

## ***Le Arti* and Intervention in the Arts**

Alexandra De Luise

Volume 19, numéro 1-2, 1992

Art as Propaganda  
Art et propagande

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1072857ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1072857ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

### ISSN

0315-9906 (imprimé)

1918-4778 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer cet article

De Luise, A. (1992). *Le Arti* and Intervention in the Arts. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 19(1-2), 123–132.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1072857ar>

### Résumé de l'article

*Le Arti*, une revue d'art italienne peu connue, parut de 1938 à 1943. Elle avait une double mission : être une revue sérieuse d'histoire de l'art et d'archéologie ainsi qu'un véhicule d'endoctrinement fasciste de la communauté artistique durant la dernière période du régime fasciste. Vers la fin des années trente, le régime utilisait son vaste réseau d'expositions, les associations artistiques, divers programmes et publications comme *Le Arti* pour contrôler l'expression artistique. *Le Arti* demeure un exemple du contrôle qu'exerçait le gouvernement sur les arts et faisait partie d'un plan soigneusement élaboré visant à les centraliser sous la direction d'une agence gouvernementale. Elle était dominée par le ministre italien de l'Éducation nationale, Giuseppe Bottai, un haut dirigeant du régime.

La revue était celle qui, parmi les publications italiennes se rapprochait le plus de la revue allemande, *Die Kunst im Dritten Reich* et sut recruter quelques-uns des plus grands historiens de l'art italien de l'époque en les utilisant comme conseillers et comme rédacteurs. *Le Arti* fut en mesure d'exister pendant la période la plus difficile de l'histoire italienne et cessa de paraître avec la chute du fascisme en 1943.

# Le Arti and Intervention in the Arts\*

ALEXANDRA DE LUISE, QUEENS COLLEGE, CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

## Résumé

**L**e *Arti*, une revue d'art italienne peu connue, parut de 1938 à 1943. Elle avait une double mission: être une revue sérieuse d'histoire de l'art et d'archéologie ainsi qu'un véhicule d'endoctrinement fasciste de la communauté artistique durant la dernière période du régime fasciste. Vers la fin des années trente, le régime utilisait son vaste réseau d'expositions, les associations artistiques, divers programmes et publications comme *Le Arti* pour contrôler l'expression artistique. *Le Arti* demeure un exemple du contrôle qu'exerçait le gouvernement sur les arts et faisait partie d'un plan soigneusement élaboré visant à les centraliser sous la direction

d'une agence gouvernementale. Elle était dominée par le ministre italien de l'Éducation nationale, Giuseppe Bottai, un haut dirigeant du régime.

La revue était celle qui, parmi les publications italiennes se rapprochait le plus de la revue allemande, *Die Kunst im Dritten Reich* et sut recruter quelques-uns des plus grands historiens de l'art italien de l'époque en les utilisant comme conseillers et comme rédacteurs. *Le Arti* fut en mesure d'exister pendant la période la plus difficile de l'histoire italienne et cessa de paraître avec la chute du fascisme en 1943.

**O**f the many art periodicals in Italy during the late 1930s, few were official fascist propaganda journals. Most of the art journals in circulation before the Second World War, particularly those not connected to any particular art movement, were directed by scholars of art history. Such was the case of *L'Arte*, directed by the noted art historians Adolfo Venturi and later by his son Lionello Venturi; and *Critica d'arte*, under the aegis of the celebrated team of Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti and Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli, subsequently joined by Roberto Longhi. One journal, *Le Arti*<sup>1</sup> (the Arts), stands apart from other such publications, for it was not under the command of any single art historian, though there were several on its editorial board. Rather, it was headed by a government official named Marino Lazzari,<sup>2</sup> in charge of the Direzione Generale delle Antichità e Belle Arti (Office for Antiquities and Fine Arts), a part of the Ministry of National Education, whose Cabinet Minister was the powerful Giuseppe Bottai.<sup>3</sup>

Guido Armellini has called *Le Arti*, "one of the fundamental tools in defining the new artistic reality during the late 1930s; intelligent and incisive though intentionally corrupt."<sup>4</sup> Fernando Tempesti has described *Le Arti* as "a journal of high critical value; one that unites all the characteristics of an official voice . . . including unrestricted pronouncements concerning art . . . the only periodical of that era to take on such features."<sup>5</sup> Yet, despite *Le Arti*'s importance, scant attention has been paid to it in relation to other wartime journals of the same period, such as *Critica fascista* (1923-43) and *Primato* (1940-43), both directed by Giuseppe Bottai.<sup>6</sup>

*Le Arti* was presented to the public as "the direct expression of the artistic policy of the Italian government." With the fascist calendar year and symbols of the eagle and

fasces appearing on its front and back covers (Figs. 1-2), it served as an example of the strong governmental control over the arts during these final years of the regime. *Le Arti* was to be employed as an instrument for the indoctrination of the artistic community during this period of Italian history. It was one component of a carefully orchestrated plan to bring all artistic expression under one centralized controlling body.<sup>7</sup>

As an example of state manipulation of the arts, *Le Arti* came closer to the German art periodical, *Die Kunst im Dritten Reich*, founded in 1937, than to any Italian art journal of the same period. Both Germany and Italy encouraged a systematic and controlled approach to art through its dissemination in postcards, illustrated newspapers and official journals such as these. Among the two journals' similarities: both were official publications directed towards an educated audience; both included extensive reviews of officially sanctioned (and in the case of Italy, union-run) exhibitions, and both relied on national traditions and myths to transmit art ideology.<sup>8</sup>

While Germany underwent a period of National Socialist art during the 1930s, Italy was experiencing a phase of stylistic pluralism. Despite debates published in various art journals in 1926 over the existence of a true fascist art, during this period Italy was not distinguished by any particular style.<sup>9</sup> Mussolini, in an effort to play one group against another, was unwilling to publicly support any particular movement. Throughout the 1930s, various art movements competed simultaneously for attention, including the "novecento," expressionism, the second wave of futurism, the autonomous movement and aerial futurism.<sup>10</sup>

To understand artistic indoctrination during this period, it is necessary to recall that the idea of a "cultural interventionism" was at the forefront of a debate during the

first decades of this century.<sup>11</sup> Its genesis can be traced to the period leading up to the March on Rome in 1922 which brought Mussolini into power. It was during this time that Bottai first began fabricating a blueprint for a new Italian "state." He envisioned such a state not as a government, police force or agency of order, but rather as an upholder of traditions, culture, art and thought; a veritable "spirit of the nation." Bottai's plan for an intervention would necessitate the participation of Italy's middle class, particularly its intellectuals, those writers, artists, critics and philosophers who would be summoned to assist in the cultural indoctrination of society.<sup>12</sup>

Many intellectuals and artists embraced fascism in good faith, at least initially, particularly those who had been active during its inception. Like Benedetto Croce, Italy's eminent scholar and director of *La Critica*, many intellectuals and artists were early sympathizers of Mussolini, until later political events changed their perspective.<sup>13</sup> The regime sought to arouse intellectuals and artists to their cause, providing them with opportunities to further their professional involvements.<sup>14</sup> Despite outward conformity, many of Italy's intellectuals played lip service to the regime. Like Croce, most of them could see through the superficiality and weakness of a so-called fascist culture. With the outbreak of war and its loss of scholarly and cultural freedom, it was difficult to find intellectuals who would demonstrate any real social commitment.<sup>15</sup>

Bottai soon defined the framework for an indoctrination of art: "A state programmed by aesthetics and guaranteeing the aesthetic quality of artistic works; a state which teaches and controls the morality of artistic works; and a state which gives an artist a social and political dignity by allowing him full responsibility to participate directly in the civic mission of Italy. . . ."<sup>16</sup> In order for art to serve his purposes, it would have to undergo what Mangoni referred to as a "cultural intervention." Bottai, as a public educator on the responsibility and function of its people, said, "it is my view that art has an essential value and is part of a nation's personality; administered by the state, organizing and guiding its people." He then added, "taking care of art in all of its manifestations: spiritual, creative, educative, social and economical." He ended with this appeal, "it is of political necessity that the state ask of the artistic energies of the nation, a militant participation in its political action."<sup>17</sup>

Giuseppe Bottai (1895-1959), one of the leading political minds of the fascist regime, was a moderate fascist who believed in the purity of its ideology as it was delineated from its inception, and who frequently challenged the rigid and dogmatic policies of the regime. In addition to being a cabinet member and a right hand man to Musso-

lini, Bottai was a prolific writer and critic of Italian arts and culture. Bottai held various posts within the regime prior to his becoming Minister of National Education in November 1936. Once Minister, he resolved the apparent deficiency of central authority overseeing Italy's artistic policies by placing control of it within his jurisdiction.<sup>18</sup>

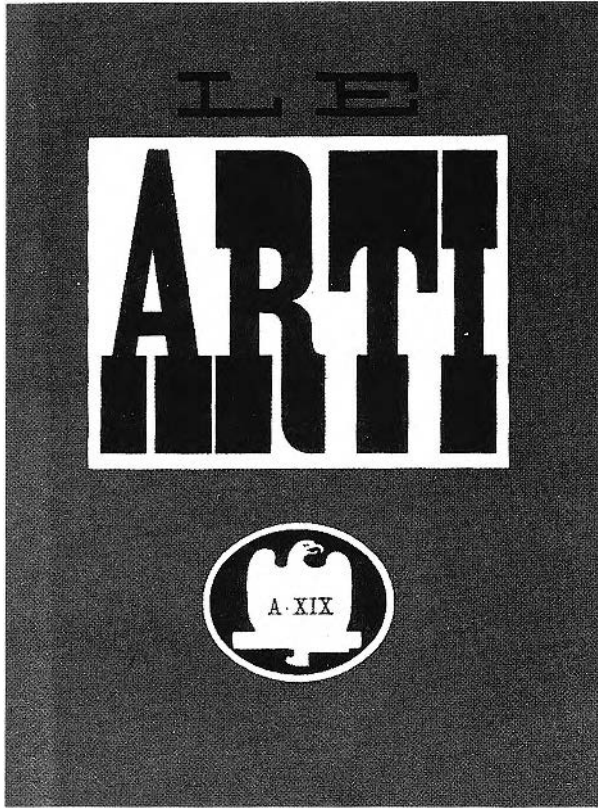
Bottai's agenda was transmitted through the offices of the Direzione Generale delle Antichità e Belle Arti (henceforth referred to as the Direzione Generale). Acting as a central base of activities, the Direzione Generale was responsible for coordinating all the provincial offices, from cataloguing art works, to establishing a centre and school for artistic restoration (called the Istituto Centrale del Restauro), to publishing the journal *Le Arti*. Bottai also restructured the Soprintendenze delle Belle Arti, a department within the Direzione Generale. It would assume control of operations for all the national museums and archeological sites.<sup>19</sup>

Bottai was able to carry forth most of his art programs due to the fact that the laws were wide open and the regime was without theoretical definition throughout the 1930s. As an example of the power Bottai exercised, he was able to increase the number of superintendents under his supervision from 28 to 58, giving to them full authority to carry out their work.<sup>20</sup> Prior to this time, the arts were not governed by any particular bureau, except in cases concerning international matters, which were then handled by the Ministry of Popular Culture. Referred to as Miniculpop by some, this ministry was established in order to regulate all forms of mass media and communications, particularly journalism, radio and cinema. Its officials were mostly uneducated and anti-intellectual, with little empathy for artists or their work. Concentrating on the planning and execution of a seizure of power, they gave neither culture nor art much thought.<sup>21</sup>

In the introduction to the first issue of *Le Arti*, entitled "Direttive del Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale," Bottai defined the propaganda mission of the journal, ". . . I will demonstrate . . . how the fascist nation, through its doctrines, considers art to be an indispensable element in the education of its citizens . . . it is my desire that the journal will demonstrate to everyone how art and criticism are politically important. . . ."<sup>22</sup> Lazzari validated Bottai's plan to utilize *Le Arti* for indoctrination purposes when he stated, ". . . one must encourage artists whose works are not being exhibited in galleries by placing them in the official journals . . . for even here the force of propaganda . . . is no less intense."<sup>23</sup>

Aside from its official mission, *Le Arti* was also a scholarly journal of art history, covering all periods of art, from ancient through contemporary, including architecture and

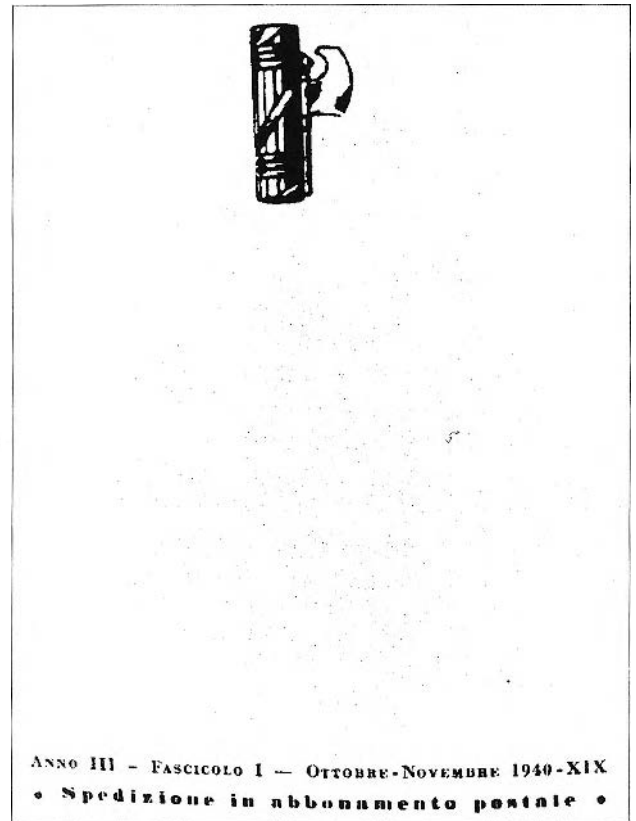
Figure 1. *Le Arti*, III, fasc. 1 (ottobre-novembre 1940), cover (Photo: courtesy Felice Le Monnier, Florence).



archeology, and to a lesser degree, music and theatre.<sup>24</sup> *Le Arti* was modelled after another official publication of the Direzione Generale, *Bollettino d'arte* (Fig. 3),<sup>25</sup> which it replaced from 1938 to 1943. When *Bollettino d'arte* resumed publication in 1948, it disassociated itself from *Le Arti*, choosing to ignore *Le Arti*'s volume numbering and to continue where it had left off. The two journals had similar approaches to art history, including lengthy presentations on restoration efforts of art treasures which were being carried out in Italy. Like *Bollettino d'arte*, *Le Arti* also contained an illustrated section on the conservation of art works called "Cronaca dei ritrovamenti e dei restauri," as well as reports on the activities from the various superintendents and departments controlling the Italian museums and schools of art. Unique to *Le Arti* were reports describing the organization of important archeological zones, and articles and information on music and theatre. *Le Arti* also absorbed another journal, *Rassegna della istruzione artistica* (Fig. 4),<sup>26</sup> which was briefly directed by Marino Lazzari, with contributions by Bottai. *Le Arti* achieved recognition by the scholarly community in Italy, and became a major publication for art historical research, similar to what *Bollettino d'arte* had been years before.<sup>27</sup>

The creation of *Le Arti* was prompted by a strong dissatisfaction among the superintendents of the various state-

Figure 2. *Le Arti*, III, fasc. 1 (ottobre-novembre 1940), back cover (Photo: courtesy Felice Le Monnier, Florence).



run art museums and agencies over the lack of published information on their divisions in the other official art journals of that period. Their concerns were voiced publicly at a conference in July 1938, attended by both Bottai and Lazzari and reported on at length in the journal's first two issues. The conference served to trace the relationship of the Soprintendenze delle Belle Arti to the public agencies, to explore restoration efforts of several art works, and to lay the foundation for cataloguing and museum management.<sup>28</sup> At the conclusion of the conference, Lazzari announced plans for a new official journal that would continue in the tradition of *Bollettino d'arte* and *Rassegna della istruzione artistica*, consolidating the agendas of the two journals into one. The journal would address equally the problems and methodology of ancient and contemporary art: "with the same dedication for Giotto as for Soffici." Its aim would be to document and disseminate information on the work being performed in museums, "alive, rich . . . a point of reference for your discoveries."<sup>29</sup>

The advisory board (Consiglio Direttivo) for *Le Arti* included many individuals who were at the forefront of creative and artistic initiatives in Italy, such as Roberto Longhi and Pietro Toesca. Working alongside the advisory board was the editorial committee (Comitato di Redazione), which included such important art historians as Cesare Brandi and

Figure 3. *Bollettino d'arte*, XXXI, no. 10 (aprile 1938), cover (Photo: courtesy Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Rome)



Giulio Carlo Argan, the latter serving also as editorial secretary for the journal. Prominent artists, many with pro-fascist leanings, also served on the board. They included Carlo Carrà, Felice Carena, Antonio Maraini, Arturo Martini, Cipriano Oppo, Ardengo Soffici and the architect Giuseppe Pagano.<sup>30</sup>

*Le Arti* offered its readers scholarly articles, critical essays, reviews and commentaries by some of Italy's most distinguished art historians. Lazzari had secured the best consultants for the journal, many of whom were also regular contributors. Some of the more important articles appearing in *Le Arti* included: a two-part article on Giotto by Cesare Brandi (beginning in volume I, issue 1); a study of Michelangelo's Palestrina Pietà by Pietro Toesca (in issue 2); a reassessment of Giorgio Morandi's paintings by Brandi (in issue 3); an essay on contemporary Italian architecture by Giulio Carlo Argan (in issue 4); and an investigation of Friulian painting by Sergio Bettini (in issue 5). Among the important works in volume II: an analysis of ancient Roman portraiture by Giovanni Becatti (in issue 2); and an examination of the art of Arturo Tosi by Argan (in issue 5-6). Major studies towards the latter years of *Le Arti* included, in volume III, a two-part review of the paintings of Giovanni di Paolo by Brandi (beginning in issue 4-5), and in vol-

Figure 4. *Rassegna della istruzione artistica*, IX, no. 12 (settembre-dicembre 1938), cover (Photo: courtesy Regio Istituto d'Arte del Libro in Urbino)



ume IV, an examination of the mosaics of Monreale by Roberto Salvini (in issue 5-6).

Important features in *Le Arti* included complete reports of activities from the various art schools, state agencies and departments of art in areas of conservation, art treasures and culture; a feature called "Documenti e commenti per la storia dell'arte" which appeared from 1941 to 1942, and a book review section called "Rassegna bibliografica." A prominent feature entitled "Notizario" appeared at the end of each issue and was considered by many to be the richest part of the journal. It included editorials and commentaries on art, short news items about museums, Italian artists abroad, and exhibition and book reviews. Extensive indices appeared at the end of each year.<sup>31</sup> Following the outbreak of war, from 1941 to 1943, the journal published a special section devoted exclusively to the war (Figs. 5-6).<sup>32</sup>

In addition to articles and features, there were numerous essays and commentaries on art. Many of these essays, particularly those written by Bottai, were charged with virtuous phrases intended to appeal to the readers' highest ideals on matters related to art and the artist's role within the fascist regime. Such was the case in the third issue, when Bottai urged his readers, to "have faith in the Italian artist who has worked hard to give to the fascist nation an art . . .

Figure 5. *Le Arti*, III, fasc. I (ottobre-novembre 1940), p. [iii], "La Guerra d'Italia" (Photo: courtesy Felice Le Monnier, Florence)

## LA GUERRA D'ITALIA

Dall'armistizio con la Francia alla conquista  
della Somalia Britannica

### L'incontro del Duce e del Führer a Monaco

17 giugno.

Il Duce, accompagnato dal Ministro degli Esteri Conte Galeazzo Ciano, è partito per la Germania. Insieme è partito l'Ambasciatore del Reich von Mackensen. (Stefani).

18 giugno.

In un colloquio, svoltosi oggi a Monaco, il Duce e il Führer si sono accordati sull'atteggiamento da adottarsi dai due Governi alleati riguardo alla richiesta di armistizio fatta dalla Francia. (Stefani).

### Il Duce al Principe di Piemonte

Il Duce, Comandante delle truppe operanti, ha indirizzato la seguente lettera al Principe di Piemonte, Comandante il Gruppo Armate del fronte Ovest:

Altezza,

tornato a Roma desidero rinnovarvi l'espressione del mio profondo compiacimento per la disciplina, il comportamento, il morale delle truppe che Voi comandate. Le Divisioni e i reparti che ho avuto la fortuna di passare in rassegna, si sono presentati in un modo che, senza ombra di esagerazione rettorica, si può definire superbo.

Gli italiani e gli stranieri devono sapere che nei giorni 21, 22, 23 e 24 giugno si è svolta quella che sarà chiamata la battaglia del fronte alpino occidentale impegnata su una estensione di 200 chilometri, a quote fra i 2 mila e i 3 mila metri, in mezzo a incessanti tormenti di neve.

Gli italiani e gli stranieri devono sapere che dal Piccolo San Bernardo al fiume Roja il primo sistema della Maginot alpina è crollato sotto l'assalto delle fanterie italiane, che lo hanno sfondato per una profondità tra gli 8 e i 38 chilometri.

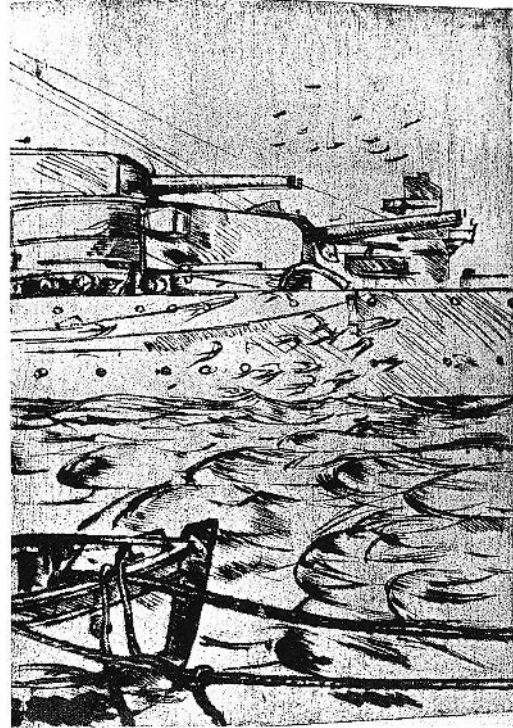
Gli italiani e gli stranieri devono sapere che i francesi annidati nelle caverne, muniti di cannoni di ogni specie, hanno resistito accanitamente sino all'ultimo, sino cioè all'armistizio e anche alcune ore dopo, poiché fra l'altro, erano stati tenuti letteralmente all'oscuro di quanto era accaduto nel resto della Francia.

Gli italiani o gli stranieri devono sapere che gli stessi francesi sono rimasti attoniti davanti alla tenacia, all'impeto ed alla eroica — veramente sovrano — del pericolo, dimostrato dalle fanterie italiane — di ogni Corpo — e dalle artiglierie. I battaglioni del Genio sono stati efficaci collaboratori dell'assalto.

Gli italiani e gli stranieri devono sapere che la battaglia è stata dura e sanguinosa. Migliaia di uomini fuori combattimento lo testimoniano. Com'è nella regola del Regime saranno pubblicati gli elenchi dei Caduti. Quanto ai feriti, che ho visitati negli ospedali, dico che è difficile trovare nel mondo un'altra razza la quale, davanti alle più crudeli lacerazioni

Figure 6. *Le Arti*, III, fasc. 5 (giugno-luglio 1941), p. [i], "La Guerra d'Italia" (Photo: courtesy Felice Le Monnier, Florence)

## LA GUERRA D'ITALIA



maybe not grand, but sincere and uncompromising. . .” Of the artist, he asked, “. . . do not chronicle the heroic facts of fascism; be initiators, not spectators; read about art, not just in journals, but in your heart . . .”<sup>33</sup> Such messages, with their constant references to myths and traditions, were repeated over and over again in the journal.<sup>34</sup>

With this arrangement, *Le Arti* quickly acquired a basic form and content from which it never deviated. The cover, with the words “*Le Arti*” written in big bold letters, made no attempt to conceal its official nature (Fig. 1). Inside, *Le Arti* was indistinguishable from other Italian journals of that period. It utilized a double column spread with a large typeface, and was printed on porous paper. Unusual for a wartime journal, it had an abundance of illustrations, occasionally one or more in colour.

The subjects of race and heritage were at the forefront in Italy in 1938. Yielding to pressures from Nazi Germany and seeking Hitler’s approval, Mussolini implemented racial laws in November 1938 and other anti-Semitic measures “in defence of the Italian race.”<sup>35</sup> Arguing that Italian art should be entirely Italian and therefore racially pure, Mussolini’s campaign rejected any artistic expression that ran contrary to traditional Italian art forms. It soon became obvious that Bottai had to take a stand on this argument

which was being debated daily in the Italian newspapers. Saying that the journal would “take an objective attitude,” and believing that a healthy debate would benefit the regime, Bottai published an interview with the renowned racist, Teresio Interlandi, in the second issue of *Le Arti*. In the interview, Interlandi called for a pure Italian art, equating modernist tendencies with Jewish and other foreign influences.<sup>36</sup>

Bottai, who had by the next issue of *Le Arti* expanded his views on the racial debate, tempered his words somewhat by suggesting that, “maybe a too hurried exchange on the racial debate has resulted in misunderstandings in recent discussions on modern art.” He added that, “attaching oneself to traditions in order to define artistic content with relation to racial content, was certainly not a good idea. . .”<sup>37</sup> Bottai was seeking a middle ground when he remarked that, “while there were artists who went abroad to learn about other forms of art which were international, non-Italian, anti-traditional and hence Jewish in nature, there were also artists who would temper this tendency with a show of native Italian good sense, intelligence and artistic traditions.”<sup>38</sup> *Le Arti* soon ceased to offer discussion on the subject. The racial polemic was never a part of Bottai’s program for change, as he saw in it no opportunities for

Figure 7. *Le Arti*, III, fasc. 5 (giugno-luglio 1941), [313], "Per l'inaugurazione del 'Premio Cremona'" (Photo: courtesy Felice Le Monnier, Florence)

### Per l'inaugurazione del "Premio Cremona"

his advantage. Bottai could never accept the extreme racism of Interlandi. According to De Grand, he understood the distance between the regime and the younger generation of scholars, and how little it would take to alienate them with a totalitarian culture.<sup>39</sup>

Among the many ways in which fascist ideology was communicated was through art works shown in local, regional and national exhibitions. The formation of the artists' unions (Sindacati Fascisti Belle Arti) in 1928 was one of the regime's more aggressive interventions into the artistic arena. The legal recognition of unions for artists and the control they had over exhibitions were the first concrete acts of a political indoctrination for the arts.<sup>40</sup>

The artists' unions managed all major national and regional public exhibitions and established policies that made artists dependent on the state for work and inspiration. Two well-known union heads who were also frequent contributors to *Le Arti* were Cipriano Efisio Oppo (1891-1962) and Antonio Maraini (1886-1963). Their involvement with both the unions and *Le Arti* guaranteed the journal a large readership and provided a setting for the indoctrination of the arts. The more important juried exhibitions reviewed and reported on by *Le Arti* were the "Premio Bergamo" (Bergamo prize), awarded between 1939 and 1941, and the "Premio Cremona" of 1939 (Fig. 7). By reviewing and publicizing these juried exhibitions, *Le Arti* encouraged a sense of competition among the artistic community.<sup>41</sup>

The "Premio Bergamo" and the "Premio Cremona" represented two extremes in artistic expression during this period. The "Premio Bergamo," founded in 1939 by Bottai, officiated over art works which were considered more modern and personal than the celebratory forms of the Cremona paintings. The "Premio Cremona" was instituted in 1939 by Party Minister Roberto Farinacci, a fascist extremist who supported and discussed the most reactionary currents in art in his newspaper, *Il Regime fascista*, from 1926 to 1933. He favoured a figurative art reminiscent of that being pursued in the Third Reich.<sup>42</sup>

Bottai publicly supported both the "Premio Bergamo" and the "Premio Cremona," calling them, "two faces of the same political culture, both diverse and necessary." Bottai maintained that their very coexistence proved that the state was not strictly one-sided, because, "in art, there cannot exist a monopoly."<sup>43</sup>

The art most favoured by Bottai was expressionism. In this movement were Afro, Corrado Cagli, Renato Guttuso and Mario Mafai, who exhibited together as a group at the "Premio Bergamo." *Le Arti's* editors, Roberto Longhi, Giulio Carlo Argan, and the artists, Arturo Martini and Ottone Rosai (Fig. 8), served on the acceptance committee of the

Non è da oggi, ma fin dalla sua prima manifestazione, ch'io seguo con partecipazione l'opera di propulsione alle arti, che col suo «Premio» compie la città di Cremona, sotto l'ispirazione e la guida di Roberto Farinacci. Che questi, politico quant'altri mai e politico di pensiero e d'azione, si dedichi con tanto ardore ai problemi dell'arte e vi sostenga con appassionata fede una propria tesi e una visione dei suoi compiti, è una riprova della politicità dell'arte medesima, intesa come condizione della sua storicità. Fatti, idee, esperienze, esigenze, sensibilità, aspirazioni, contrasti del tempo che viviamo entrano a forza, per tal guisa, nel campo di concluso dell'arte: e le stesse conteste, che da città a città, da gruppo a gruppo, da uomo a uomo, s'accendono, ben altrimenti lo fecondano di quella piattata concordia di tutti, con cui alcuni sembrano confondere la funzione collettiva delle associazioni sindacali. Una funzione, si badi, che nessuno vuol contestare, tanto meno chi v'è creduto fin dallo origini; ma che contestabile diverrebbe, ove intendesse contendere all'arte l'intima sua dialettica formativa, che sempre inesorabilmente procede dalla quantità alla qualità, anche a costo di ridursi contro tutti alla qualità di pochi o di uno solo.

Di qui, l'importanza di queste iniziative di città o di regioni, di queste ricerche tendenziose, di questi centri d'azione: d'innestare sulla diligente e, per quant'è umanamente possibile, imparziale catalogazione sindacale i segreti fermenti delle creazioni più appassionate o addirittura personali. Forse, appartiene all'arte, proprio alla Parte (e questo illumina ancora di nuova luce quella sua politicità, di cui prima dicevo) di salvare in un mondo di valori sempre più collettivi i valori della persona umana.

Questa polemica ci piace, questa di che l'arte vive, dai suoi contrasti raggiungendo non imposte, ma consapevoli armonie. Lo altre polemiche contano meno o nulla, promosse più spesso da interessi di falsi mercanti o di critici senescenti o d'organizzatori senza coraggio. Si guardi, per esempio, alle polemiche, che vogliono per forza distinguere due sponde all'arte contemporanea e tentano di far strapulare la corrente a destra o a sinistra, pur di sottrarla all'alveo naturale, nel quale è scorsa per tanti secoli. Io, che non amo i compromessi, credo alla fin fine che la virtù sia nel mezzo. Non, dunque, sulle sponde, fitte di pescatori ansiosi di pescar pesciolini ingenui e smarriti, ma nella perennità senza pausa della corrente: che all'Italia ha portato arte e ancora arte, da sempre, e non ne vorrà certo privare il tempo nostro, tutt'altro che indegno. E non potrebbe essere diversamente, dacché il corso del fiume non è deviato, anche se in piena è trascinato relitti d'altre correnti, e in magna s'è inquinato con la melma del fondo. È, infatti, in quella corrente, che, insieme con le più alte tradizioni formali, corre la vena del sentimento collettivo e si rispecchia l'attualità della vita che viviamo, con le sue grandi realtà storiche, che associano in un'unica azione di civiltà, tutta una Nazione, un popolo, una gente.

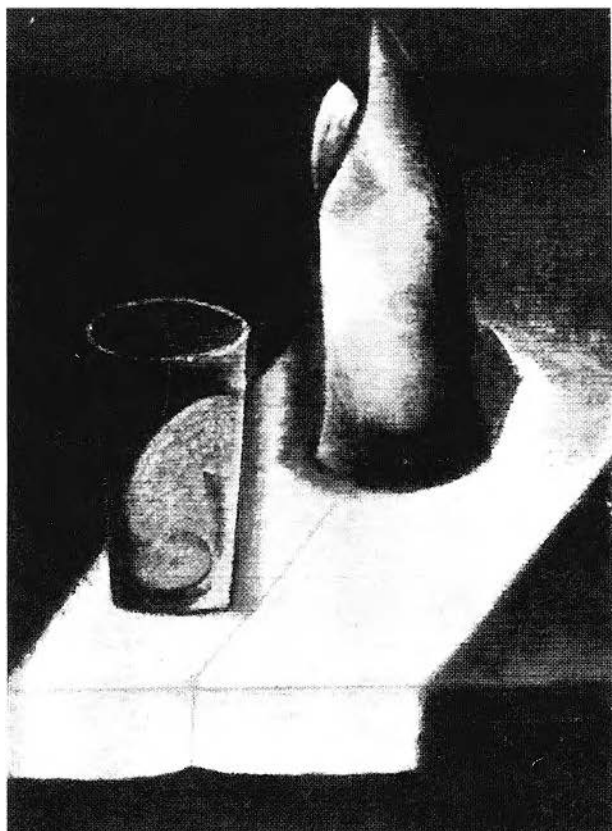
Il molto parlare, che si fa, di contenuto e di forma, di soggetto e di stile, non muta affatto lo cose. Se no parla da non muta affatto lo cose. Se no parla da quando s'è chiesto alla stessa bottega, alla stessa mano, l'affresco per la cattedrale e il tabernacolo per il capezzale, di salvare in un mondo di valori

Bergamo exhibitions. Their participation in the "Premio Bergamo" could be seen as an endorsement of this more personal form of expression.<sup>44</sup>

Bottai understood the limitation of a syndicate system for directing art exhibitions, which lowered standards because of the number of participants. He sought out other ways to introduce contemporary art to the public, through private initiatives, and by sponsoring non-union exhibitions and awards.<sup>45</sup> He helped establish Centres of Action for the Arts in various cities throughout Italy, hoping to create a network of activity. Additionally, he laid the groundwork for an Office of Contemporary Art, another component in Bottai's intervention in the arts. Conceived in 1940 with the approval of the Direzione Generale, but never put into action due to the war, it was to serve as an information centre for artists and a library for contemporary Italian art, documenting all the regional and national exhibitions.<sup>46</sup>

The final element employed by the government to establish a connection between art and state was through the two per cent (for art) law, created in 1942 and discussed in *Le Arti*.<sup>47</sup> Under this law, all buildings of the state, public institutions, companies and union organizations, which were not solely technical or industrial, were required to ensure that two per cent of their total cost would go to-

Figure 8. *Le Arti*, III, fasc. I (ottobre-novembre 1940), p. [28], two paintings by Ottone Rosai, a still-life and a self-portrait (Photo: courtesy Felice Le Monnier, Florence)



wards their artistic embellishment. The law was made public in August 1942.<sup>48</sup>

The program seemed to provide an incentive for artists, and many of the expressionists profited from it by securing mural commissions. Opinions varied on the reasons for instituting the law. Some felt that the law was created as a measure to lift the economic conditions of artists. Others believed it originated from artists themselves who feared that they would be forced to follow the stylistic dictates of the buildings' architects, such as Marcello Piacentini, a supporter of a monumental style of architecture favoured by Mussolini.<sup>49</sup> Others felt it was a way to buy time and artists' goodwill until after the war, because in reality, there were few such commissions for artists in 1942, most new public works and other creative endeavours having been halted by the bombardments.<sup>50</sup>

Despite its origins, the law was promoted fully in the pages of *Le Arti*. Bottai remarked that the law "was an opportunity for the state to support a force of action in art."<sup>51</sup> Lazzari added that the "two per cent (for art) law promoted by Bottai . . . changed the moral and social position of the artist . . . who felt productive and social, like a needed

worker . . . participating in the economic life of the nation and in its political life as an artist."<sup>52</sup>

Bottai was proud of the passing of this law, as it provided one solution to the official intervention in the art world. Recognized early on by Mussolini, as "representing the legitimization of the totality of Italian art," the law provided, "the best means of returning to a unity of the arts and to express the fascist times."<sup>53</sup> The two per cent (for art) law and the Office of Contemporary Art were intended to be complementary; while one was created to join together the public with its artists, the other would have documented their activities in all its aspects.<sup>54</sup> These programs—the Office of Contemporary Art, the two per cent (for art) law and the organization of artists' unions—were the key moments in fascist politics for the control of organizations and of artists, and the principal tangible acts for an intervention in art.<sup>55</sup>

An editorial in *Le Arti* in 1941 stated that Bottai would assume command at the battleline and that under-secretary Emilio Bodrero would take over his official duties.<sup>56</sup> Despite his absence, Bottai's influence continued to be felt in the journal. His essays appeared in *Le Arti* through the spring of 1942.<sup>57</sup>



Toward the latter years of the regime, the Fascist Party had found it increasingly difficult to manage effectively the vast number of programs it had engendered. Mussolini's last rearrangement of his cabinet in February 1943, which included the dismissal of Bottai from his government position,<sup>58</sup> did not halt the decline of the party and the state. Three years of military setbacks, including a crumbling home front and an unpopular war, brought the collapse of fascism and of Mussolini's dictatorship. After July 1943, most organized cultural activity in Italy ceased.<sup>59</sup>

In an essay in one of the final issues of *Le Arti* in 1943, Lazzari's words, always somewhat constrained, now expressed fatigue. The war had ravaged many of the art treasures and monuments of Italy. Lazzari questioned whether in defending art, one was not defending art against mankind: "a defense of art is a defence against us, men of practical means, a defence against our spirituality. . . ." The new National Minister of Education, Carlo Alberto Biggini, under-secretary during Bottai's tenure, echoed a similar sentiment when he said, "the state does not have a duty regarding art other than to educate people on the conscious function of civilization." He underscored his point by adding, "art and politics are not parallel roads never destined to intersect, but rather on the same road . . . a road of comprehension and revelation of our times and of the spirit and the will." Lazzari summed up the spirit of those times with the following: ". . . today, more than ever, we are involved in the lottery of survival and historical materialism, which finds its artistic significance in a new formula . . . in the defence of art."<sup>60</sup> Both Biggini and Lazzari were distancing themselves from the polemics which had absorbed Bottai for close to a decade. The connection between art and politics had by now evolved into a partnership between art and life. By 1943, many intellectuals and artists had turned against the regime to join the Resistance.<sup>61</sup>

*Le Arti* published one more issue before ceasing publication in December 1943. It had survived a most difficult period in Italian history primarily through its strong connection with Giuseppe Bottai and the fascist regime. The journal's rise and fall paralleled that of Bottai's tenure as National Minister of Education. Its discontinuation, almost immediately after Mussolini's removal by the Grand Council in July 1943 and the subsequent fall of fascism, was not surprising. *Le Arti* proclaimed to be the "direct expression of the government" in the personification of Bottai; hence, it derived its true meaning only through Bottai and the regime. Despite Bottai's exploitation of art as self-serving, censored and controlled, he attempted to imbue it with energy and vitality. *Le Arti* was more than just another journal among numerous official publications in circulation

during wartime Italy; it was a symbol of fascist culture: academic, yet compliant and immensely rhetorical.

\* I would like to thank Professor Rolf Swensen of Queens College for his perceptive comments and recommendations in the reworking of this article.

- 1 *Le Arti: Rassegna bimestrale dell'arte antica e moderna*, Anno I, fasc.1 - Anno V, fasc.6 (ottobre/novembre 1938 - agosto/dicembre 1943). Bimonthly (with some issues combined). Issued by the Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale, Direzione Generale delle Antichità e Belle Arti (after 1940, the name was shortened to the Direzione Generale delle Arti). Yearly index, except for Anno V. Published by the publishing house, Felice Le Monnier, Florence, in a large format (30 cm). Each issue contained approximately 110 pages of text and a large number of illustrations, some in colour. Volumes I and II were indexed in *Art Index*.
- 2 Little is known about Marino Lazzari (1883-1975), who was a journalist before becoming Director of the Direzione Generale delle Antichità e Belle Arti in 1938. Most prominent among his publications are, *L'Azione per l'arte* (Florence, 1940) and *Problemi e fatti dell'arte* (Florence, 1942).
- 3 Two important studies on Bottai are, Alexander De Grand, *Bottai e la cultura fascista* (Rome and Bari, 1978); and Giordano Bruno Guerri, *Giuseppe Bottai; un fascista critico* (Milan, 1976).
- 4 Guido Armellini, "Gli artisti di 'Corrente' e la cultura degli anni trenta," in *Gli Annitrenta; arte e cultura in Italia*, Comune di Milano, Ripartizione Cultura e Spettacolo (Milan, 1982), 135. All Italian translations into English are the author's.
- 5 Fernando Tempesti, *Arte dell'Italia fascista* (Milan, 1976), 224.
- 6 *Primato* and *Critica fascista* were among the most influential cultural journals of the fascist period. For *Primato*, see Luisa Mangoni, *Primato, 1940-1943: Antologia* (Bari, 1977); and Vittorio Vettori, *Antologia di Primato* (Rome, 1968). For *Critica fascista*, see Giorgio Luti, *La Letteratura nel ventennio fascista: Cronache letterarie tra le due guerre: 1920-1940* (Florence, 1972), 146ff, 229ff.
- 7 On the government control of art during this period, see Philip Cannistraro, "Fascism and Culture in Italy, 1919-1945" in *Italian Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture 1900-1988*, ed. Emily Braun (Munich and New York, 1989), 147-154.
- 8 On the concept of monumentality and myth in art, see Kate Flint, "Art and the Fascist Regime in Italy," *The Oxford Art Journal*, III, no.2 (October 1980), 50ff; and Peter Adam, *The Art of the Third Reich* (New York, 1992), 23ff.
- 9 Such an open debate appeared in Bottai's journal, *Critica fascista*. See Carlo Bordini, *Cultura e propaganda nell'Italia fascista* (Messina and Florence, 1974), 147ff.
- 10 A thorough study of the art of this decade may be found in *Gli Annitrenta*, 43ff.
- 11 Emily Braun, "Mario Sironi and a Fascist Art," in *Italian Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture 1900-1988*, 174. The

- expression was first applied to a title of an article by Bottai in his journal, *Primato*, 1 June 1940. See Luisa Mangoni, *L'Interventismo della cultura: Intellettuali e riviste del fascismo* (Rome and Bari, 1974), 3ff.
- 12 See also Edward R. Tannenbaum, *The Fascist Experience; Italian Society and Culture, 1922-1945* (New York, 1972), 279ff.
  - 13 Laura Fermi, *Mussolini* (Chicago, 1961), 269.
  - 14 Two such programs were the *Enciclopedia italiana*, a massive project begun in 1925 which employed many intellectuals as contributors; and the creation of the Reale Accademia d'Italia in 1926, an association for scholars patterned after that one already established in France. See further Philip Cannistraro, "Fascism and Culture in Italy," 148ff.
  - 15 Mangoni, *L'Interventismo della cultura*, 343ff.
  - 16 Giuseppe Bottai, "Modernità e tradizione nell'arte italiana di oggi," *Le Arti*, I, fasc. 3 (febbraio/marzo 1939), 232.
  - 17 Giuseppe Bottai, "Azione politica e arte" in *Politica fascista delle arti* (Rome, 1940), 53. On the relationship between Bottai and the politics of art, see Philip V. Cannistraro, *La Fabbrica del consenso: Fascismo e mass media* (Rome and Bari, 1975), 149ff.; Gianni Grana, "Ideologia e arte nel regime fascista" in *Letteratura italiana novecento*, ed. Gianni Grana, 3 vols (Milan, 1979), II, 358ff.; Guerri, *Giuseppe Bottai*, 163ff.; and Laura Malvano-Bechelloni, "La Politique artistique dans un regime totalitaire," in *Art et fascisme: Totalitarisme et Résistance au totalitarisme dans les arts en Italie, Allemagne et France des années 30 à la défaite de l'axe*, ed. Pierre Milza and Fanette Roche-Pezard (Brussels, 1989), 160ff.
  - 18 Cannistraro, "Fascism and Culture," 153.
  - 19 On the Direzione Generale during this period, see Cannistraro, *La Fabbrica del consenso*, 155ff.
  - 20 Cannistraro, *La Fabbrica del consenso*, 155.
  - 21 Cannistraro, "Fascism and Culture," 147.
  - 22 Giuseppe Bottai, "Direttive del Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale," *Le Arti*, I, fasc. 1 (ottobre-novembre 1938), 3.
  - 23 Lazzari, *Problemi e fatti dell'arte*, 87.
  - 24 A critical examination of *Le Arti* can be found in Tempesti's book, *Arte dell'Italia fascista*, 224ff., in which the author gives a summary of a paper by Vittorio Fagone on *Le Arti* from the 1973 conference. "Il Novecento e gli anni trenta." For information of a descriptive nature on *Le Arti*, see "Indice ragionato della rivista 'Le Arti' (ottobre 1938-giugno 1943)," *L'Architettura*, XLVII, anno V, no. 495 (settembre-novembre 1959), 351, 423; "Recent Research," *The Burlington Magazine*, LXXIV, no. 4 (April 1939), 196; Mary Chamberlin, *Guide to Art Reference Books* (Chicago, 1959), 300, no. 2177; Silvia Danesi and Luciano Patetta, *Il Razionalismo e l'architettura in Italia durante il fascismo* (Venice, 1976), 199; Emilio Lavagnino, "News Letter from Italy," *College Art Journal*, VII, no. 4 (Summer 1948), 321; Lazzari, *L'azione per l'arte*, 172, no. 14ff.; and Dora Gulli Pecenko and Laura Nasi Zitelli, *Bibliografia dei periodici del periodo fascista 1922-1945, posseduti dalla Biblioteca delle Camera dei Deputati* (Rome, 1983), 30, no. 83.
  - 25 *Bollettino d'arte: Notizie dei musei, delle gallerie e dei monumenti*, Anno I, fasc. 1- (1907- ). Frequency varies. Issued by the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, 1907-1920; then the Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale, Direzione Generale delle Antichità e Belle Arti, 1921- .
  - 26 *Rassegna della istruzione artistica*, anno I, fasc. 1 - anno IX, fasc. 9-12 (gennaio 1930-settembre-dicembre 1938). Monthly. Directed by the Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale, Direzione Generale delle Antichità e Belle Arti. Edited by Marino Lazzari in 1938.
  - 27 *Le Arti* was printing articles and material that were read and cited in other scholarly art journals. *Critica d'arte* made reference to *Le Arti* by calling it, "... especially useful to students for its abundant illustrations ... we look at it for the same reason we do *Bollettino d'arte*; precise information and documentation." The journal also abstracted articles appearing in *Le Arti* from 1939 to 1940. See *Critica d'arte*, IV, no. 4, fasc. XIX, parte seconda (gennaio-marzo 1939), xi.
  - 28 See further "Il Convegno dei Soprintendenti," *Le Arti*, I, fasc. 1 (ottobre-novembre 1938), 41-69, and fasc. 2 (dicembre 1938-gennaio 1939) 133-69.
  - 29 Marino Lazzari, "Conclusioni al Convegno (Del Direttore Generale)," *Le Arti*, I, fasc. 2 (dicembre 1938-gennaio 1939), 165-166.
  - 30 Giuseppe Pagano (1896-1945), a major figure among the rationalist architects, began work on a master plan in 1935 to develop a special exposition district outside of Rome called E42. See Francesco Dal Co, "Italian Cities and Architecture in the First Half of the 1900s," *Italian Art 1900-1945*, eds by Pontus Hulten and Germano Celant (New York, 1989), 92ff.
  - 31 Articles were indexed by author, artist, illustration and, when appropriate, by building and city.
  - 32 Entitled "La Guerra d'Italia," these were official reports from the front line which were inserted in the beginning of each issue, beginning with the giugno-settembre 1940 issue and running through the giugno-settembre 1942 issue.
  - 33 Giuseppe Bottai, "Modernità e tradizione," 234.
  - 34 On the concept of traditions in Italian art, see, Flint, "Art and the Fascist Regime," 50ff.
  - 35 Many of the same discussions were going on in Germany under Hitler. See George L. Mosse, *Nazi Culture* (New York, 1966), 11.
  - 36 The interview had appeared originally in Bottai's journal, *Critica fascista*. See "Discussioni sull'arte moderna," *Le Arti*, I, fasc. 2 (dicembre 1938-gennaio 1939), 170-73, II-V.
  - 37 Giuseppe Bottai, "Modernità e tradizione," *Le Arti*, 231.
  - 38 "L'Arte Moderna," *Critica fascista*, XVII, fasc. 3 (1 December 1938), 35 (unsigned editorial but known to be by Bottai). See further Flint, "Art and the Fascist Regime," 51.
  - 39 De Grand, *Bottai e la cultura fascista*, 264.
  - 40 Bottai, "Il Regime per l'arte" in *Politica fascista*, 289.

- 41 See Giuseppe Bottai, "Per L'inaugurazione del 'Premio Cremona,'" *Le Arti*, III, fasc. 5 (giugno-luglio 1941), 313-15 and "Per L'inaugurazione del Terzo Premio Bergamo," *Le Arti*, IV, fasc. 1 (ottobre-novembre 1941), 1-4.
- 42 See Flint, "Art and the Fascist Regime," 51ff.
- 43 Malvano-Bechelloni, "La Politique artistique," 173.
- 44 On the Cremona and Bergamo exhibitions see Flint, "Art and the Fascist Regime," 51ff., and Tempesti, *Arte dell'Italia Fascista*, 227ff.
- 45 Student art shows provided one alternative. See "Il Convegno degli Istituti d'Istruzione Artistica," *Le Arti*, II, fasc. 5-6 (giugno-settembre 1940), 329-39.
- 46 See further Giovanni Gentile, "Arte contemporanea," *Le Arti*, II, fasc. 3 (febbraio-marzo 1940): 142-45, 183-87; Lazzari, *L'Azione per l'arte*, 157-62; Bottai, *Politica fascista*, 287ff.; Enrico Crispolti, "La Politica culturale del fascismo, le avanguardie e il problema del futurismo," in *Futurismo, cultura e politica*, ed. Renzo De Felice (Turin, 1988), 252ff.; and Tempesti, *Arte dell'Italia fascista*, 234ff.
- 47 Giuseppe Bottai "La legge sulle arti figurative," *Le Arti*, IV, fasc. 4 (aprile-maggio 1942), 243-49.
- 48 On the two per cent (for art) law, see further Elisabetta Cristallini, "La Legge del 2 per cento e il Concorso per il Mosaico" in *E 42; Utopia e scenario del regime*, eds Maurizio Calvesi et al., 2 vols (Venice, 1987), II, 231-33; Vittorio Fagone, "Arte, politica e propaganda" in *Gli Annitrenta*, 44; and Tempesti, *Arte dell'Italia fascista*, 245ff.
- 49 De Grand, *Bottai e la cultura fascista*, 263.
- 50 See further Fagone, "Arte, politica e propaganda," 44ff.
- 51 Bottai, "La legge," 243.
- 52 Marino Lazzari, "Vent'anni di politica fascista dell'arte," *Le Arti*, V, fasc. 4-5 (aprile-luglio 1943), 195.
- 53 Cristellini, "La Legge del 2 per cento," 231.
- 54 Crispolti, "La Politica culturale del fascismo," 257.
- 55 See further Fagone, "Arte, politica e propaganda," 51.
- 56 *Le Arti*, IV, fasc. 3 (aprile-maggio 1941), 1.
- 57 This may also have been an indication that the journal was being published behind schedule.
- 58 Bottai was Minister until his dismissal in February 1943. Soon after, he supported the Grand Council resolution to remove Mussolini from power in July 1943. Condemned to death in absentia by a Verona tribunal, he escaped to Algeria; he was later given amnesty in 1948 and devoted himself thereafter to journalism. See further De Grand, *Bottai e la cultura fascista*, 264ff.
- 59 Cannistraro, "Fascism and Culture," 154. See also, Tannenbaum, *The Fascist Experience*, 310ff.
- 60 Lazzari, "Vent'anni," 195ff.
- 61 Tannenbaum, *The Fascist Experience*, 337ff.