

ART | 6 MAR 2019 | BY ELLY PARSONS

## Collezione Maramotti's extraordinary art collection continues to evolve

The converted factory gallery in Reggio Emilia presents the first rehang of its permanent collection since it opened in 2007



Installation view of the 2017 exhibition 'Postnaturalia', by Krištof Kintera. *Courtesy of Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, 2019. Photography: Dario Lasagni*

**M**ax Mara's late founder Achille Maramotti was born and bred in the Italian city of Reggio Emilia, best known for being the progenitive city of the famed Reggio Emilia approach to educational philosophy. Now, growing this local legacy in forward-thinking discussion, the Collezione Maramotti is one of the most important – and intelligent – contemporary art collections in the country.

The building, first built as a Max Mara factory in 1957 by the architecture firm of Antonio Pastorini and Eugenio Salvarani, was converted into a gallery between 2003 and 2007 by English architect Andrew Hapgood. The building, and its contents, are kept under the close watch by its protective family owners, spearheaded by Luigi Maramotti, Achille's son and the chairman of Max Mara. Though free to enter (at the wishes of Achille), the Collezione is reserved for appointment-only guests (of up to 25 people at a time) and no children under 11. 'Visitors must take their time and spend a couple of hours to see it,' explains the Collezione's senior coordinator Sara Piccinini. 'That's what we request: to enter into a personal relationship with the works'.

We first visited back in 2009 for the March fashion special of *Wallpaper\** (W\*120). 'The gallery may reveal occasional glimpses of its founder's idiosyncratic character,' we wrote at the time, 'but ultimately it conceals as much as it reveals'. In places, evidence of its former life as a factory has been retained; in the floors, stained by the memory of machinery long-removed, and in the Memphis-style cafeteria, with its gloriously vibrant orange booths and checkered tables. Elsewhere, in the sweeping reception hall opened up by Hapgood, and the architectural, slatted windows that tessellate across the facade, this is a polished, world-class art gallery.



The Collezione Maramotti, as pictured in the March 2009 issue of *Wallpaper\**. The building was one of the first to contrast raw reinforced concrete with exposed brickwork on its exterior. *Photography: Milo Keller & Julien Gallico*

Over the last few years, the collection seems to be opening itself up, and revealing precious more about its ethos and environments. Last year, for example, the Collezione Maramotti played host to its first Max Mara fashion show (the Resort 2019 collection), where the visceral work of Lutz & Guggisberg's debut Italian exhibition provided textural counterpoint to the double-faced cashmere, gauzy silk organza of the collection.

Indeed, art and fashion continually cohabit within the Max Mara identity. 'From the very start, Achille Maramotti thought that there may be a fruitful interchange between artistic creativity and industrial design: some of the art pieces were on display in the premises of Max Mara when the company was here, to positively

inspire designers and creative collaborators,' Piccinini continues. 'But at the same time he had clearly in mind the intrinsic differences between these two languages: the artistic gesture and artworks are an end in themselves, they don't need any reason, while fashion, as exclusive as it may be, only exists because a user exists, someone who will wear it.'

A good example: since 2005, the brand has sponsored the biannual Max Mara Art Prize for Women in collaboration with London's Whitechapel Gallery. In 2016, a fascinating show by artist Emma Hart drew upon the academic legacy of Reggio Emilia. She spent six months in the town, and travelling Italy, immersing herself in its culture, theory, and academia.



*Ohne Titel, 2009, by Gert & Uwe Tobias. © The artists. Photography: Alistair Overbrück*

Likewise, the collection is proudly Italian, and has particular strength in Italy's colourful postwar optimism; though it also presents an elegant chronology of key moments in both European and American contemporary art. The permanent collection features around 200 works from the late 1940s onwards, belonging to some of the most significant artistic trends of the second half of the 20th century: art informel, arte povera, German and American neoexpressionism, New Geometry, alongside more recent experimentations from the 1990s. Continuing to chart and represent emerging movements, the new exhibition 'Rehang' emphasises the family's restless fascination with the new, with a selection of works created by today's bleeding-edge.



In the exhibition, the work of ten artists that exhibited at the Collezione since it opened to the public in 2007 have been rehung in new contexts. Solo shows from Enoc Perez, Gert & Uwe Tobias, Jacob Kassay, Krištof Kintera, Jules de Balincourt, Alessandro Pessoli, Evgeny Antufiev, Thomas Scheibitz, Chantal Joffe and Alessandra Ariatti, pick up notes central to the collection, particularly its keen eye for the evolution of painting.

Joffe's paintings are equal parts seductive and arresting. In the four large format paintings on display, the British artist represents a large single figure, her then-teenager niece Moll, an *Alice in Wonderland*-esque figure, with enigmatic qualities. Through broad brushstrokes and blurred details of the face and dresses, the girl looks immersed in a dense, pictorial flow.



Installation view of Jacob Kassay's 2010 exhibition, 'Untitled'. Courtesy of Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, 2019. Photography: Dario Lasagni

Elsewhere, Jacob Kassay's silvery painted sheets (pictured above) act as an antidote to the almost overwhelming range of work on show throughout the museum. His room, filled with nine mirror-like works, is cast in a moonlit atmosphere; each individual painting contributing to a kind of peaceful immersion.

Interestingly, the collection doesn't have a curator, as such, and never has. Instead, the artists themselves play a keen role in directing the hanging of the works, and the flow of their exhibitions. All ten artists featured in Rehang attended the private view, indicating their level of engagement. The lack of curatorial input, too, reveals the extent that the Maramotti family contribute to exhibitions. They play a crucial role. 'The Maramotti family enter into conversations with the artists and make decisions about the shows to present, as well as the artworks to purchase; taking care of the daily dialogue with artists, supporting them step by step and making projects happen,' Piccinini says. 'The dialogue and the continuous interaction between these roles is the core of our working practice.' ✱



*Moll with the Cat*, 2014, by Chantal Joffe. © The artist. Photography: Dario Lasagni



From the 2011 exhibition 'Il fiume e le sue fonti', by Thomas Scheibitz. Courtesy of Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, 2019. Photography: Dario Lasagni