DEI LAVORATORI DELLE INDUSTRIE**



TERNI - 17 Maggio 1953

*per la salvezza delle fabbriche
per una famiglia serena
una produzione di pace*

**VOTIAMO CONTRO IL GOVERNO
DELLA MISERIA E DELLA GUERRA
VOTIAMO PER I PARTITI DEI LAVORATORI**

Fig. 114. UDI, *Convegno delle familiari dei lavoratori delle industrie*, 17 May 1953.



Fig. 115. UDI, 8 Marzo, 8 March 1950.



Fig. 116. UDI, 8 marzo, 1 June 1951.

8 marzo giornata internazionale della donna

ricostruzione
giornale murale - direttore: Augusto Fasolo
 pubblicazione del 1951 del Partito Comunista di Milano e della UDI

Come vivono i bambini di Milano?

Oltre 7000 bambini risultano GRACILISSIMI, dai dati ufficiali del Comune di Milano.

6000 bambini vivono ancora nelle cantine o in case inabitabili e antigiuridiche.

La refezione scolastica viene data soltanto al 10% dei bambini che ne hanno diritto.

Su 247 comuni della provincia di Milano funzionano solo 8 Case della Madre e del Bambino.

Su 40.000 bambini dai 3 ai 6 anni solo 6000 usufruiscono degli asili comunali.

È già molto difficile, e quasi tutte le mamme lo sanno, nutrire e allevare un bambino sano. Ma quali garanzie offre la società attuale perché i bimbi bisogno di cure e di assistenza trovino l'ambiente e le condizioni favorevoli per crescere sani come gli altri? I bimbi italiani hanno bisogno di cibo nutriente, case igieniche, asili, scuole, assistenza medica e soprattutto serenità. Ecco dove lo Stato deve impiegare il denaro, invece di fabbricare fucili e carri armati.

Da ogni parte si invoca la pace e il rispetto della famiglia, ma intanto si fabbricano armi e si prepara la guerra. È necessario che tutte le donne si uniscano per impedire che l'avvenire delle famiglie italiane e di tutto il mondo sia un pezzo di tutto rovine e miseria.

Armato dai nemici della pace sta per risorgere il militarismo tedesco. Ma il mondo non vuole più sfregi.

manina salva tuo figlio

difendolo con ogni mezzo

per la Pace
 per un'infanzia felice
 per un mondo
 più giusto e più bello

Fig. 117. UDI, 8 Marzo, 8 March 1952.



Fig. 118. UDI, *8 Marzo*, 8 March 1954.



Fig. 119. UDI, 8 Marzo, 8 March 1955.



Fig. 120. UDI, *Donne d' Italia*, 1 May 1950.



Fig. 121. UDI, *Prima che sia troppo tardi...firmiamo contro l'atomica*, 1 May 1950.



Fig. 122. UDI, *Unione Donne Italiane III Congresso Nazionale*, 14 October 1949.



Fig. 123. UDI, *Assise delle donne di terra di bari*, 5 April 1952.



Fig. 124. UDI, *Congresso delle donne sarde*, 9 March 1952.



che cosa chiedono le donne per la loro emancipazione

Questi 10 anni di vita politica hanno dato alle donne chiara coscienza dei loro problemi e della possibilità di risolverli attraverso l'unità di tutte le donne. Con slancio e con fede esse hanno preso parte alle lotte del popolo italiano e, con tutto il popolo, hanno progredito ed hanno compreso che l'affermazione dei loro diritti e la conquista della loro emancipazione sono possibili solo con il rinnovamento di tutta la società, con la liberazione di tutti gli oppressi. Questa nuova coscienza si è espressa attraverso la partecipazione appassionata delle donne alla battaglia contro la legge elettorale truffaldina ed è emersa dal voto che gran parte di esse ha dato il 7 Giugno alle forze democratiche per un nuovo indirizzo nella politica nazionale. Oggi le donne italiane chiedono un governo che rispecchi la volontà affermata col loro voto da milioni e milioni di cittadini e che, nel rispetto dei principi costituzionali, si impegni a creare le condizioni favorevoli ad una reale ed effettiva emancipazione della donna; un governo che persegua una politica di pace e non permetta che il nostro Paese subisca l'umiliazione di una nuova oppressione straniera.



PER LA LORO EMANCIPAZIONE LE DONNE ITALIANE CHIEDONO:

Il rispetto della dignità e il riconoscimento dei diritti delle donne

La difesa della famiglia

La salvaguardia della pace

diritto al lavoro e salario e tutte le opportune partecipazioni al potere giudiziario, legislativo e giurisdizionale

investimenti della spesa destinata al cinema in opere di pace per l'educazione

sicurezza della Patria dai pericoli del fascismo militarismo tedesco (C.E.R.)

eguale retribuzione per eguale lavoro

lavoro alle nuove industrie

diritti delle zone montane

cessazione di negozi di monopolio e di privilegio alle donne sottoposte in riconoscimento del valore sociale del loro lavoro

scuole dismesse e prezzi accessibili per tutti

spoglio del governo italiano ad ogni tentativo di dittatura e alla conclusione di un patto di pace fra le grandi potenze

Le donne italiane con slancio e fiducia proseguono unite e concordi il loro cammino per conquistare il posto che loro spetta nella società nazionale.

Fig. 125. UDI, *Che cosa chiedono le donne per la loro emancipazione*, 6 July 1953.



**Per i diritti delle donne
per il benessere delle famiglie
per il progresso del Paese**

In queste elezioni l'Unione Donne Italiane propone:

- 1 La riduzione delle imposte indirette sullo zucchero, il caffè, e l'abolizione dei dazi comunali sull'energia elettrica, l'olio, il vino, la carne, la marmellata, per fermare il continuo e pauroso aumento del costo della vita.
- 2 Il rispetto del diritto dei Comuni a stanziare fondi per l'assistenza in generale e per l'infanzia in particolare; l'attribuzione dei fondi ad essa destinati dal bilancio statale agli Enti locali e non ad organizzazioni confessionali o di parte; la libertà per le famiglie di scegliere gli enti assistenziali ai quali affidare i propri bambini.
- 3 L'istituzione da parte delle Amministrazioni Comunali e Provinciali di servizi sociali quali asili, doposcuola, lavanderie elettriche rionali, che rendano meno faticoso e difficile il compito di educatrici e di massaie, soprattutto alle donne lavoratrici.
- 4 La costruzione di alloggi popolari a basso prezzo stroncando la speculazione sulle aree fabbricabili e sui materiali da costruzione e limitando gli eccessivi profitti degli imprenditori; l'applicazione del Testo Unico delle leggi sanitarie per imporre ai proprietari la riparazione delle case rurali in cattivo stato.

La realizzazione di queste proposte richiede in primo luogo la piena autonomia degli Enti locali, nell'attuazione dei principi costituzionali.

L'UNIONE DONNE ITALIANE INVITA LE DONNE A VOTARE PER I CANDIDATI E SOPRATTUTTO PER LE CANDIDATE DI QUELLE LISTE CHE ASSICURINO LA FORMAZIONE DI AMMINISTRAZIONI ONESTE, BASATE SULLA PIU' LARGA UNITA' DELLE FORZE DEMOCRATICHE, LE SOLE IN GRADO DI RISPONDERE, CONTRO L'ALLEANZA DEI PADRONI E DEI PRIVILEGIATI, ALLE ESIGENZE DI PROGRESSO E DI RINNOVAMENTO DELLE DONNE ITALIANE.

Fig. 126. UDI, *Per i diritti delle donne*, 1 January 1956.



Fig. 127. UDI, 1967: il Parlamento approva queste leggi, 8 March 1967.

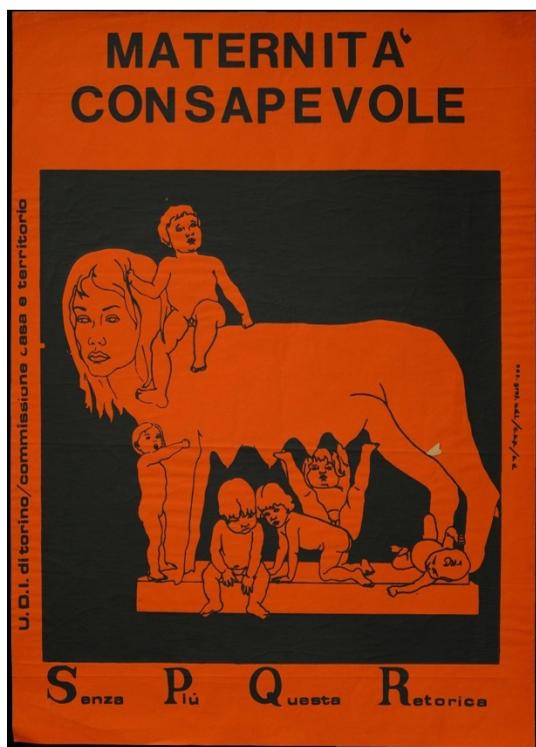


Fig. 128. UDI, *Maternità consapevole*, 1 January 1969.



Fig. 129. UDI, *La maternità dev'essere una libera scelta*, 1974.

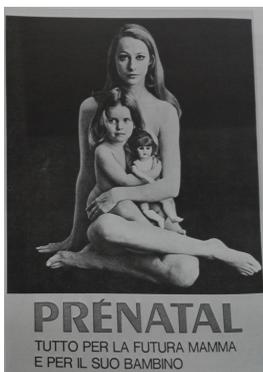


Fig. 130. LBG group, PRÉNATAL campaign, 1969.

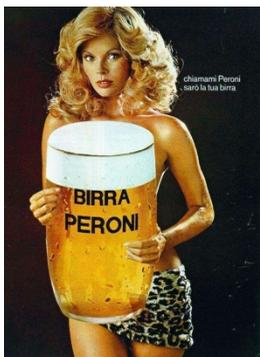


Fig. 131. Advertisement for the firm Peroni, 1973.



Fig. 132. Marcella Campagnano, *L'invenzione del femminile: RUOLI*, 1974.



Fig. 133. Carla Cerati, *case di ringhiera*, 1972-1975.



Fig. 134. Carla Cerati, *Professione fotografa*, 1974.



Fig. 135. Paola Mattioli, *Faccia a faccia: Paola*, 1977.



Fig. 136. Verita Monselles, *no title*, 1976.



Fig. 137. Verita Monselles, *Superstars*, 1975.



Fig. 138. Verita Monselles, cover, *Effe*, September 1975.



Fig. 139. Stephanie Oursler, *My first love*, 1973-1975.



Fig. 140. Giovanna De Sanctis, *Annunciazione*, 1975.

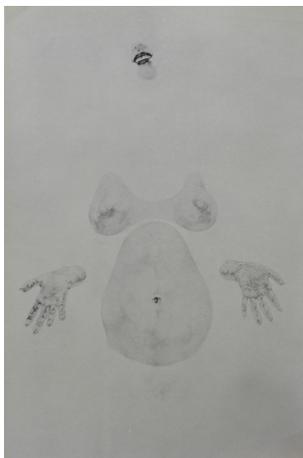


Fig. 141. Giovanna De Sanctis, *Maternità*, 1975.



Fig. 142. Giovanna De Sanctis, *Offerta*, 1975.

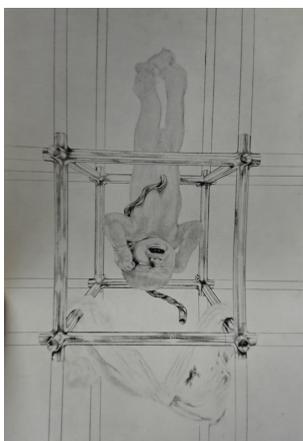


Fig. 143. Giovanna De Sanctis, *Morte per aborto*, 1975.



Fig. 144. Giovanna De Sanctis, *Nascita tecnologica*, 1975.



Fig. 145. Giovanna De Sanctis, *sonno di acciaio e neon*, 1975.



Fig. 146. Giovanna De Sanctis, *neonato che piange*, 1975.



Fig. 147. Giovanna De Sanctis, *culla di vuoto sterilizzato in perspex*, 1975.



Fig. 148. Giovanna De Sanctis, *presenza di mamma*, 1975.



Fig. 149. Germaine Greer, "Il nudo non è in vendita," *Effe*, November 1973, 46-47.



Fig. 150. Natalia Aspesi, "Medicina. il parto punitivo," *Effe*, January 1974, 9-13.



Fig. 151. "Dossier. Parto: quali metodi," *Effe*, June 1982, 16-21.



Fig. 152. *Quotidiano Donna*, no. 43, 1979, 6.



Fig. 153. *Quotidiano Donna*, no. 40, 1979, 8-9.



Fig. 154. *Quotidiano Donna*, no. 40, 1979, 8-9.



Fig. 155. *Quotidiano Donna*, no. 40, 1979, 8-9.



Fig. 156. *Quotidiano Donna*, no. 40, 1979, 8-9.



Fig. 157. Paola Mattioli, *Sara è incinta*, 1977.



Fig. 158. Paola Mattioli, *Sara è incinta*, 1977.



Fig. 159. Centro Ervavoglio, poster, 1975.



Fig. 160. Photo of the exhibition *Maria, Medea e le altre: I volti ambivalenti della madre*, Archivia.



Fig. 161. Photo of the exhibition *Maria, Medea e le altre: I volti ambivalenti della madre*, Archivia.



Fig. 162. Photo of the exhibition *Maria, Medea e le altre: I volti ambivalenti della madre*, Archivia.



Fig. 163. Photo of the exhibition *Maria, Medea e le altre: I volti ambivalenti della madre*, Archivia.



Fig. 164. Photo of the exhibition *Maria, Medea e le altre: I volti ambivalenti della madre*, Archivia.



Fig. 165. Photo of the exhibition *Maria, Medea e le altre: I volti ambivalenti della madre*, Archivia.



Fig. 166. Photo of the exhibition *Maria, Medea e le altre: I volti ambivalenti della madre*, Archivia.



Fig. 167. Photo of the exhibition *Maria, Medea e le altre: I volti ambivalenti della madre*, Archivia.



Fig. 168. "ho riscoperto me bambina, mamma, donna," *Quotidiano donna*, no. 38, 1979, 10.



Fig. 169. "mamma tu sei il mio amore," *Quotidiano donna*, no. 11, 1980, 8-9.



Fig. 170. "le madri del leoncavallo," *Quotidiano donna*, no. 15, 1980, 8.



Fig. 171. *Quotidiano donna*, no. 17, 1980, 10.



Fig. 172. "mamma è poco," *Quotidiano donna*, no. 4, 1979, 4-5.



Fig. 173. "le operaie della "solari" in lotta per la saute," *Effe*, March-April 1976, 16-18.



Fig. 174. Françoise Colliri, "maternità. Humour in amore," *Effe*, June 1978, 12-15. Photo: Daniela Colombo.



Fig. 175. "Inchiesta sulla maternità. L'altra mamma," *Quotidiano Donna*, no. 5, 1980, 8-9.



Fig. 176. cover, *Quotidiano Donna*, no. 5, 1980, 1.



Fig. 177. "Sopravvivere in borgata," *Effe*, November 1973, 6-8.



Fig. 178. "Sopravvivere in borgata," *Effe*, November 1973, 6-8.

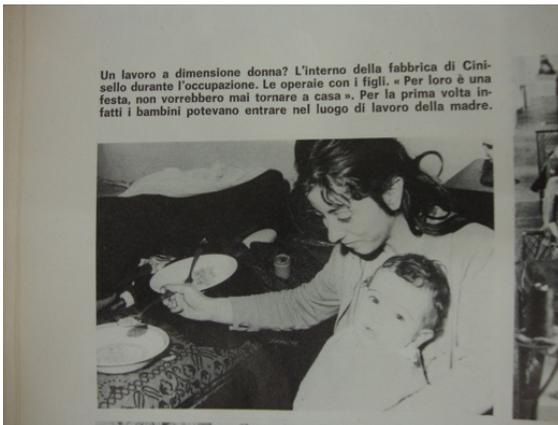


Fig. 179. "Sopravvivere in borgata," *Effe*, November 1973, 6-8.



Fig. 180. "Sopravvivere in borgata," *Effe*, November 1973, 6-8.



Fig. 181. "una testimonianza," *Effe*, October-November 1974, 47.



Fig. 182. Part of the cover, *Effe*, June 1975. Photo: Daniela Colombo.

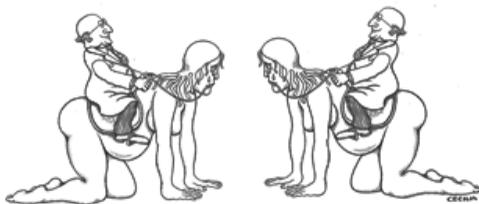


Fig. 184. Leslie Leonelli, "anticoncezionali. I padrini dell'utero a confronto," *Effe*, April-May 1974, 44-45. Illustration: Cecilia Capuana.



Fig. 185. "aborto: una testimonianza," *Effe*, October-November 1974, 47-48. Illustration: Cecilia Capuana.



Fig. 186. Les Cahiers du Grif, "I bambini di tutti," *Effe*, January 1977, 11. Illustration: Clara Fiorillo.



Fig. 187. Effe Famiglia Alternativa, "maternità: dietro il mito della mamma," *Effe*, March 1977, 5-8. Illustration: Clara Fiorillo.



Fig. 188. Grazia Francescato, "maternità: io dico no," *Effe*, March 1977, 15. Illustration: Clara Fiorillo.



Fig. 189. Grazia Fresco, "il parto si impara," *Effe*, September 1977, 10-13. Illustration: Clara Fiorillo.



Fig. 190. Tilde Giani Gallino, "l'amore materno è," *Effe*, September 1977, 20-22. Illustration: Clara Fiorillo.



Fig. 191. "antologia del delirio," *Effe*, April-May 1974, 32-33. Illustration: Lydia Sansoni.



Fig. 192. Anita Zaccaria, "Chiesa, capitalismo, fascismo: mamme si nasce," *Effe*, May 1976, 4-7. Illustration: Lydia Sansoni.



Fig. 193. "antologia del delirio," *Effe*, April-May 1974, 32-33. Illustration: Lydia Sansoni.



Fig. 194. magda, "femminismo all'inizio del secolo, " *Effe*, July-August 1975, 46. Illustration: Lydia Sansoni.



Fig. 195. Lydia Sansoni, *Maternità*, 1975.



Fig. 196. Agnese De Donato, Demonstration for the arrest of the gynaecologist Giorgio Conciani, 18 January 1975.

Table 1.

Regions	1871	1881	1901	1911	1921	1931	1936	1951
Piemonte e Valle d'Aosta	35,3	34,8	29,1	24,3	19,9	16,4	14,9	11,2
Liguria	34,2	32,4	27,5	24,6	20,3	15,7	14,5	10,2
Lombardia	37,4	36,7	34,5	32,8	27,7	22,5	21,0	15,1
Trentino-Alto Adige	....	....	....	....	....	22,2	20,4	18,4
Veneto	37,4	34,9	36,5	36,8	34,9	25,9	24,5	18,4
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	....	....	....	....	....	20,0	18,9	11,8
Emilia Romagna	35,0	34,9	33,1	33,9	30,2	21,6	20,0	13,7
Marche	33,6	35,9	32,9	33,0	33,5	25,1	23,8	16,8
Toscana	37,7	34,8	30,7	28,9	27,5	19,1	17,8	12,9
Umbria	33,4	34,1	30,8	32,1	32,9	24,2	22,3	15,7
Lazio	17,3	33,7	29,7	31,3	30,9	25,3	24,0	18,0
Abruzzi e Molise	37,3	39,1	34,3	33,4	35,4	30,3	27,7	20,3
Campania	36,9	36,7	32,8	33,2	34,3	31,6	29,4	24,6
Puglia	40,7	42,9	37,1	37,6	38,0	32,9	31,3	25,4
Basilicata	40,1	42,6	36,6	36,4	39,1	35,6	34,1	26,7
Calabria	38,5	37,0	34,9	35,9	36,7	33,1	31,4	27,3
Sicilia	39,8	40,2	34,4	33,0	28,7	28,3	27,0	22,8
Sardegna	38,0	36,3	31,8	32,2	32,5	29,6	28,2	25,9
Italia	36,5	36,6	33,1	32,5	30,4	25,0	23,5	18,3

Ratios of natality in Italy between 1861 and 1961 (Roma: ISTAT, 1965).