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GEOGRAPHIES OF SURREALISM THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE MOVEMENT: UNITED STATES AND ITALY

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GEOGRAPHIES OF SURREALISM
THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE MOVEMENT:
UNITED STATES AND ITALY

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ENRICO DONATI IN 1950: THREE ITALIAN EXHIBITIONS¹

Claudio ZAMBIANCHI

In September 1949, Daria Guarnati (1891-1965), née Lapauze, publisher and graphic art director, is in New York, having been invited by Fleur Fenton to help her design the first issue of *Flair*, the short-lived luxury magazine inspired by Guarnati's *Aria d'Italia* (1939-1941)². In a letter to her friends, the Pallucchini (Rodolfo Pallucchini was then Secretary-General of the Venice Biennale), she writes that she would like to do something to return the help offered by the painter Enrico Donati (1909-2008)³ during her stay in New York. Apparently, Donati assisted Guarnati in trying to obtain better wages for her job at *Flair*⁴, and, in particular, she wanted to support him in making his work known in Italy. This is the first of many letters in which Daria describes her friend Enrico⁵: we learn that Donati is a bright, charming, and even seductive forty-year-old Italian painter who has been living in New York since 1940, after having spent some years in Paris. He is the son of a wealthy attorney in Milan and has started painting only recently⁶. The art historian and anti-fascist

1 Many people helped me generously with the research for this paper: I want to thank Mme Aube Breton Elléouët for permission to quote a passage of a letter written by her father André Breton to Donati; Caterina Caputo, for having shared with me unpublished materials on the Breton-Donati friendship; Cecilia Rostagni for telling me about Daria Guarnati's friendship with Donati and suggesting to read her 1949-1950 letters to Rodolfo Pallucchini; Silvia Bignami, Linda Borean, Maria Caterina Caratozzolo, Giulia Tulino; Gabriella Della Bianca, of the Biblioteca umanistica e della formazione, Università degli Studi di Udine, Claudia Palma, of the Archives of the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome; the Archivio Storico della Biennale - ASAC, in particular Alice Scandiuzzi; The Getty Research Institute, in particular Virginia Mokslaveskas.

2 On Guarnati and *Aria d'Italia* see Silvia Bignami, (ed.) '*Aria d'Italia*' di Daria Guarnati. *L'arte della rivista intorno al 1940*, Ginevra-Milano, Skira, 2008. Cecilia Rostagni talked about Guarnati and *Flair* in a paper 'Daria Guarnati: una professionista del libro' read on November 26th, 2020 at the symposium 'L'altra metà dell'editoria. Le professioniste del libro e della lettura'. Milan, Università degli studi di Milano, Fondazione Apice, see: <https://www.apice.unimi.it/news-ed-eventi/video-4-disegnare-il-libro-quarta-sessione-del-convegno-laltra-meta-delleditoria/> [last checked February 5th, 2021].

3 Daria Guarnati to Rodolfo Pallucchini, September 15th, 1949. Università degli studi di Udine, Biblioteca umanistica e della formazione, Archives of Rodolfo Pallucchini (henceforth ARP) - 1. Carteggio - 1.1 Corrispondenza con enti e persone - 4. Corrispondenza degli anni 1949-1950 e relativa alla collezione Restelli di Como - Corrispondenza del 1949 - Guarnati Daria, box 4, folder 1 (the letters between Guarnati and Pallucchini are online at the following address: http://teche.uniud.it/list/list_ad?p=1&s=5SFJPT7ok2sFNIWK%2bdakIhqL0XVrRtk6gUHRfwUFpra38OnAGRjILVfcvisaeL3xONZYqz%2b4kiOiOifHIZWiga%2fEnFb03Rkc7CnOD0f9gwo%3d [last checked February 5th, 2021]).

On Donati's life and work see Peter Selz, *Enrico Donati*, Paris, Editions Georges Fall, 1965; Theodore F. Wolff, *Enrico Donati. Surrealism and Beyond*, New York, Hudson Hills Press, 1996; Timothy Anglin Burgard, (ed.), *The Surreal World of Enrico Donati*, [exhibition catalogue], Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, de Young Museum, (in association with Weinstein Gallery), 2007; Dawn Ades (ed.), Ann Temkin, Marie Mauzé, and Cynthia Albertson, *Enrico Donati*, Skira Rizzoli, 2015; Transcript of the interview by Forrest Selvig to Enrico Donati: *Oral history interview with Enrico Donati*, September 9th, 1968. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (<https://sirismm.si.edu/EADpdfs/AAA.donati68.pdf>).

4 Guarnati to Pallucchini; October 8th, 1949; ARP (series and subseries as in note 3), box 4, folder 2. Things probably did not work out the way she wanted, because Guarnati left the US after a few months, though she maintained her honorary position as *Flair*'s 'Representative for Italy'. See Amy Ann Collins, 'A *Flair* for Living', *Vanity Fair*, October 1996; online: <https://www.vanityfair.com/magazine/1996/10/fleur-cowles199610> (last checked February 5th, 2021).

5 Guarnati to Pallucchini, October 8th, 1949; ARP (series and subseries as in note 3), box 4, folder 2; Guarnati to Pallucchini, undated (1950); ARP (series and subseries as in note 3) box 4, folder 2.

6 Guarnati says that he began painting in 1942, in New York, but we know from Wolff (*Surrealism and Beyond*, p.16) that Donati started studying painting in Paris, in the second half of the 1930s.

emigré Lionello Venturi encouraged his first steps and introduced him to André Breton, who supported him during his stay in New York. In recent years he held one-person exhibitions in both New York (at Durand-Ruel) and Paris (at André Weil and Drouant-David) and in 1947 he took part in *Le Surréalisme en 1947* exhibition, held at the Galerie Maeght in Paris (the first major surrealist exhibition after the end of WW2, organised by Breton and Duchamp, to which we will return shortly). We also learn that Daria was planning one-person exhibitions of Donati for the following year in two of the major Italian galleries, the Galleria del Milione in Milan, and the Galleria L'Obelisco in Rome and she asked Pallucchini to invite Donati to the 1950 Biennale.

Guarnati describes Donati as a man about town, well-mannered and familiar with the artistic and high society circles of New York. Overall, her information is reliable and the picture she gives us needs only some extra details. Born in 1909, after graduating from the University of Pavia, in 1934 Donati moved to Paris, where he devoted his interests mostly to music. After a trip to Canada and the South West in search of Native American art (1934), he settled in New York, and in 1936 he went back to Paris, where he started studying painting. He then moved to New York again in 1940 and took painting courses with the Ecuadorean artist Camilo Egas, at the New York School of Social Research, a 'hub for European *emigrés*'⁷. In May 1943 Donati held his first one-person exhibition at the aforementioned School, a show of sixteen oils and watercolors, many bearing titles related to music (e.g. *Chromatic Symphony*; *Emotion 7 con moto*, *Nocturne*). His work drew the attention of Venturi who, seeing a surrealistic quality in his work, addressed him to André Breton⁸. Although it is difficult to imagine personalities as far apart as those of Venturi and Breton, they knew each other and shared the condition of European intellectuals exiled in New York. Breton liked Donati's paintings and, for his next one-person exhibition, at the Passadoit Gallery, in February 1944, Donati had a marvelous introductory text by Breton⁹, dated January 15th, 1944, so inspired it was considered 'too good for the occasion'.¹⁰ Perhaps the author was writing under the spell of his new love for Elisa Claro¹¹.

7 Romy Golan, 'The Critical Moment: Lionello Venturi in America' in Karen Remmler and Christopher E. G. Benfey, *Artists, Intellectuals and, World War II: the Pontigny Encounters at Mount Holyoke College, 1942-1944*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 2006, p. 123. On a more specific issue, see also See also Caterina Caputo, "Toward a New "Human Consciousness": The Exhibition "Adventures in Surrealist Painting During the Last Four Years" at the New School for Social Research in New York, March 1941", in *Networking Surrealism in the USA. Agents, Artists, and the Market*, Conference proceedings curated by J. Drost, F. Flahutez *et alii*, Paris Heidelberg 2019, pp. 151-170.

8 Traces of Venturi's continuous interest in Donati's work are the catalogues of the exhibitions held at the New School of Social Research (1943), Passadoit (1944), and Obelisco (1950) which are kept in the Archive of Lionello Venturi at the Sapienza University of Rome. In a postcard in Donati's papers at the Getty Research Institute, dated December 1950, Venturi congratulates the artist for his success (The Getty Research Institute. Special Collections. Enrico Donati letters received and manuscripts, 1943-1963. Series I. Letters received, 1943-1963, Box 1, Folder 5. Venturi, 1950). Writing to Guarnati in 1949 Pallucchini says that he was helped by Venturi (then a member of the 'Commissione per l'Arte Figurativa' (Commission for figurative art) in overcoming some difficulties concerning Donati's participation (see below, note 46). Venturi includes Donati in his book *Pittura contemporanea*, Milan, Hoepli, 1948, p. 57.

9 Breton also suggested titles for the works exhibited: see André Breton, 'Lettres à Enrico Donati', in *Pleine marge. Cahiers de Littérature, d'arts plastiques & de critique*, n. 7, June 1988, p. 11, and Dominique Bozo, (ed.), *André Breton, La Beauté convulsive*, [exhibition catalogue], Paris, Centre Pompidou, 1991, photo p. 356.

10 By Isabelle Waldberg; see André Breton, *Écrits sur l'art et autres textes. Œuvres complètes*, IV, Etienne-Alain Hubert (ed.), Paris, Gallimard, 2008, p. 1320.

11 *Ibid.*

Breton describes the artist as a sort of mediator between two clashing trends of Surrealist art: one abstract and another reliant on the appearances of the world¹². Donati's painting is placed instead under the aegis of 'harmony', because,

even when it is completely detached from the shape of things surrounding us, it is at the antipodes of the abstract by means of the fidelity it displays towards the texture of things lovingly caressed, invited to yield the secret of their charms.¹³

It comes as no surprise that Donati used Breton's beautiful text every time he had the chance to do so, also in later years, when his style had changed so much that Breton was left in doubt about Donati's paintings of the late 1940s. For example, Breton's introduction was reused, alongside Maurice Nadeau's 'Enrico Donati' (originally published in the legendary 1945-1946 *rentrée* issue of the 'Cahiers d'Art' after the end of the war)¹⁴, in the catalogue of the exhibition *Peintures de Donati* at the Galerie Drouant-David in Paris (November 1946). Both texts, together with a third one by Nicolas Calas, introduced the catalogue of the one-person exhibition *Donati*, held at the Galerie André Weil in Paris in 1949. Breton's text was reprinted again (in French) in the catalogue of the exhibition at the Galleria L'Obelisco in Rome, in November 1950. Breton, for his part, republished his text in *Revue d'Alger*, no. 3 (1944). The year after, Breton's *Enrico Donati* was included in the Brentano edition of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, where it immediately precedes the text written for Arshile Gorky's exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery (1945)¹⁵.

The artistic milieu around which Donati gravitated in New York in the early and mid-1940s was mostly formed by Surrealist *émigrés*, who also greatly influenced the young Abstract Expressionists. In a 1943 issue of the magazine *View* [III, n. 3] Donati's *Narcissus* (1942) was reproduced on the same page as Jackson Pollock's *Male and Female* (1943). Donati and Pollock were then young artists, both trying to make their names.

In 1943-1944 Donati became an *habitué* of Breton's lunches at the Larré Restaurant¹⁶. It was here that Donati was introduced to Marcel Duchamp, one of the few people towards whom Breton showed some degree of 'reverence'¹⁷. Donati and Duchamp became friends. Donati helped Duchamp in setting up the window display of Brentano's bookshop for the 1945 edition of *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*¹⁸, and provided a pair of boots with toes for it (*Shoes*, 1945), the 3D translation of René Magritte's *Le Modèle*, reproduced on the cover of the book¹⁹.

The grounds for the Donati-Duchamp friendship were not as much art as a shared gift for *savoir vivre* and irony, as we shall see in a moment²⁰. Donati's peculiar gifts for human

12 André Breton, 'Enrico Donati', in Id., *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture*, in Id., *Écrits sur l'art*, p. 586.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 587 (I quote from the English translation by Bravig Imbs for the Passedoit 1944 catalogue).

14 Maurice Nadeau, 'Enrico Donati' in *Cahiers d'Art*, 1945-1946, pp. 418-420.

15 For the editorial history of Breton's text see Breton, *Écrits sur l'art*, note 1, p. 1320 (the Obelisco and the 'Amici della Francia' catalogues [see below] are not mentioned).

16 Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp. A Biography*, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1996, p. 340.

17 *Ibid.*

18 André Breton, *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, New York, Brentano, 1945. A photograph of the display at Brentano is published in Paris, Galerie Maeght, *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, [exhibition catalogue], 1947, plate XLI.

19 For Duchamp's window display for *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, see Thomas Girst, 'Duchamp's Window Display for André Breton's *Le Surréalisme et la Peinture* (1945)', in *Toutfait.com. The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal* (published 2002/01/01, updated 2019/06/03); address: <https://www.toutfait.com/duchamps-window-display-for-andra-bretons-le-surraalisme-et-la-peinture-1945/> (last checked February 5th, 2021).

20 See for instance Kim Whinna, 'A Friend Fondly Remembered – Enrico Donati on Marcel Duchamp', *Toutfait.com. The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal* (published 2000/12/01, updated 2019/05/17);

relationships transpire also in a letter written to him on December 5th 1949 from Paris by Breton, who says: ‘You are one of the too-rare friends one feels the need to see regularly: human warmth is actually at stake here’²¹. Duchamp and Donati were responsible for the famous *Prière de toucher* catalogue cover of *Le Surréalisme en 1947* exhibition, held at the Galerie Maeght in Paris, a show with which Breton wanted to re-establish his role as a leader of Surrealism in Europe after his exile in the US. Breton worked on the project in Paris while Duchamp took care of the New York end of the show. For the deluxe edition of the catalogue (printed in 999 copies), Duchamp conceived a cover with, on the *recto*, a female breast in relief (a foam rubber ‘falsie’) and, on the *verso*, the notice *Prière de toucher* [Please touch]. Donati helped Duchamp in finding and purchasing the foam falsies; it was he who had the idea of placing them on a black velvet base before gluing them on the cover (an operation that had to be carried out in Paris). Interviewed by Calvin Tomkins for his Duchamp biography Donati recalled:

We painted every nipple ourselves. We had them all laid on the floor of my studio, prior to packing them in corrugated cardboard boxes to send to Paris. As I was closing one of the boxes I noticed that when the top was lifted they all sprang up – whoof! I showed Marcel, and he wrote to Breton, telling him to bring a photographer and get him to take a picture of the customs inspector opening a box²².

In a letter from New York, dated April 28th, 1947, concerning the organization of the Maeght show, Duchamp asked Breton to mention Donati for the work done, not only to please him but also to give him due recognition²³. Donati not only took care of the catalogue cover, but also sent works to the exhibition (two sculptures, including the *Evil Eye* [1946, *Le Mauvais œil*; Philadelphia Museum of Art²⁴], in the ‘Salle des Superstitions’, designed by Frederick Kiesler, and *Pour un autel* [*For an Altar*], 1947²⁵, and two paintings, *Les Hauts de Hurle-Vents* [*Wuthering Heights*, 1946]²⁶ and *Carnaval de Venise* [no. 48, *Carnival of Venice*, 1946, Philadelphia Museum of Art]²⁷). Donati also produced a lithograph for the deluxe edition of the catalogue, *Nid de Mandragore* [*Mandragora Nest*] (1947)²⁸, based on a drawing of 1946²⁹, inspired by the metamorphic motif of the mandrake root as a metaphor for death and regeneration that was a favorite subject of Donati’s work in the mid-1940s.

In the many letters that Breton addressed to Donati after his return to France, he not only almost invariably asked for favors but also offered to help him exhibit his works in Paris. In November 1947, Breton tried with René Drouin, owner of an important Paris gallery, who at that time had Leo Castelli as his correspondent in America. Castelli too, who knew

address: <https://www.toutfait.com/a-friend-fondly-remembered-enrico-donati-on-marcel-duchamp/> (last checked February 5th, 2021).

21 Breton to Donati, from Paris, December 5th, 1949; Breton, ‘Lettres à Enrico Donati’, p. 25.

22 Tomkins, *Duchamp*, p. 361.

23 Duchamp to Breton, April 28, 1947; Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre Pompidou, Paris: BRET 1.8, published online: <https://www.andrebretton.fr/en/work/56600100999952> (last checked February 5th, 2021). Donati is given credit for the cover in the colophon of the catalogue.

24 <https://philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/308359.html?mulR=1849534356|2#> (last checked February 5th, 2021).

25 No. 112, plate XXVIII.

26 Probably as *Composition*, no. 114, Plate XXV.

27 See <https://philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/197329.html?mulR=25601585|1> (last checked February 5th, 2021).

28 See https://www.moma.org/collection/works/16029?artist_id=1585&page=1&sov_referrer=artist (last checked February 5th, 2021).

29 Private collection; reproduced in Ades, *Enrico Donati*, p. 149.

Donati and his work, supported (so Breton writes) the plan of an exhibition at Drouin's; the project, however, did not go through³⁰. Breton also tried with Maeght³¹, before *Le Surréalisme en 1947* exhibition, but again he failed because the dealer (and Breton himself) reproached Donati for doing business with the Galerie Drouant-David, where he had held a one-person exhibition the year before³². Breton's attempts, however, seem, overall, timid and listless, probably because Donati's work between 1947 and 1948 was changing considerably, shifting from the liquid³³, mutable and suggestive world of mandrake roots to the more rigid, petrified realm of fossils. Breton, who periodically had Donati send him photographs of his works, expressed growing doubts about his works of 1948-1949, mostly because he perceived in them an abstract quality that seemed to contradict the open and harmonious nature of the previous phase, happily poised between figuration and abstraction. This can be deduced from some of Breton's letters, kind in tone, less so in substance. For example, in a letter to Donati of May 9th 1948 Breton regrets not being able to see the colors of the works; however, the b&w photographs suggest a 'leap towards rigor', which he needs to become acquainted with, and this can only be done in front of the works themselves. He then declares his 'little resistance' to Donati's move consisting of 'great strides towards abstraction'³⁴. His resistance seems to be 'little' only out of politeness.

The Bretons were probably out of town when Donati's Paris exhibition at the Galerie André Weil opened on May 29th 1949³⁵: the minuscule but elegant catalogue was introduced by Breton's (1944) and Nadeau's (1946) texts, which both supported the former, more fluid phase of Donati's work, and by a newer text by Nicolas Calas, written in New York in February 1949. Calas seems to be aware of Breton's reservations and defends the artist's recent works: 'As long as abstraction does not become an end in itself, it remains the essential means to convey a subtler expression of the subject matter'³⁶. He then insists on the alchemical quality of Donati's paintings³⁷. The comparison between the titles of the works shown and a group of photographs of Donati's paintings kept in Breton's archives³⁸ allow us to form a reliable idea of the Weil and then of the Milione, Biennale, and Obelisco exhibits. The photographs bear on the back the stamp of a New York photographic studio, Peter A. Juley and Sons, specialized in fine art photography, and, in pencil, the title, date, and size (in inches) of the works. We have reproductions of all the

30 Breton to Donati, Paris, November 19, 1947; in Breton, 'Lettres à Enrico Donati', pp. 23-25.

31 *Ibid.*

32 Breton to Donati, from Paris, February 4, 1947: The Getty Research Institute (as in note 8). Box 1, Folder 2, André Breton and Elise Breton, 1943-1953.

33 As Nadeau writes, in Donati's works 'the humors and the humid part of things decompose their primary elements and form new miraculous creations'. Nadeau, *Enrico Donati*, p. 420.

34 Breton to Donati, from Paris, May 9, 1948; The Getty Research Institute (as in note 8). Box 1, Folder 2, André Breton and Elise Breton, 1943-1953.

35 See Breton to Donati, from Paris, February 7, 1949, and Breton to Donati, from Paris, July 11, 1949: both The Getty Research Institute (as in note 8). Box 1, Folder 2, André Breton and Elise Breton, 1943-1953.

36 Nicolas Calas, introductory text to *Donati*, [exhibition catalogue], Paris, Galerie André Weil, 1949, p. 59.

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

38 Ensemble de photographies d'œuvres d'Enrico Donati et de Jean Guerin; published online (*recto* and *verso*) at the address: <https://www.andrebretton.fr/en/work/56600100031410> (last checked February 5th, 2021).

fifteen paintings of the Weil exhibition³⁹, of two of the three works sent to the Venice Biennale, and of eleven of the fourteen paintings shown at the Obelisco⁴⁰.

The core of Donati's French and Italian shows of 1949-1950 seems not far in iconography from Surrealist and early Abstract Expressionist painting: elementary creatures, spirals, symbolic forms, references to alchemy, and possibly to Native American art. Donati's interests in Native American art dated to the 1930s, years before he decided to be a painter, an interest matured first through visits to the Museum of Natural History in Milan, then to the anthropological collections in Paris, and through a trip to New Mexico and Canada in 1934, where he came in touch with the Natives and bartered objects brought from France with kachina dolls and other artifacts, starting a rich and interesting collection that expanded in time⁴¹. Donati became an expert and in the late 1940s Breton himself asked for his help, from France, in finding works of Native American art in New York⁴².

In the late 1940s, the paintings through which Donati wanted to be known in France and Italy were close to the works by André Masson, the surrealist who moved to the U.S. in 1941 to escape the Nazi occupation and whose paintings influenced Jackson Pollock, and by Pollock himself. More than to any other, though, Donati's paintings of 1948 and 1949 are close to Adolph Gottlieb petroglyphs and Mark Rothko's works of the early and mid-1940s. While the Abstract Expressionists, however, as the decade progressed, were moving towards spatial fluidity and all-overness, Donati's images, that in the mid-1940s were liquid and metamorphic, influenced probably by Roberto Sebastian Matta and Arshile Gorky's work, now look somewhat petrified, with linear cobweb-like patterns, often arranged in spiraling and cochlear rhythms. Fossils had become the new imaginative referent for Donati's work, replacing the mandrake root:

When Donati abandoned the mandrake – says Carter Ratcliff –, his art became entirely his own, as if he arrived at his identity by conceiving of it as a fossil, a bio-geological imprint, buried by history and lying-in wait for discovery - or, in the terms of the artist's personal myth, waiting to be reborn⁴³.

The paintings of the Weil-Milione-Biennale and Obelisco group, now almost forgotten by the literature on the artist, are the first evidence of the interest in fossils that Donati pursued thoroughly only in the early 1960s⁴⁴.

In the years that followed *Le Surréalisme en 1947* show, therefore, Donati had decided to propose his work in Europe through a brand-new group of paintings. After the Weil

39 *Flammes de bengale** (1949), 2 *Valet de pique* (1947); 3 *Le Nombri de la mer** (1948); 4 *L'oeil de Pythagore** (1947); 5 *Le Bateau ivre** (1948), 6 *Prière de toucher (pour Marcel Duchamp)** (1948), 7 *Chez l'Alchimiste: 'fragment'* (1947), 8 *L'Écusson de Paracelse* (1948), 9 *Le Messager du Sphinx* (1948), 10 *L'Opale** (1948), 11 *Le Coq** (1948), 12 *Le Grand Métronome** (1948), 13 *...ainsi disait Tiepolo* (1948), 14 *Les Vaisseaux de l'araignée* (1948), 15 *Le Saphir merveilleux* (1949) (the works exhibited also at the Obelisco are marked by an asterisk).

40 See below.

41 See transcript of the interview by Forrest Selvig with Enrico Donati (1968); and Marie Mauzé, 'Under the Spell and the Seal. Enrico Donati and Native North American Art', in Ades, *Enrico Donati*, pp. 75-93.

42 In a letter to Donati of April 28th, 1947, Breton asks him to buy for him and deliver an ancient kachina to the Carlebach Gallery in New York; The Getty Research Institute (as in note 8). Box 1, Folder 2, André Breton and Elise Breton, 1943-1953.

43 Carter Ratcliff, 'Enrico Donati, Manhattan Transfer' in *Art in America*, 77/5 (May 1989), p. 176.

44 For a statement by Donati on his fossils, see Selz, *Enrico Donati*, pp. 22-24. In 1961 Duchamp made a pun on Donati's fossils as an introduction to Donati's exhibition at the Brussels Palais des Beaux-Arts; see Duchamp to Donati, from Cadaquès, June 29th, 1961, in *Plein marge*, n. 7, June 1988, p. 33. For a reproduction see: <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2018/livres-et-manuscrits-pf1813/lot.81.html> (last checked February 5th, 2021).

exhibition, in 1949, Daria Guarnati, through her relationships, had a crucial importance in selecting the Italian venues for Donati's works, not only out of gratitude but also because she was convinced of the importance of Donati's painting to the point that she even thought of writing a monograph on the artist herself.⁴⁵

Wishing to promote Donati's art in Italy, Guarnati was active in two fields: the institutional art system, managing, thanks to her friendship with Pallucchini, to obtain an invitation for Donati to the 25th Venice Biennale; and the art market, organizing shows at the Galleria del Milione and the Galleria L'Obelisco, held respectively in the spring and in November 1950, one before, the other after the Biennale.

At the Biennale Donati exhibited three works, two of them known through Breton's photographic archive, *The Blood of Lucretia* (1948) and *Les Vaisseaux de l'araignée* (*The Veins of the Spider*, 1949), the latter shown also at the Galerie André Weil. So far I have been unable to trace the third work, *Lambicco ermetico* (*Hermetic Alembic*, 1948) (a good candidate is the *Still Life of the Alchemist*, 1948, reproduced in one of the Breton photographs). Guarnati, through Pallucchini, also managed to solve the problem of Donati's citizenship. Born in Italy, Donati had been a naturalized US citizen from 1948, and could therefore exhibit his works at the Biennale only if selected by the curator of the US national pavilion. Pallucchini eventually decided to ignore the issue⁴⁶ and Donati's three works were shown in room 46⁴⁷, together with paintings, among others, by Alberto Savinio and Osvaldo Licini, both influenced at different stages of their career by Surrealism. Guarnati not only took care of the delivery of the works, but she was also in close contact with the head of the sales office of the Biennale, Ettore Gian Ferrari. The latter informed Guarnati that an important American art collector, Robert B. Eichholz, a high ranking official of the American Embassy in Rome, wanted to buy one of the works, *The Veins of the Spider* (1948). In the end, however, the sale did not go through, to Gian Ferrari's disappointment. He suggested to Guarnati to turn to Gaspero del Corso, the art dealer of the Galleria L'Obelisco also well acquainted with Eichholz, to seek help in trying to convince the collector to buy the painting⁴⁸.

Donati's exhibition at the Galleria del Milione opened in spring 1950, a couple of months before the inauguration of the Biennale. No catalogue was published⁴⁹, but some clues allow the reconstruction of at least part of the show. In his review of the exhibition in the *Corriere della sera* of May 9th 1950, Leonardo Borgese mentions three works⁵⁰, also exhibited at the Galerie Weil and that would be part of the Obelisco show; a fourth, *Le Bateau ivre*, is reproduced in the April 1950 issue of the magazine *Domus*, as an advertisement for the Milione show. Since they were delivered from the Galleria del

45 She also thought of leaving the task to 'the young [Bruno] Alfieri'; Guarnati to Pallucchini, undated [1950]; ARP (series and subseries as in note 3), box 4, folder 2.

46 See Pallucchini to Guarnati, November 4th, 1949; ARP (series and subseries as in note 3) box 4, folder 2; Pallucchini had Venturi's help. See the official letter of invitation to the 'Italian section' of the Biennale (December 12th, 1949) from Pallucchini to Donati is in the Donati's papers at The Getty Research Institute (as in note 8). Box 1, Folder 5. Venice Biennial, 1949-1950.

47 See 25. *Biennale di Venezia*, [exhibition catalogue], Venezia, Alfieri, pp. 193-194.

48 Two letters from Gian Ferrari of September 21st and 22nd, 1950, inform Guarnati of the sale to Eichholz of the painting *Le vene del ragno* (*Les Vaisseaux de l'araignée*) [The Getty Research Institute (as in note 8). Box 1, Folder 5. Venice Biennial, 1949-1950; another copy of the letter of September 21st in the Archivio Storico della Biennale - ASAC, serie Ufficio vendite, b. 08]. With a letter dated October 17th, 1950 Gian Ferrari informs Guarnati that the sale did not go through, and suggests she turn to del Corso for help [*ibid.*].

49 Nor does the Galleria del Milione have any archival material for those years.

50 L[eonardo] B[orgese], 'Mostre d'arte', in *Corriere della sera*, May 9th, 1950; newspaper clipping in the Archivio bio-iconografico; Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome. The works mentioned are *L'ombelico del mare* (*Le Nombri de la mer*), *L'occhio di Pitagora* (*L'œil de Pythagore*) and *Il Grande Metronomo* (*Le Grand Métronome*).

Milione, we can assume that the three works exhibited at the Biennale the following June – *The Blood of Lucretia* (1948) and *Les Vaisseaux de l'araignée* (*The Veins of the Spider*, 1949), and *Lambicco ermetico* (*Hermetic Alembic*, 1948) – were part of the show as well⁵¹. While I assume that *Le Carnaval de Venise*, reproduced in a large and charming color reproduction as an illustration for the review of the exhibition written by the sculptor Mario Negri for the May 1950 issue of *Domus*⁵², was not part of the show, because it is too different from the recent paintings Donati wished to exhibit in Italy that year. Negri, who does not mention any specific work, talks at length about the limited success of Surrealism in Italy and gives Daria Guarnati credit for having organized Donati's Milione exhibition as a 'generous patroness' of the artist.

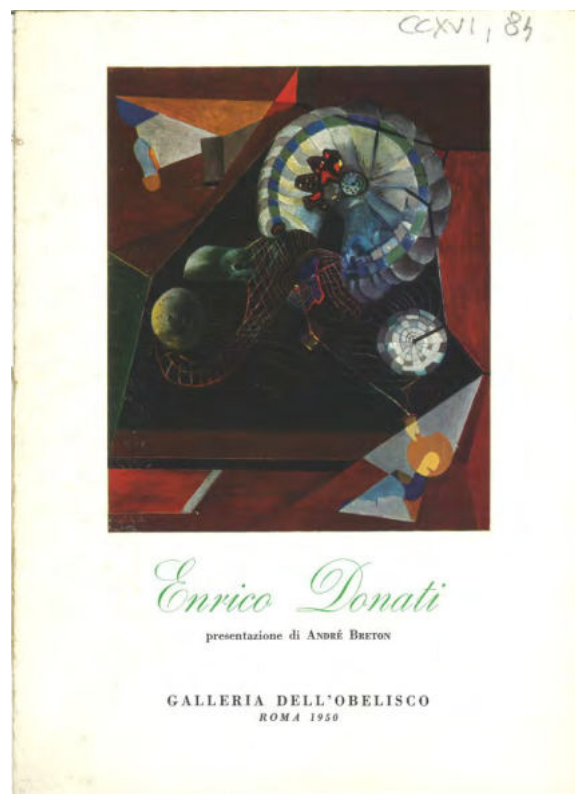


Fig. 1: Cover of the catalogue of Enrico Donati's exhibition at the Galleria L'Obelisco, Rome (November 1950). The work reproduced is *Plumed Butterfly* (1948). Archivio di Lionello Venturi, Dipartimento SARAS, Sapienza Università di Roma.

The Galleria del Milione and the Galleria L'Obelisco, where a Donati exhibition opened on November 1st 1950 (*fig. 1*), were very different venues. Since 1930 Il Milione had been one of the most important Italian galleries for modernist and abstract art and Guarnati had been in touch with them since the 1930s through her publishing business⁵³. The Galleria

51 The three works were delivered to the Biennale by the Galleria del Milione, through Daria Guarnati; see 'Scheda di notificazione delle opere degli artisti invitati', April 15th, 1950; Archivio Storico della Biennale - ASAC, serie Ufficio vendite, b. 08.

52 M[ario] N[egri], 'Mostre d'arte. Enrico Donati al Milione' in *Domus*, n. 246, May 1950, p. 34. *Domus* was then edited by Gio Ponti and probably both the mention [in *Domus*, n. 246, April 1950, p. 44] and the review of the exhibition were a favour to Daria Guarnati.

53 See Bignami, *'Aria d'Italia'*, pp. 32, and notes 16, p. 35, and 66 p. 37.

L'Obelisco was instead a fairly new gallery, opened in 1946, and directed by an interesting couple, husband and wife, Gaspero del Corso, who ran the space; and Irene Brin, the brilliant writer and fashion journalist who in 1952 would become Rome Editor of *Harper's Bazaar*. Maria Vittoria Caratozzolo suggested to me that the modernist architect Gio Ponti, with whom Guarnati worked closely in the 1940s and 1950s, might have been her link with Irene Brin, who had written for Ponti's magazines of the 1940s, *Bellezza* and *Stile* (Guarnati worked for both)⁵⁴. Ponti held an exhibition at the Galleria L'Obelisco in 1949. Whatever the reason for the choice of the gallery, an exhibition of the works of Donati at that time fitted well in what the art historian Carlo Bertelli called a belated 'gust of Surrealism' in Rome, supported by the Obelisco with one-person exhibitions of Giorgio de Chirico (1947, 1949, 1950), Salvador Dalí (1948, his first Italian show), Fabrizio Clerici (1949), Alberto Savinio (1949), Eugène Berman (1949), Roberto Sebastian Matta (1950), Pavel Tchelichew (1950), Yves Tanguy (a close friend of Donati's in the United States) in 1953, Kay Sage (1953)⁵⁵.

The show at the Obelisco included fourteen paintings, eleven had been part of the Galerie Weil exhibition: *Flammes de bengale** [1949], *Le Nombriil et la mer* (sic)* [1948], *Le bateau ivre** [1948], *Prière de toucher (pour Marcel Duchamp)** [1948], *L'Opale** [1948], *Le Coq** [1948], *Le Grand Métronome** [1948], *The Star Dial** [1948], *Inquiet Still Life, Plumed Butterfly* (chosen for the catalogue cover)* [1948, fig. 1], *The Moss Agate**, *Still Life, L'Occhio di Pitagora** [1948], *La torre dell'alchimista*.⁵⁶ We don't know about the two still lives exhibited (*Still Life* and *Inquiet Still Life*). The exhibition should also have included the three pictures of the Biennale, but they arrived too late⁵⁷. We can form an idea of the dark gamut of colors employed by Donati in these works from the reproductions collected in a portfolio published by the Galleria del Milione in 1954⁵⁸, where *The Moss Agate*⁵⁹, *The Cock*, and *Plumed Butterfly* were included. With two exceptions, the works

54 Cecilia Rostagni, 'Bellezza' della vita italiana. Moda e costume secondo Gio Ponti' in *Engramma*, no. 175, September 2020: http://www.egramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=4017#_ftnrefl (last checked February 5th, 2021). Cecilia Rostagni, 'Gio Ponti's *Stile*', in Michela Rosso (ed.), *Investigating and Writing Architectural History: Subjects, Methodologies and Frontiers. Papers from the third EAHN International Meeting*, Torino, Politecnico di Torino, 2014, pp. 316-325, see in part. pp. 317 and 321; Guarnati visited the Galleria L'Obelisco together with Ponti on March 31, 1953, as noted by Gaspero del Corso in his diary; see Ilaria Schiaffini, 'Between Fashion, Art and Photography: Irene Brin and the Early Activities of the galleria L'Obelisco', in Giovanna Motta and Antonello Biagini, (eds.), *Fashion Through History*, Vol. 2, *Costumes, Symbols, Communication*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017, note 4, p. 595; on Brin and Ponti see also *ibid.*, p. 594. Cecilia Rostagni has been so kind as to inform me that Irene Brin wrote a lively portrait of 'my friend' Daria Guarnati in 'I libri che ho letto', *Almanacco della donna italiana*, 23 (1943), p. 173, and that they were in touch since 1941.

55 Rita Camerlingo and Maria Dalesio, eds., 'Regesto delle mostre de L'Obelisco', in Maria Vittoria Caratozzolo, Ilaria Schiaffini, and Claudio Zambianchi, (eds), *Irene Brin, Gaspero Del Corso e la Galleria L'Obelisco*, Roma, Drago Editore, 2018, pp. 266-303. On the Galleria L'Obelisco and Surrealism see Giulia Tulino, *La Galleria L'Obelisco. Surrealismo e arte fantastica (1943-1954)*, Roma, De Luca, 2020.

56 Titles are given in English, French, and Italian, as they appear in the catalogue. The works reproduced in the photographs by Breton are marked by an asterisk.

57 Guarnati to Pallucchini, November 29th, 1950; ARP (series and subseries as in note 3) box 4, folder 2.

58 The portfolio *Donati. Sei tavole a colori*, published in 1954 by the Galleria del Milione, is a late (and updated) outcome of the Milione and Obelisco exhibitions: the six color reproductions are introduced by a text by Umbro Apollonio (an art critic close to the Obelisco) that, judging from the date of the original publication (December 1950) should be a review of the Obelisco exhibition. The portfolio includes also excerpts of the texts by Breton, Nadeau, and Calas of the 1940s, a few lines by Clement Greenberg, dated 1953 and written expressly (or so it seems) for the occasion, and a quotation from a new text by Calas, written in January 1954 that deals with the painter's latest works.

59 Donati shared a love for agate with Breton; Breton to Donati, from Percé, September 1st, 1944; The Getty Research Institute (as in note 8). Box 1, Folder 2, André Breton and Elise Breton, 1943-1953.

exhibited at the Obelisco (and at the Milione gallery and the Venice Biennale), form a rather compact group, the exceptions being *Le Bateau ivre* (that seems to be closer to Tanguy) and *The Tower of the Alchemist*, not reproduced in Breton's photographic archive, but very likely part of a group of paintings devoted to this subject, where fantastic architecture is combined with biomorphic images, some of them reproduced in Wolff's and Ades' monographs on the artist⁶⁰. In these years Donati was experimenting in different directions: for example, there is also a group of geometric paintings, that he kept for himself and exhibited only decades later, in which he makes use of a decidedly abstract and geometric style, described by Martica Sawin as 'linear, hard-edged, and resistant to interpretation'⁶¹.

According to Guarnati the show in Rome was a success, and two, maybe three paintings were sold⁶². We do not know much about the one-person exhibition that in 1951 Donati held at the Amici della Francia gallery, in Milan. It was introduced by Breton's and Nadeau's texts and three out of fifteen of the works shown belong to the group of paintings exhibited the year before in Italy, *La torre dell'alchimista vista dall'alto* [*The Alchemist Tower Seen From Above*], *L'occhio di Pitagora* [*The Eye of Pythagoras*], and *Alambicco ermetico* [*Hermetic Alembic*]; another, *The Moss Agate*, is reproduced in color in the catalogue (but it is not listed among the works exhibited).

In one of the sudden moves characteristic of his artistic life in 1952, the year after the Amici della Francia exhibition Donati signed the 'Manifesto Spazialista per la televisione' (The Manifesto of the Spatialist Movement for Television) and, for a while, he was part of the Spatialist movement. His paintings, which he had the chance to exhibit several times in Italy in one-person and group shows in the 1950s, were now closer to Alberto Burri and Lucio Fontana⁶³. After having been the isolated Italian American Surrealist Donati for some time was on the cutting edge of modern art, exhibiting in Italy and New York, at the Betty Parsons' Gallery. In the following decades, he continued as a painter, an entrepreneur⁶⁴, and a witness of the extraordinary season of 'Surrealism in exile'⁶⁵ until his death, at the age of 99, in 2008.

60 Wolff, *Surrealism and Beyond*, pp. 56-57, and Ades, *Enrico Donati*, pp. 40-41.

61 Martica Sawin, 'Spiritual and Electric Surrealism: The Art of Enrico Donati', in *Arts* 61/8, May 1987, p 27.

62 Guarnati to Pallucchini; November 29th, 1950; ARP (series and subseries as in note 3), box 4, folder 2.

63 Transcript of the interview by Forrest Selvig with Enrico Donati (1968) ['Eury' is of course Alberto Burri, whom Donati defines as 'his closest friend' among the Italian artists].

64 Frank J. Prial, 'Enrico Donati, Surrealist Artist, Dies at 99', in *The New York Times*, April 26th, 2008, online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/26/arts/26donati.html?ex=1366948800&en=086840e5ddb90d41&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&emc=rss> (last checked February 5th, 2021).

65 The title is borrowed from Martica Sawin's book (*Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School*, Cambridge, Mass, and London, The MIT Press, 1995) where Donati is repeatedly mentioned.

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