From September 25, 2015 to April 10, 2016 at Palazzo Ducale in Genoa an exceptional sequence of masterpieces by Van Gogh, Cézanne, Gauguin, Monet, Matisse, and Picasso

Because of the exceptionally long period of 200 days, it is almost as if it were the opening of a new museum of modern art. The Detroit Institute of Arts is moving to Genoa with a selection of fifty-two masterpieces: a unique opportunity to admire masterpieces by the greatest painters of the twentieth century in the period of their greatest artistic expression and to retrace inversely the route that leads from Detroit to the Old Continent. At Palazzo Ducale we will find pioneers and symbols of the avant-gardes, such as Monet, Van Gogh, Renoir, Degas, Picasso, Matisse, Kandinsky: artists who were able to anticipate modern taste through their paintings, which express all the innovation and stimuli that distinguished Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Curated by Salvador Salort-Pons and Stefano Zuffi, the exhibition is organized by the Detroit Institute of Arts, produced by MondoMostre Skira together with Palazzo Ducale Fondazione per la Cultura, and promoted by the Municipality of Genoa and the Ministry of Cultural Assets and Activities and Tourism. The catalogue is edited and published by Skira. The press conference at which the exhibition is presented will be hosted on September 21, 2015 by the Embassy of the United States of America in Italy, with the presence of the Ambassador, John R. Phillips, and the Mayor of Genoa, Marco Doria.

In 1880, one of the founders of the Metropolitan Museum urged his fellow Americans to "convert pork into porcelain, grain and produce into priceless pottery, the rude ores of commerce into sculptured marble, and railroad shares and mining stocks ... into the glorified canvas of the world's masters". The extraordinary cultural and entrepreneurial adventure of art collecting in the United States began: an inimitable exchange between public and private. It was an entirely new scenario for the international art market, which led to the creation and rapid growth of great museums, which were considered strategic for the cultural development of the entire country. With the typical American spirit, within just a few decades, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, there was a veritable competition to create the best collection, to acquire key works, to discover and valorize older and modern artists. The scintillating Paris of the Belle Époque was the most important benchmark, but American collectors, gallery owners, antique dealers, auction houses, and museum directors were engaged in a continual race supported not only by massive financial resources, but also an open-minded approach, free of prejudices regarding taste. It is well known, for example, that painters such as the Impressionists and Matisse were esteemed and purchased first by American – and Russian – collectors, and only later valued also in Europe!

Detroit is one of the economic capitals of the United States and, as the historical center of the automobile industry, is still called “Motor City”. Founded in 1885 and enlarged and renovated several times during its 130-year history, the Detroit Institute of Arts has always been at the very center of the city’s glory, and especially in the years of the economic boom the city’s factories constituted the locomotive of American
industry. As early as the first decades of the twentieth century, the Detroit Institute of Arts was considered the outpost and the main channel of access of the European avant-gardes in the United States.

In addition to being able to count on the industrialists’ solid patronage, the Institute also had a resource which distinguished it from the museums that had been established in other American cities. For more than twenty years (1924-1945), the Detroit Institute of Arts was directed by the German art historian William Valentiner. Thanks to him, the museum opened up to new horizons. Valentiner's taste and experience brought to Detroit the first Van Goghs and Matisses exhibited in an American museum, while his specific expertise on German Expressionism, as well as his personal friendships with several artists, allowed very high-level choices to be made in this field, too. Under Valentiner's direction, the museum thoroughly renovated its building, and in 1937 was also decorated magnificently with a series of murals painted by Diego Rivera. Another extraordinarily important figure is Robert H. Tannahill, who left numerous works of art – half of the works in the exhibition were donated by him – and a huge fund for the constant enlargement of the collections. Thanks to the convergence between the patronage of private individuals, among whom the Ford family should also be mentioned, and far-sighted direction, the Detroit Institute of Arts is solidly ranked as one of the leading museums of the United States. The works, which will be on display for a long time in the magnificent Apartment of the Doge, will retrace inversely the route that leads from Detroit to the Old Continent. The sumptuousness of the collection of European art from the nineteenth and twentieth century stems from its completeness and its multiplicity of styles: a dialogue that involves Van Gogh, Matisse, Monet, Modigliani, Degas, Courbet, Otto Dix, Degas, Picasso, Gauguin, Kandinsky, Cézanne, and Renoir. The presence of all the protagonists and the importance of the works make it possible to sketch the entire experience of European art from Impressionism to the avant-gardes. Visitors at the exhibition are constantly accompanied by information that provides context for paintings, artists, and movements within the historical dynamics of fifty years dense with masterpieces organized according to chronology.

The exhibition begins in the large room where visitors are told about the birth of the movement and idea that changed the history of painting forever: Impressionism. The will to create freely in the light of nature is a conquest that begins with the intense realism of Gustave Courbet (Bather Sleeping by a Brook) and the pleasantly narrative works of “trendy” painters such as Gervex and leads to the glorious color of a masterpiece by Claude Monet, the radiant Gladioli dating from around 1876. Equally significant is the luminous Path by Camille Pissarro, which constitutes an independent, free development of Impressionism, reflected in a broad country landscape. Also significant is the presence of three fascinating works by Pierre-August Renoir, from the Woman in an Armchair, which coincides with the first exhibition of Impressionism (1874), to two works of his late maturity, after the turn of the century.

A separate space, practically an “exhibition within the exhibition”, is dedicated to Edgar Degas, who is present with five works which depict all the great painter’s principal subjects: the portrait, horses, and the unmistakable dancers. Recognizable in all these paintings is the great perspicacity of the drawing, with which Degas captures expressions, gestures, and feelings, following a path parallel to that of the Impressionists, but also with a great, noble independence.
Immediately following is another monographic space, the one in which four extraordinary paintings by Paul Cézanne are on display. In this case, too, the collections of the Detroit museum comprise all the subjects which the painter studied: the human figure, the landscape of Provence around Aix (with one of the last versions of his beloved Mont Sainte-Victoire), the still life, the Bathers in the wood. Unlike Van Gogh, Cézanne does not let himself get carried away by emotion, but returns a number of times to the same subjects, patiently studying their form and combining the luminous color of the Impressionists with a rigorous geometric logic which has deep roots in tradition.

The exhibition’s largest room presents one of the most delicate and significant artistic issues at the end of the nineteenth century: going beyond Impressionism to new horizons. The key figure here is Vincent Van Gogh, who “discovered” light when he moved to France, and reflected an exciting, but terribly sad human adventure in brushstrokes loaded with matter and expression. The Bank of the Oise at Auvers, executed in 1890, is a masterpiece that impresses us not only because of its explosive colors, but also its significant size. His Self-portrait with a Straw Hat (1887) is unforgettable: an explosion of color and emotion. (It was also the very first work by Van Gogh to be displayed in a museum in the United States.) A comparison with the pensive and rather sly Self-portrait by Paul Gauguin (1893) is immediate and intense. Other protagonists of post-impressionism are Pierre Bonnard, with the enchanting Woman with a Dog, and the highly original Odilon Redon, whose Evocation of Butterflies is one of the most fascinating and surprising paintings in the entire exhibition.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Paris was still the center of the arts and culture. International painters converged on the low hills of Montmartre and Montparnasse at the opposite ends of the city. Groups and avant-gardes formed, but in general we speak of an École de Paris, the “Paris school”. One of the leading protagonists was Henri Matisse, who is present here with three memorable works, including the unforgettable Window (1916), in which a classic bourgeois interior is broken up into a series of forms, between dim and full light. It is possible to engage in an exciting dialogue with the three portraits (one woman and two men) by Amedeo Modigliani, the sophisticated artist from Livorno and undisputed master of the line, who was able to evoke secret emotions with moving intensity. The paintings of Raoul Dufy and Georges Rouault, both French, and the Belarusian Chaim Soutine confirm the markedly international character of the Parisian art scene in the first decades of the twentieth century.

The group of masterpieces by the German avant-gardes in the Detroit Institute of Arts is without equal in North American museums. This part of the exhibition is almost physically dominated by the Self-portrait of the very young Otto Dix (1912), whose graphic steadiness and resolute expression are impressive. Next to remarkably independent artists such as Emil Nolde (Sunflowers) and Oskar Kokoschka (with truly spectacular views of Dresden and Jerusalem) we find the protagonists of the various branches of the Expressionist movement in Germany: the “Bridge”, with the electrifying Landscapes of Ernst Kirchner and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, as well as the edgy figures of Erich Heckel and Max Pechstein; the “New Objectivity” of Max Beckmann; and, finally, the brilliant turn towards abstraction, with its charge of color and emotion, carried out by Wassily Kandinsky in his precocious Study for Painting with White Form (1913).
The monographic room dedicated to Pablo Picasso presents six paintings which practically cover the entire development of art in the twentieth century, from his youthful Head of Arlecchino (1905) all the way to the magmatic Seated Woman, painted in 1960, when Picasso was almost eighty. From one masterpiece to another, we can follow the turning points, the brilliant leaps, and the mental dynamism of the great Spanish painter. We begin with the blue period, which is still bound to the lessons of the academy, and with the Portrait of Manuel Pallarés (1909) we are at the threshold of Cubist decomposition, an investigation of form clearly inspired by Cézanne; the still life called Bottle of Anís del Mono (1915) is a development of this study, with the objects arranged freely in space, reduced to their basic outlines and materials. The subsequent, surprising change – the “classicism” of the early 1920s – is a consequence of a trip to Italy: the large portrait of a Woman Seated in an Armchair is an example with formidable intensity and importance. The Girl Reading (1938) takes us into the stylistic climate of Guernica (painted a year earlier), with its expressive deformation of faces and hands, while preserving the figure’s intimate strength.
INFORMATION SHEET

Venue
Palazzo Ducale – Appartamento del Doge
Piazza Matteotti, 9
16123 Genoa

Date
September 25, 2015 – April 10, 2016

Opening hours
Monday: 3–7 p.m.
Tuesday through Thursday: 9:30 a.m.–7:30 p.m.
Friday and Saturday: 9:30 a.m.–9 p.m.
Sunday: 9:30 a.m.–7:30 p.m.
The ticket office closes an hour earlier

Admission
Normal with audio-guide: €13
Discounted with audio-guide: €11
Groups Saturday and Sunday: €13
Groups Monday through Friday: €11
Schools: €6 (including advance sale)

Reservation and advance sale charges
Individuals: €2
Groups: €2 per person

Info and advance sales
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