

Harper's BAZAAR

ARABIA

ART

ISSUE 24

PENETRATING THE SILENCE

HAYV KAHRAMAN

THE NEW
TATE MODERN
A conversation with
**FRANCES
MORRIS**

BLACK FRIDAY
MALL CULTURE *with*
SOPHIA AL MARIA

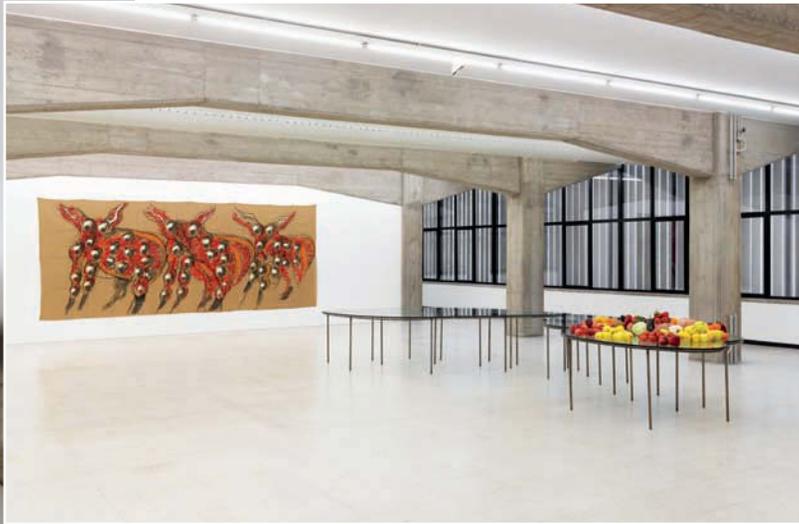


THE REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH

*While **Emma Hart**, this year's Max Mara Art Prize for Women winner, completes her residence in Italy, Siska Lyssens drops in at her studio and visits the Collezione Maramotti, where Hart's new project will eventually land after a Whitechapel Gallery exhibition*

Inconspicuous behind a steel gate and mostly hidden from view by foliage, stands the former headquarters of Max Mara. Located in Emilia-Romagna, the industrial structure is unusual compared to the Northern Italian region's typical warm yellow, pink and terracotta coloured houses and closely built-up historical town centres. Instead, a leafy domain dotted with just a few sculptures surrounds the brick and glass structure. The premises consist of sweeping, light-filled floors and there are a few annexes. It's a reflection of the idealistic notions of Max Mara founder Achille Maramotti.

Conceived as a versatile industrial building by Pastorini and Salvarani in 1957, it was one of the first Brutalist structures in Italy. The headquarters were then transformed into an exhibition space by Andrew Hapgood after the fashion company outgrew the premises in 2003. But even when the building still served as a factory and offices, art had always been a big part of Maramotti's life and work. An avid collector, he also placed pieces of his



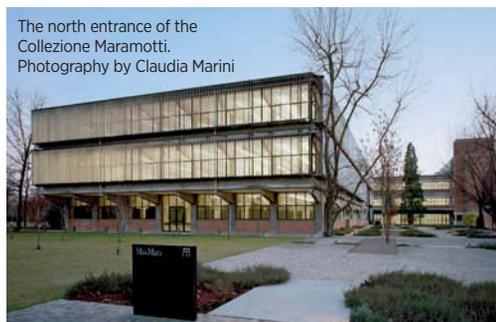
Above: An exhibition view of the Maramotti Collection featuring artworks by Mario Merz
Facing page: An installation view of the Maramotti Collection featuring artworks by Julian Schnabel and Alex Katz. Photography by Dario Lasagni

personal art collection in the company's hallways and rooms, with the goal to educate his personnel. He strongly believed in the positive and educational effect that art has on human beings, and was eager to elevate his workers' consciousness through the aesthetical experience of being surrounded by art in daily life.

The Maramotti Collection opened to the public in 2007, unfortunately two years after Maramotti passed away—he did not see his dream fulfilled. Still, fulfilled it definitely is, as the collection welcomes visitors, for free, on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays by appointment only. This, tells the Collection's director Marina Dacci, was a conscious choice, in order to attract only those visitors who are willing to make an effort to experience art and not just consume it thoughtlessly. It's true that recently art foundations opened by other fashion houses seem to have been created for social media purposes. Not so here. The atmosphere at the Maramotti Collection is one of serenity and space, white and grey backgrounds and amply spaced artworks that were acquired not for their monetary value or status, but for the fact that Mr. Maramotti sensed the visionary qualities of his contemporaries—as his three sons continue to do today. Tellingly, the art collection does not bear the company's name.

The permanent collection, divided over the two upper floors, follows a chronological order that starts with Maramotti's first forays into collecting contemporary art in the 1960s. He focused on Italian and European art back then, and Arte Povera, Pop Art and Transavanguardia feature heavily. One of his first Alberto Burri pieces hang here, as do the poetic and symbolic works of Claudio Parmigianni, who became a close friend, and Michelangelo Pistoletto's engaging mirror pieces. A Mario Merz fruit installation takes pride of place in the central space. German neo-Expressionist works as those by Gerhard Richter and Sigmar Polke mirror what was happening in Rome and Turin at the time.

After these significant European art movements fizzled out, Maramotti followed his good friend, the gallerist Mario Diacono in his shift towards American art. One floor down, blockbuster names like Jean-Michel Basquiat and Julian Schnabel rub shoulders with Alex Katz and Peter Halley. Female artists, it can be clearly noted, start to become present as well. Karin Davie's optical canvases that celebrates the female body catches the eye, and so does Rosemarie Trockel's work that literally magnifies what are seen as typically female occupations: *pied-de-poule* knitwear and a cooker become abstracted through her eyes.



The north entrance of the Collezione Maramotti. Photography by Claudia Marini

From 2005 onwards, it has been Luigi Maramotti, the eldest son of the three, who decided to really look to female artists more closely and dedicate a separate platform to them. In partnership with London's Whitechapel Gallery, the Max Mara Art Prize for Women is awarded every other year to a female artist from a shortlist composed by an all-female panel of judges. The current laureate, Emma Hart, had been quietly at work in a sweltering Milan for two months when we met her at her calm and cool studio, her young family residing with her in quarters upstairs. "Out on the street I feel like an ant caught in the magnifying glass of a kid," joked the Peckham-based artist, perturbed by the decidedly un-London temperatures.

Though it was too early in the creation process to get a precise picture of what her 2017 solo show at Whitechapel Gallery will bring (the show will then move to the Maramotti Collection), Hart was able to indicate the avenues she was exploring.

Family and real-life experiences are at the core of her work, and this unique trip to Italy with her own family, while simultaneously producing a new project gave Hart an interesting lens through which to view the concept of family in Italy. "When I first had my family, I was really shocked at how very rapidly two 'cool' people fall into gender roles," she admitted. "We haven't fallen out of them yet. But here in Italy they are changing a bit, because David is doing a lot more childcare now and I'm down here working. That's been good for us."

Emma's proposal for the Prize centres on the family, its traditions and its power. In Milan, she's been doing research at a famous psychology clinic, the Institute is la Scuola di Psicoterapia Mara Selvini Palazzoli, which makes use of two-way mirrors to observe families. "For this two-way mirror to work, one half has to be in the light and one half in the dark," explained Hart. "It's been quite interesting to see the way light has fed into their practice. I feel like the psychologists want to be torches shining lights on people."

No wonder, then, that light recurs as an influence in Hart's ideas for the solo show. She repeats that the 'punishing' Milan light has been a big influence in her state of mind there, adding in her humble, self-deprecating way that "it sounds really simple." One of the works in progress that she can show incorporates a lamp. "I'm interested in how art might infect or corrupt a viewer, and a lamp seems quite a good way to cast a light on something," said Hart. "And I was also sort of thinking: 'how can a sculpture inform another sculpture?'" she continued. "I've been thinking about relationships a lot, about how I can really manifest relationships in sculpture, and light would be a useful way to create a relationship between two sculptures: as when one is shining a light on another."

This time, Hart's trademark ceramics combined with photography will be amplified thanks to her last stop during the residency: Faenza. The town, known for its majolica earthenware provides her the opportunity to use their expertise to create larger scale ceramic elements. Usually, Hart laughs,

"I do everything myself, badly – I taught myself ceramics on YouTube. I'm not the greatest." In the next few months, she's "hoping to make a big lampshade and big baseball cap, or a chandelier in ceramics, with their help. That's what I'm really looking forward to." ■

collezionemaramotti.org