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### Challenging cultural categories: The transformation of the Venice Biennale under Fascism

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## Challenging cultural categories: the transformation of the Venice Biennale under Fascism

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### Abstract

This article analyzes the development of a national cultural event, the Venice Biennale, under the auspices of the Fascist government. As part of a larger project of forging responsive publics and modernizing cultural life, Fascist culture ministries and bureaucrats used this international fine arts exhibition as a place to challenge existing practices of cultural display and organization. In this process, which took place between 1930 and 1938, cinema, the decorative arts and audience incentive practices drawn from the tourist industry were mobilized to transform a previously limited institution.

### Keywords

Arts patronage, Venice Biennale, Venice Biennale Film Festival, aesthetic pluralism, Fascist culture.

Excitement ran high on the Lido in Venice on the night of 3 August 1932. The glamorous crowd on the terrace of the Excelsior Hotel awaited the arrival of Greta Garbo and Lionel Barrymore. For the closing festivities of the first Venice Biennale International Film Festival, 'the Super Colossal *Grand Hotel*', presided over by 'M.G.M.'s principal artists', was screened for an audience of film stars, dignitaries, Fascist officials, European rich and summer tourists.<sup>1</sup> The conclusion to a Fascist cultural experiment, the Venice Biennale Film Festival was a carefully choreographed Hollywood-style extravaganza which stressed fantasy, spectacle and romance. The government-appointed Venice Biennale administrators celebrated a cultural triumph and innovation. The secretary general of the Biennale, Antonio Maraini, boasted that the Biennale was 'the first to place cinema alongside the other major arts'.<sup>2</sup> 'The world's greatest exhibition of contemporary art', wrote the press, 'has received and consecrated among its arts even cinematography'.<sup>3</sup> Mass culture met elite culture on the terrace of the Excelsior Hotel, and the Fascist government and party had arranged the match.

The cultural politics of Italian Fascism opened the social and formal boundaries of European elite culture. As part of its project to integrate Italians into

official cultural institutions and as a product of broader western socio-cultural shifts, Fascist sponsorship transformed the presentation and cultural role of the fine arts in Italy. The regime simultaneously appropriated and adapted elite culture: it made use of the legitimacy and rootedness offered by elite culture, while also expanding its content and enlarging its audiences. Fascist intervention advanced certain preexisting trends, such as the commercialization of the fine arts, begun in the nineteenth century, and introduced new ones, such as the mixing and blending of cultural forms within an elite context.

This article is part of a scholarly tradition which is deciphering Italian Fascism's complex cultural politics and its attraction for audiences and for a significant number of interwar Italian artists.<sup>4</sup> In contrast to postwar studies which saw the regime's interest in culture as purely instrumental and functional, with Fascist intervention in cultural affairs aimed at the singular goal of cementing an unwilling populace to the regime, much contemporary work has abandoned the dichotomy 'collaboration' versus 'consent', 'art' versus 'propaganda' and 'Fascism' versus 'culture', looking instead for the contestations and accommodations between them.<sup>5</sup> Here I investigate an instance of Fascist cultural intervention, but with the idea that Fascist culture was imprecise and changing – the product of a constant negotiation between the dictatorship's goals and the cultural tastes of artists and spectators. This discussion of official challenges to cultural hierarchies is part of the critical tradition which views the dictatorship as *shifting and contested at the ideological and functional levels*. While significant scholarly work has been done on the function of mass culture in the Fascist dictatorship, especially on the role of film, newspapers and radio, few investigations have considered the role of elite culture in forging consent for the regime.

As this article details, the seemingly inconsistent appearance of Fascist patronage reveals an evolving cultural politics shaped by conflicting factors. These factors were as varied as the search for critical and popular acclaim and the interest in the Fascistization and centralization of cultural production. What emerged out of the mix was a cultural policy of 'aesthetic pluralism' – the Mussolini dictatorship's practice of accepting, appropriating and supporting a range of aesthetics and cultural products. This Italian Fascist form of pluralism meant that multiple imageries and aesthetic formulations represented Fascism and were a part of its cultural system, its imaginary and its aesthetic universe.

The Venice Biennale of International Art, then and now the most prestigious art exhibition on Italian soil, provides a case study for the intersection of Fascist cultural politics and the fine arts. In the late 1920s, the Fascist government replaced local Venetian elites as the promoter of the Biennale and brought with it a new agenda and a new relationship to inherited European elite culture. With the dictatorship's vision of the Venice Biennale as the pinnacle of a centralized network of national arts institutions and 'a great festival of cultural tourism', the change of patron meant the opening up of the institution

to larger and more diverse audiences, as well as to new cultural forms and aesthetic languages.<sup>6</sup>

Inaugurated in 1895 in commemoration of the silver wedding anniversary of King Umberto and Queen Margherita, the Venice Biennale of International Art was firmly located on the itinerary of the European upper classes.<sup>7</sup> The exhibition was conceived as a response to Venice's decline and economic woes by its turn-of-the-century elites who hoped it would bring revenues and international acclaim to the city. During its first thirty years, the Biennale served primarily as a meeting place for the established European art world. The exhibition, with its backdrop of grand balls and *palazzi*, attracted the attention of the European aristocracy and *haute bourgeoisie* in the years before World War I. By 1914, it was a confirmed stop on the Grand Tours of an increasingly mobile bourgeoisie. In its first years, the Venice Biennale stressed the isolation of the fine arts from the pressures of mass society and politics.<sup>8</sup> Academic painting prevailed, with the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists generally excluded until the years just before World War I. Elevating the cult of the master and the masterpiece, this institution, in its pre-Fascist incarnation, was based on a restricted number of genres, styles, artists and social classes.

This article employs terminology of common but often slippery usage. For our purposes, the categories 'high culture' and 'elite culture' refer to cultural forms created by dominant social groups and then mobilized into a system of social stratification. High culture, as it emerged by the nineteenth century, required knowledge and expertise in the classical tradition. It provided European elites with 'cultural capital' used to bolster a position of economic and social dominance. As Pierre Bourdieu has detailed in his work on the creation of 'cultural tastes' in European societies, high culture is freighted with symbolic capital which can be used by those with knowledge of it and access to it.<sup>9</sup> Historians and sociologists, such as Lawrence Levine and Paul DiMaggio, have revealed how, in the course of the nineteenth century, bourgeois elites appropriated cultural forms such as classical music and drama from more popular realms and reconfigured them as the exclusive terrain of high culture.<sup>10</sup>

Between 1928 and 1932, Fascist-appointed officials replaced Venetian elites at the helm of the Biennale. Under Fascism, the biannual international art exhibition's aristocratic and bourgeois character was repackaged to attract the new professional and white-collar middle classes. The rise in numbers of urban professionals and middle-class white-collar and clerical workers in the early twentieth century represented a potential untapped audience for the Biennale and for Fascist-sponsored cultural institutions. Between 1900 and 1925 northern Italy had undergone rapid urbanization; by the 1920s the urban middle classes and *petite bourgeoisie* – especially doctors, lawyers and small shopkeepers – had grown significantly. In the 1920s, Italy counted three-quarters of a million salaried personnel.<sup>11</sup>

Fascist cultural bureaucrats employed several strategies for widening a previously limited cultural institution. Changes in the boundaries of high

culture fell into two categories: broadening content and actively cultivating the attendance of new social groups. The first strategy, that of changing accepted notions of high culture, involved the inclusion of new cultural forms and genres, from popular to mass culture. It also translated into welcoming a greater variety of aesthetic schools and styles. Between 1930 and 1936, the Fascist dictatorship moved certain manifestations of popular and mass culture – film, popular drama and music, the decorative arts and public art – to the center of the Biennale, displacing the dominance of easel painting and sculpture. From the Hollywood musicals and situation comedies of the Film Festival to the glass vases of the decorative arts pavilion, each previously excluded form threatened the isolation of the fine arts.

The second strategy focused on familiarizing new groups to a formerly exclusive cultural practice. Using the techniques developed in advertising and mass tourism, the regime sought to reshape cultural habits and practices. Some of the phenomena of consumer capitalism – advertising and the culture industry – coincided with the dictatorship's goal of economic growth, as well as the interest of Venetian elites in the same. Fascist bureaucrats targeted travel discounts and hotel packages at members of the new urban middle classes who might have felt excluded from the Biennale or who might have chosen to travel elsewhere. Government-subsidized train fare discounts of up to 70 percent worked together with hotel and restaurant promotions to turn the Venice Biennale into a consumption and leisure experience.

Nonetheless, the Venice Biennale's reconstitution was hybrid and complex: rather than abandon elite culture, the regime promoted an amalgamated cultural institution. The mass and popular culture introduced at the Biennale in the 1930s retained an aristocratic patina and a flavor of cultural elitism. Fascist defiance of the borders of elite culture was contradictory: the dictatorship at once pursued the *legitimacy and continuity* it found in elite culture and the cultural consensus possible in a successful mobilization of mass culture.

In opening high culture and adapting it to Fascism's perceived interests, the dictatorship underwrote the transformation of the Biennale's visitors from arts connoisseurs to cultural consumers. Thus, those attending official art exhibitions moved from the narrow category of connoisseur, with accumulated knowledge and expertise in European high culture, to consumer, the partaker of a commodity based on its accessibility and diversity which carried fewer rites of initiation. Where the connoisseur would 'judge critically because of thorough knowledge', the consumer came to assimilate and experience.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to Fascism's goal of expanding the audiences for official culture, the reconceptualization of the Venice Biennale was shaped by domestic political and economic interests and international cultural and economic trends. The blurring of the lines between high and low, elite and mass, connoisseurship and consumption also emerged from an Italian and European avant-garde critique of elite culture: from the Futurists to the Constructivists, cultural avant-gardes, both before and after World War I, broke down inherited categories and

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declared the bankruptcy of established bourgeois and elite culture. The challenges to cultural segregation came in large part from the growth of mass culture industries such as film, radio and publishing in the 1930s. The officially coordinated changes in the Venice Biennale thus reveal the transformation of fine arts (re)presentation in the face of Fascism and consumer capitalism.

### I The social boundaries of culture

After the Fascist consolidation of power in the years 1925–6, the party and the government entered into the workings of a range of preexisting cultural institutions, from the La Scala Opera in Milan to the Uffizi Museum in Florence. The dictatorship cited a range of motivations, from financial inefficiency to unqualified personnel, for the overhaul of earlier administrative systems. Overall, the legacy of Fascism's initial intervention in cultural institutions, as the case of the Venice Biennale demonstrates, was one of cultural change and the implanting of a national foundation, at the expense of the preexisting local or regional one.

Fascist-sponsored cultural events and institutions, with their celebration of the widespread participation of artists, required that the dictatorship's leading role be seconded by audiences. And, as the Fascist regime increased its cultural presence after 1930 and searched for a set of cultural forms and aesthetic languages evocative of its ideology, it pursued broader segments of the population to acknowledge its successes. Without a significant expansion of the culture-going public, the regime could not make good its promises of a cultural renaissance and financial support to artists, could not be a successful and visible patron, and could not recruit high culture in its search for consent. A number of factors, based in Fascist ideology and governing practices, coalesced in the expansion of a government-supported fine arts culture in the 1930s. Interest in being seen as the force behind cultural renewal, and as the enabler of the 'new' and the revolutionary drove the move, together with the desire to mobilize the population within conditions coordinated by the party and the government.

The early years of Fascist intervention in the arts, from 1922 to 1930, focused on government and party involvement in preexisting institutions of high and mass culture, on the creation of new institutions where a lack was perceived, and on the professional organization of cultural producers. Following the creation of Fascist Syndicate of the Fine Arts between 1926 and 1930, the government coordinated previously communal, local and regional art exhibitions into a pyramid-shaped national hierarchy, with the Venice Biennale of International Art at the top and the local and regional shows of the Fascist Syndicate of the Fine Arts at the base. Between 1925 and 1932, the dictatorship legally and financially reconstituted art exhibitions and created a national, centralized and government-promoted system of artistic display. Fascist bureaucrats and artists working in the syndicates took administrative positions in the arts bureaucracy and at the helm of institutions. Art exhibitions, from the Venice Biennale of

International Art and the Roman Quadriennale of National Art to the regional and provincial exhibitions, were coordinated with the Fascist Syndicate of the Fine Arts, and the government and the party became central patrons.

In 1931, Mussolini announced the decision to 'move toward the people'.<sup>13</sup> He called upon the agencies of the party and the government to draw Italians into Fascist institutions and to have Fascism touch the lives of those still not mobilized into the organs, institutions and events of the regime. In the early 1930s, official journals debated the depth of Fascist influence upon the Italian state and society, discussing methods for its expansion.<sup>14</sup> Among the strategies proposed to make the party more populous and populist were the expansion of Fascist mass culture and a resurgence of populist discourse in official culture. The party and the government created programs and policies for bringing Fascism into as yet untouched corners of Italian society. The mass organizations multiplied and differentiated their tasks according to social group.<sup>15</sup> Youth and women were targeted by the *Gruppi universitari fascisti*, *Gioventù fascista del littorio* and the *Fasci femminili*.<sup>16</sup> The *Opera nazionale dopolavoro* moved into new workplaces.

Urban middle and upper-middle-class adults, social groups accustomed to autonomy and, by the 1930s, possessed of an individualist, non-corporate understanding of their social role, were harder to coordinate.<sup>17</sup> One solution was an officially organized sphere of high culture. As Simonetta Lux has explained, the need 'to involve a broader public ... was often resolved by a plan to control the major organizational and exhibiting structures of art'.<sup>18</sup>

## 2 The new forms

Fascism's eclectic patronage style and its use of culture in the search for responsive publics encouraged Antonio Maraini – who served both as secretary general of the Biennale and as director of the Fascist Syndicate of the Fine Arts – and Count Giuseppe Volpi di Misurata, president of the Biennale, to experiment with the exhibition. The government-appointed Biennale administration, in place by 1930 and presided over by Volpi, determined to build a major national institution. Volpi personified Fascism's desire to appropriate the Biennale and give it a Fascist and national character. Born into a lower-middle-class Venetian family, Volpi had built an empire and a fortune from electrical, chemical and iron industries in the Veneto and the Emilia-Romagna. While serving as president of the Biennale, Volpi also headed the *Confindustria*, the association of businessmen and industrialists, during the Fascist era.<sup>19</sup> Volpi's industrial and business background informed his attitude toward culture.<sup>20</sup> Certainly, his managerial and business experience led him to an awareness of the Biennale's potential as a commercially successful tourist center.<sup>21</sup> Volpi and Maraini were supported in their project by officials in the Ministry of National Education, in particular ex-Nationalist Balduino Giuliano.

In the early 1930s, the Fascist Biennale administration added a series of

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diverse attractions to the fine arts exhibition. The Film Festival, Music Festival, Drama Festival, Poetry Competition and the introduction of the decorative and public arts all represented challenges to dominant notions of high culture. The new attractions determined perceptual shifts and brought the Biennale closer to contemporary cultural forms such as department stores, arcades and world's fairs. The viewer's gaze moved from the conspiratorial and knowing gaze of the initiate to that of the modern consumer 'looking at' and consuming a range of phenomena. These entertainment-oriented festivals pursued social groups less trained in the language and manners of European high culture. Held in theaters, halls and open-air auditoria, they were available to a numerically larger audience than the traditional painting and sculpture exhibition and bestowed potentially greater profit upon organizers.

The first innovation, while hardly revolutionary, paved the way for further experimentation. In 1930, the Music Festival was launched with a program of international classical music.<sup>22</sup> Its organizers welcomed it as pathbreaking, because 'it not only signals an important development, but opens wide horizons for new and fertile expansions'.<sup>23</sup> Mirroring the organization of the figurative arts exhibition, the Music Festival offered separate 'national' and 'international' concerts.<sup>24</sup> It presented a varied fare, selected from European classical music and including 'soloists performing recent classical music' and 'classical dance pieces'.<sup>25</sup> The 1934 program emphasized well-known music by Mozart, Richard Strauss and Verdi. That same year, in a move to blend mass and elite culture, the Music Festival organized a competition for music 'suitable for radio broadcasting'.<sup>26</sup> Scheduled with an eye toward maintaining a steady flow of visitors to the Biennale, the Second Music Festival in 1932 took place during the first two weeks in September, when the summer crowds traditionally thinned out. In contrast to the art exhibition which ran at a deficit throughout the 1930s, the Music Festival showed a modest profit.<sup>27</sup>

The Music Festival catered to new cultural consumers who looked for more accessible forms. With its eclectic programs and open-air theater, it mixed musical genres and challenged notions of elite experience. Spectators consumed the program simultaneously in large numbers and it took place at night, when the fine arts exhibition was closed. The Music Festival redefined the Biennale's itinerary, replacing the formal evening banquets of the Biennale's earlier participants with reasonably priced entertainment. The physical mixing and crowding of an amphitheater or hall confronted elite notions of the private and isolated assimilation of culture which had previously characterized the Biennale.

The Music Festival's popularity encouraged Maraini to launch Theater and Poetry Festivals which fulfilled similar functions. The Theater Festival stressed a Venetian theme with Goldoni productions and other plays written by Venetians or set in Venice. Again, in an effort at accessibility, Goldoni's *La bottega del caffè* was performed in 'modern prose'.<sup>28</sup> This opening-up included formal experimentation, as when in 1934 the Theater Festival welcomed modernist direction



and staging with the exiled Weimar theater director Max Reinhardt's *The Merchant of Venice*.<sup>29</sup>

The addition of an array of evening activities was tied to the expanded tourist packaging of the Biennale. After 1932, on any given evening, visitors could partake of a variety of attractions, including folkloric festivals and regattas on the Venetian canals. The diversified Biennale stressed the consumption of the 'Venetian experience', in the form of a surfeit of Venetian imagery and references, from the Goldoni productions of the Theater Festival to the gondolas and masks of the promotional literature. Of course, these were in symbiosis with the inexpensive and readily available souvenirs carrying the same images.

On the heels of the Music Festival, the Biennale administration introduced an event which quickly became its most popular new feature and which fundamentally confronted the hegemony of the fine arts at the exhibition. In the summer of 1932, the Biennale inaugurated the International Film Festival, projecting forty films from nine nations and attracting 25,000 spectators.<sup>30</sup> The Film Festival screened two films each night for twenty nights, with the projections held outdoors on the seaside terrace of the Excelsior Hotel. To view the films, well-dressed spectators sat in wicker chairs on the Chez Vous terrace of the Excelsior Hotel (see Illustration 1). Locating the spectacle in the primary hotel on the Lido furthered the Biennale's identity as a site of

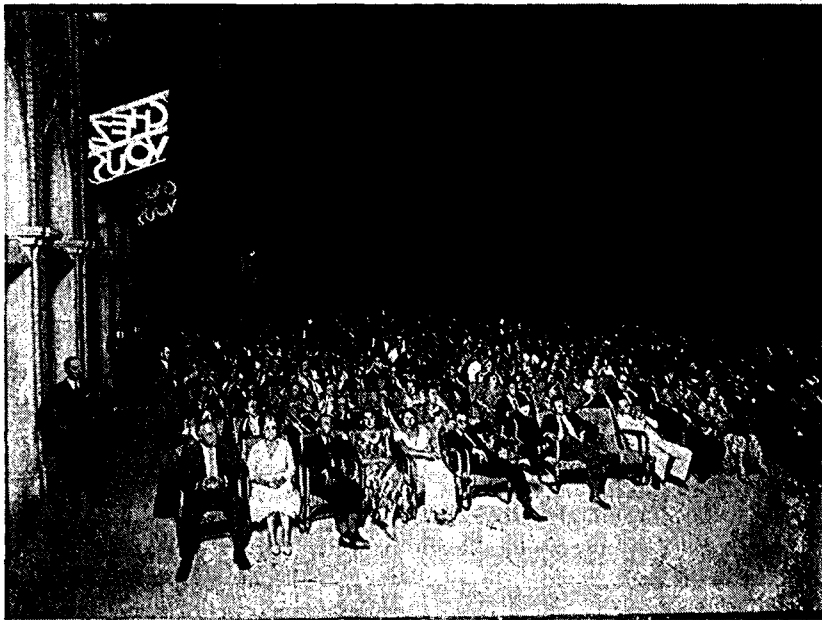


Illustration 1 The first Venice Biennale Film Festival: Chez Vous outdoor theater on the terrace of the Excelsior Hotel, Lido, Venice, 1932

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consumption, tourism and leisure. The Film Festival was situated snugly among the hotels and restaurants of the Venetian beach resort. A visitor/consumer could dine on the terrace of the Excelsior, watch a film and sleep peacefully at the Hotel des Bains.

The second Film Festival in 1934 established it as a permanent fixture: seventeen nations participated with fifty-eight production companies showing films to 41,000 people.<sup>31</sup> The success of this festival quickly led Mussolini to decree it an annual event, thus giving it a more visible and regular cultural presence than the fine arts exhibition itself, which took place every two years.<sup>32</sup> From the start, the Film Festival stressed variety and entertainment, especially multiplicity of genre and nationality. At the 1932 debut, showings included E. Goulding's *Grand Hotel*, Leni Riefenstahl's *Blue Light*, Dziga Vertov's *Towards Life* and René Clair's *A nous la liberté*.<sup>33</sup> American films predominated: the inaugural event screened *Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Champion*, *Frankenstein*, *The Cry of the Crowd*, *Forbidden*, *Grand Hotel* and *The Man I Killed*, among others. The goal of a large and diverse audience and the marketing of a ground-breaking event gave the Film Festival a smorgasbord character and an explicit connection to new forms of consumption and leisure. In addition to a range of melodramas, historical dramas, musicals, situation comedies, documentaries and animated shorts, the program 'include[d] films of unusual character: avant-garde, surrealist, musical light symphonies'.<sup>34</sup>

Along with the stress on variety and diversity, much of the transformation of the Biennale depended upon the promotion of prizes and awards. Each of the separate festivals mounted competitions and awarded prizes. The Music Festival, for example, promoted a competition for music suitable for radio broadcasting; the Theater Festival launched one for 'four new comedies'; and the Poetry Festival ran a competition for 'young poets'.<sup>35</sup>

At the Film Festival prizes and awards played an especially determinative function in drawing in new audiences. The spectacle surrounding the designation of prizes at the Film Festival for production, direction and performance tied the event to shopping and commerce. The numerous categories of prizes, including an audience referendum with monetary awards for the winners, underlined the commercial rather than intellectual aspects of artistic production.<sup>36</sup> For example, at the 1934 Film Festival, Mussolini, the Biennale, the city of Venice, the Istituto Luce, the Ministry of Corporations, the Fascist Theater Association and the Ministry of National Education, among other organizations, promoted twenty-three prizes for categories ranging from Best Foreign Film to Best Direction to Best Animated Cartoon.<sup>37</sup> In 1936, Walt Disney won Best Animated Cartoon for *Three Orphaned Cats*; the honors included a medallion depicting Mickey Mouse astride a *fascio*-ornamented gondola, with the Venetian cityscape in the background.<sup>38</sup> (See Illustration 2.) Blending the symbols of elite culture (Venice), mass culture (Mickey Mouse) and Fascism (the *fascio*), the medallion manifests the Film Festival's attempted cultural synthesis.

The vast and varied prizes of the Film Festival courted as many types of films



Illustration 2 Medallion awarded to the Disney Studio for Best Animated Cartoon at the Venice Biennale Film Festival in 1936

and film-makers as possible. In distinction to the competitions for the figurative arts, these prizes were not based on thematic categories. They were awarded for 'quality' and 'popularity' and were conferred by an international jury. The 'audience referendum', a key innovation of the Film Festival from its start, provided the element of popular choice and selection central to consumer culture. The questions of the audience referendum reveal a connection between the Film Festival and the emergent discourse of Hollywood film culture. The seven categories of the audience referendum, from Best Actress and Actor to Best Film, very closely resembled those of the recently begun Academy Awards.<sup>39</sup> In 1932, Americans won four of the audience referendum categories, with Helen Hayes and Frederick March carrying away best performance honors.

The Fascist transformation of elite culture is striking in the Film Festival's use of Hollywood spectacle for the presentation of the films. The Film Festival merged a number of spectacular elements, such as night-time film premières, the

romantic ambience of Venice, dramatic appearances of 'stars', and the titillating excitement of treating cinema as a fine art. The regime eagerly cultivated the drama and 'hype' available in the Film Festival. Prizes were awarded in tense and staged ceremonies, openings and closings were carefully orchestrated and the whole event was tied to the glamor and fantasy of Hollywood. The brochure for the 1934 Film Festival summoned advertising's language of innovation. It boasted the 'First Presentation of New Films' and that 'The Best Known Artists of the Screen Will Be Present'.<sup>40</sup> The promise of 'the first' and 'the best' represented the influence of consumerism upon official culture. In July 1937, the Minister of Popular Culture, in a much touted ceremony, inaugurated a new and permanent 'Cinema Palace' on the Lido. The term 'palace' mobilizes Hollywood language of the new aristocracy of film and of the fantasy of film: it was not called the 'Film Pavilion', which would have been in keeping with the Biennale's other buildings.<sup>41</sup> With this turn to spectacle and fantasy, the Film Festival involved the new kind of viewing implied in cinema spectatorship. The participant in the Film Festival was a 'spectator-shopper [who] tries on different identities', identities of fantasy, mobility and romance.<sup>42</sup>

The inclusion of popularly acclaimed and commercially successful films in the context of the Biennale both levelled and reconfigured cultural categories. The Venice Biennale Film Festival bestowed respectability on the relatively new and still controversial art form of cinema. The festival allowed previously excluded spectators to partake of mass culture experiences within the elite context of the Biennale. The Biennale, the quintessential high culture institution, adapted itself and produced a 'mixed' cultural event: though film was a mass art form, the Film Festival attracted a primarily middle- and upper-class audience by virtue of its location on the Lido and its association with the Biennale. The pricing of Film Festival tickets further reveals the regime's middle-class, rather than working-class, focus: the tickets cost 5 lire, twice the normal film ticket price. At the same time, the promotion and advertising of the event incorporated the language of mass film culture, such as the stress upon 'stars' and 'the appearance of the most admired artists of the silver screen'.<sup>43</sup>

The Film Festival's promoters had the honor of hosting the first international film festival in Europe. There was profit in defying convention which the Biennale administration self-consciously celebrated: Maraini declared that his 'precise goal . . . in founding and organizing this Exposition' was 'to put cinema on the level of painting, sculpture, music and drama – all arts already promoted by the Biennale'.<sup>44</sup> Its promoters recognized that the elevation of film to acceptable high culture accounted for the Film Festival's attraction: 'What are the reasons for such success? It is very simple. First, put cinema on a par with all the pure arts – painting, sculpture, music, poetry, architecture.'<sup>45</sup>

The economy also drove cultural change. The state-sponsored Film Festival offered practical aid to an embattled national film industry. At the time of the first Film Festival, annual domestic film production in Italy had fallen to less than a dozen films from a pre-World War I high of 500 features.<sup>46</sup> A well-attended,

critically acclaimed and highly publicized international film competition promoted by the State suggested lucrative possibilities to Italian film-makers squeezed by the popularity and visibility of Hollywood productions. To offer exposure to Italian productions and to highlight official support of the film industry, the first night of the 1933 Film Festival was 'devoted exclusively to Italian productions' and began with 'a great propaganda film edited by LUCE and designed to illustrate the great works of Fascism achieved in the last two years and in the process of completion'.<sup>47</sup> In 1934, in an effort to coordinate and stimulate national production (as well as to get as much publicity as possible out of a successful event), the regime declared that the Film Festival would become annual.

The Film Festival acquired a popular following, and attendance figures rose continually through the 1930s. In 1935, 38,500 people attended; in 1936 the event boasted 50,000 spectators; and the 1937 version counted 56,000 viewers.<sup>48</sup> By way of comparison, attendance for the 1934 and 1936 Biennales totaled 361,917 and 194,702, respectively. Thus, by 1936, slightly more than one-quarter of Biennale visitors paid a separate fee to watch at least one film. By the time of the 1935 Film Festival, Maraini celebrated the profitability of the enterprise which had 'brought in 250,000 lire, rather than the 180,000 predicted'.<sup>49</sup>

The Music Festival, the Theatre Festival and the Film Festival together gave the Biennale a multi-faceted character, offering a new set of itineraries and ways of consuming culture. After 1932, visitors could make extended trips, partake of a range of activities, select, choose and consume plays, music, film and the fine arts. Each of these attractions mobilized the consumptive possibilities of culture and of Venice itself by being situated in various parts of the city and requiring that the spectator move through the city to attend them. The 1934 Biennale brochure underlined the limitless attractions of the event: the brochure was divided into seven promotional sections – film, fine arts, decorative arts, music, theater, 'traditional feasts and sports competitions' – and 'exceptional railway reductions'.<sup>50</sup> The Biennale now had an itinerary similar to shopping: the art exhibition's pavilions themselves resembled shops and the act of moving among a variety of attractions located throughout the city intensified Venice's transformation into an extended arcade or theme park. The connection to broader trends in consumption and leisure can also be seen in the stress on the quantity of new attractions, as opposed to an earlier emphasis upon the quality and exclusivity of the Biennale. By creating the atmosphere of a supermarket of events and exhibitions, Maraini and the other Fascist-appointed administrators had altered the context of the viewing of the fine arts. The changed context – the shaking-up of the experience of viewing art – challenged the social embeddedness of taste and, to a certain extent, the social boundaries of culture.

The fine arts pavilion, the core of the Venice Biennale, was not immune from the search for expanded publics and the challenges to cultural categories. The Biennale inaugurated in 1932 a Venezia pavilion alongside the main Italia

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building in which the painting and sculpture were housed.<sup>51</sup> This new pavilion housed decorative arts displays. Previously, the art of the Biennale had been restricted to painting, sculpture and drawing – all art forms rooted in long-standing European elite culture traditions. These art forms required knowledge of and familiarity with high culture and were too expensive for the non-collector. After 1932, however, new forms arrived: glassware, textiles, lacework, gold-smelting, enamel-work and brasswork all became central to the Biennales of 1934–42.<sup>52</sup> In 1934, seventy-three decorative arts exhibitors presented 422 objects. Modern glass designs by famous Venetian producers such as Venini and Saviati shared the Venezia pavilion with traditional lacework (see Illustration 3).

The new middle classes had been distanced from arts acquisitions by the costs, as well as by the barriers of cultural habit and practice. Paintings and sculpture at the Biennale had been too expensive for the non-collector or non-elite. In 1932 and 1934 painting prices ranged from 1000 to 5000 lire, while glassware and other decorative art pieces cost between 100 and 300 lire.<sup>53</sup> A visitor of middling means could attend the Biennale after 1932, purchase a Venetian glass vase for 125 lire, and consider himself a patron of the arts. Art work produced in volume and at a lower cost allowed patrons of the arts to come, as President of the Biennale Volpi claimed, from 'a vaster public of smaller means'.<sup>54</sup>

Blurring the lines between high and low, elite and popular took in many forms and played many functions. In some cases, it came as patronage of mechanical reproduction – film – and in others it took the form of defending craft against the machine. The introduction of the decorative arts at Venice had

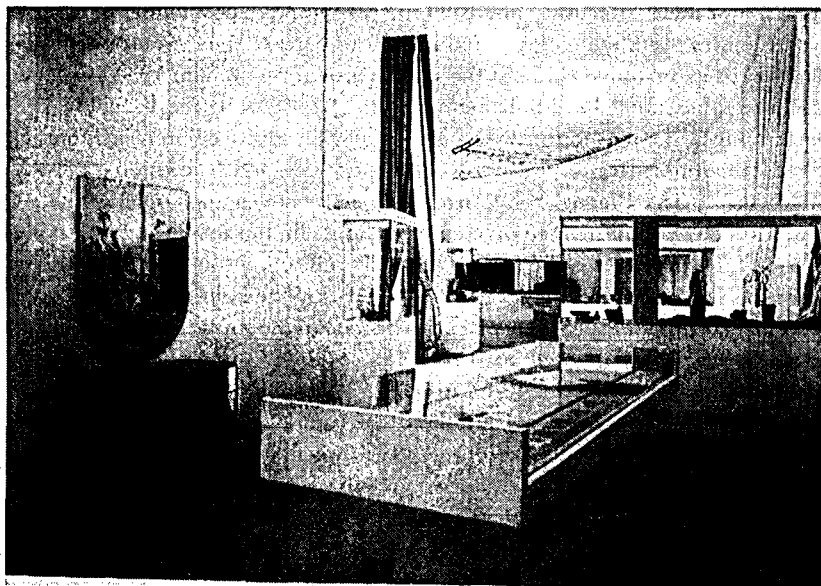


Illustration 3 The interior of the Pavilion of the Decorative Arts – Venice Biennale, 1942

an economic and ideological function. On the one hand, it opened arts consumption to new classes, as the accountant from Turin could now take home a Venetian glass vase from the Biennale. The decorative arts confronted the segregation of high art, which had excluded design objects because of their 'distasteful entanglement with commerce'.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, patronage of the decorative arts was also redolent of the preindustrial patron-artist relationship of the old aristocracy with the craftspeople they commissioned. So, while the decorative arts allowed more people to purchase *objets d'art*, they remained somewhat elitist, in that they embodied preindustrial social hierarchies. The decorative arts of Venice, fine blown glass and hand-worked lace, still evoked images of luxury associated with aristocracy. The location of the decorative arts at the center of the Biennale simultaneously revealed a challenge to convention and anxiety about change.<sup>56</sup>

As in case of the Film Festival, official patronage of cultural change incorporated financial support for an embattled sector. Government and party support of the decorative arts meant aid to an endangered crafts industry. The Venetian lace-making and glass-blowing islands of Murano, Burano and Torcello had suffered greatly from the competition of the cheap goods of mechanized production. The 1934 Biennale catalogue stressed the relationship between the economic crisis and patronage of the decorative arts, claiming that 'times [have] fatally harmed the decorative arts'.<sup>57</sup> Official interest in sustaining the decorative arts was also tied to official anxieties over unemployment among the skilled artisanal working class.<sup>58</sup>

### 3 The triumph of public art

By the middle of the 1930s, the official challenges to the formal and class boundaries of fine arts culture intensified to confront the figurative arts exhibition itself. The next step in Fascist cultural experimentation involved attacks on the canon of the fine arts and a reconceptualization of what it meant to be a patron of the arts. In a move that joined rhetoric concerning the social role of the artist under Fascism to a critique of private, bourgeois patronage, Fascist cultural bureaucrats made public art a central component of the production and display of the fine arts in Fascist Italy in general and at the Venice Biennale in particular.

Public art emerged in Italy in the early 1930s as the answer to the problem posed by artists, officials and critics looking for a new and Fascist art dissociated from the private, academic work of the nineteenth century. Figures inside and outside of the Fascist hierarchy seized upon public art as the way to make art more accessible to the masses and to reorient artistic production in the name of Fascism. Fascist populist discourses and a depressed art market (and later demands for cultural autarchy), together with artists' own experiments with genre and explorations for more socially effective forms, led to the production and consumption of vast numbers of frescos, murals, mosaics and public statuary

by the government and the party. Increasingly from 1930 on, such public forms constituted a central element of state patronage.

Fascist Italy's embrace of public art was hardly unique. The intersection of public art and state patronage occurred on an international level, with the crisis of the 1930s witnessing a reconsideration of the social role of the arts and of artists.<sup>59</sup> The 1930s were characterized across Europe and America as a decade of politicized culture in which artists and governments searched for responsive forms. Public art, especially frescos, murals and monumental statuary, represented a diffused form of international 1930s culture. Public art had a cross-political cultural appeal which can be accounted for on a number of levels. First, governments in the years between the world wars integrated public art into the search for a national culture and the representation of national myths and identities. Second, mass politics and socioeconomic crisis had rendered official support for isolated or elite culture illegitimate. Public art fit firmly within the discourse which saw bourgeois culture as indulgent and antithetical to 'honest production'. Third, in a time of economic crisis, public arts projects provided employment to a potentially unruly but useful social class. Various governments between the world wars from New Deal America to France of the Popular Front to the Soviet Union under Stalin recruited the artist class for the production of art with a social and public function.

Domestic and international ideological and cultural developments encouraged Italy's turn to large-scale public art forms in the 1930s. The inconclusive search for an aesthetic representative of Fascism drove the rise of public art. Murals, mosaics and bas-reliefs coincided with Fascist patronage agendas in both form and content: they were all long-standing types of public art which combined Italian traditions dating from antiquity with Fascism's interest in opening the social composition and rhetorical possibilities of cultural production and reception. Patronage of murals, mosaics and bas-reliefs also represented great statements of *romanità* (Romanness); such forms reinforced the regime's connection with ancient Rome and allowed it to explicitly emulate the great Roman imperial patrons, thereby providing an alternative model to more recent bourgeois elites. The Roman-inspired frescos, mosaics and bas-reliefs bore a classical aura that buttressed the message of the regime's longevity and historical rootedness. Some Fascist bureaucrats believed that frescos, mosaics and bas-reliefs strengthened the authority of the state in ways that more contemporary forms could not.

Each major Italian artistic movement active in the interwar period promoted its own brand of public art. The public art produced in Fascist Italy generally shared (with the exception of that of the Futurists) an aesthetic which blended avant-garde elements with populist, historical and monumental ones. Out of both an internal development and in response to critics, the novecento painters evolved a style of public art after 1934 called *pittura murale* (mural painting). In addition to celebrating the use of murals and mosaics, *pittura murale* drew on resurrected pre-Renaissance Italian pictorial traditions, such as the Etruscan and



Romanesque. The 'Manifesto della pittura murale' ('Manifesto of mural painting'), published by Massimo Campigli, Achille Funi, Carlo Carrà and Mario Sironi in December 1933, declared that 'in the Fascist state art must have a social function: an educational function'. These novecento artists proposed the creation of a truly Fascist, Italian and modern style through mural painting. 'Mural painting', they asserted, 'is social art, *par excellence*'.<sup>61</sup> They stressed the combined public and collective character of the mural's production and reception. For them, mural painting 'committed the artist to a decided and virile execution which the technique of mural painting itself requires'.

Where the pre-Fascist Biennale had been based upon private patrons buying art to decorate private spaces, the Biennale after 1936 elevated grand-scale forms such as bas-relief and murals to be enjoyed by the public and purchased by the state. In 1936 public art came to the Venice Biennale in full force. That year, prize competitions wove together a number of newly emphasized ideological strands. The 1936 Biennale promoted competitions for frescos, bas-reliefs, portraits, landscapes, engravings and commemorative medals. Each category specified that the works 'will have to be inspired by events or aspects of Italian life during the Fascist era'.<sup>62</sup> The competition for a commemorative medal, for instance, required that one side bear the image of a figure 'most representative of the Fascist era' and the other an 'allegory drawn from the work of the person depicted'.<sup>63</sup> Government and party-sponsored competitions were to dominate the 1936 Biennale: there was one for 'seven frescos' and one for 'eight statues . . . to decorate a central hall chosen for this purpose'.<sup>64</sup> These competitions replaced earlier ones for easel paintings and ornamental sculpture. Two years later in 1938, the public art focus expanded to include competitions for frescos, bas-reliefs, portraits and commemorative medals. In an effort to open high culture at the level of production, these competitions specified who could participate: in 1936 restrictions of age and experience required that contributing artists be less than 35 years of age, members of the Fascist Syndicates and from among those not invited to the Biennale.<sup>65</sup>

In a bold challenge to the private patron and to 'the artist as celebrity', the Biennale administration filled the main halls of the 1936–42 exhibitions with the products of the public art competitions. In 1938, to emphasize a more regimented and more public form of patronage, the works of the competition winners occupied the first five rooms of the main exhibition hall of the Italia pavilion. The much publicized winning frescos and bas-reliefs met audiences in the entrance and the 'grand central hall' (see Illustration 4).<sup>66</sup> The location of public art at the front of the Biennale indicated a challenge to established patronage patterns. This was the regime's physical declaration of a new set of priorities. It relegated the private art of the easel to the back of the display space. Now, upon entering the pavilion, the visitor first would see the collective, large-scale works of public destination.

The placing of works destined for public or official uses at the center of the Venice Biennale reconfigured patronage. The spectator in the galleries of the



*Illustration 4* The Fresco Competition, Venice Biennale, 1936

pavilion now viewed the art for the experience and for the message implied in the work, not to acquire it. The 'lessons' of the frescos and the statuary – from the glories of the war in Ethiopia to the Battle for Grain – were for consumption, not the objects themselves. This consumption was to go on in public, either the public space of the more open Biennale or the public space of the work's final destination. The removal of the private market from the main halls of the 1938–42 Biennales declared the event less intimidating and more open to those without the means to purchase art works. Moreover, the location of rhetorically Fascist public art at the front of the Biennale announced the unequivocal authority of the state.

With the addition of public art to the Biennale, the dictatorship changed the hierarchies of cultural production and reception. Most of the participants in the public art competitions were young and non-consecrated artists, given access by the regime, like the new audiences. The frescos, mosaics and monumental statuary inside the Italia pavilion forced a meeting between an elite space and a public form.

#### **4 Tourism**

Advertising and tourist incentives comprised the third strategy for opening elite culture and integrating it into a larger burgeoning leisure and consumer

economy. The European expositions of the middle and late nineteenth century had initiated the connection between travel, commerce and the art market. By the early twentieth century, 'a symbiotic relationship had developed between central European tourism and the visual arts'.<sup>67</sup> The Fascist organizers of the Biennale wanted to extend its share of this commercial market. The broadening of culture-going audiences at fine arts exhibitions represented economic possibilities for the tourist industry, especially for hotels, restaurants and shops.<sup>68</sup>

In addition to the structural changes and the reconsideration of patronage styles, Maraini and Volpi recruited promotional and publicity techniques to attract audiences. Organized by both the Biennale press office and the government tourist agency, the publicity initiative encouraged Italians to travel to Venice and partake of an Italian and Fascist cultural experience. Maraini expanded and modernized the Biennale press office with the regular publication of information, schedules, prizes and discounts in the local, national and international press.<sup>69</sup> By 1934, Biennale news and advertisements ran in sixty-two national newspapers and fifteen European and American dailies.

Beginning in 1930, thousands of posters detailing available train discounts hung in train cars throughout Italy. The posters' placing reveals the audiences targeted by the Biennale staff: in 1930 announcements were split evenly between first- and second-class train cars, with none for the third-class cars.<sup>70</sup> While not renouncing its commitment to long-standing elite audiences, the Biennale now pursued middle-class audiences with equal fervor. By 1932, the balance swung in favor of middle-class patrons, with the orders for announcements showing twice as many allotted to second-class train cars as to first-class cars.<sup>71</sup> The selection of locales for railway station advertisements also demonstrated the geography of the targeted audiences. Large wall-size posters adorned thirty-three Italian central municipal railroad stations in 1930, with 85 percent in northern industrial cities.<sup>72</sup> By 1932, the number of participating railway stations rose to fifty-five, but the overwhelming emphasis remained in the industrial north.<sup>73</sup> Advertising went into 40,000 telephone directories.<sup>74</sup> Biennale marketing consciously targeted the urban middle classes, those who owned telephones and took second-class train cars. The Biennale also published pamphlets in six languages for tourist offices and resort hotels. The publicity program was coordinated with Italian and foreign tourist agencies, such as Italy's ENIT or Britain's *Bradshaw's Continental Guide*.<sup>75</sup>

The Biennale administration under Maraini made travel discounts the cornerstone of the incentive program. The train fare discount policy benefited both the regime and the consumer: the Ministry of Communications granted each exhibition visitor the right to a certain number of weeks of discounted train tickets. The ticket-holder would, upon reaching the Biennale, have his or her ticket stamped in proof of attendance. The *bollo* or validation cost between 5 and 15 lire which was divided between the Biennale and the Ministry of Communications.<sup>76</sup> For the 1930 Biennale, which ran from 2 May until 4 November, 50 percent discounts were available for 2–11 May, 18–27 July, 7–27 September and

26 October–4 November, and 30 percent discounts were offered for 12 May–17 July, 28 July–6 September and 22 September–25 October. The discounted tickets were valid for eight days, if issued in the Veneto, fifteen days if issued in other Italian train stations, and twenty days for those coming from abroad.<sup>77</sup>

By 1934, the expansion of the Biennale, the birth of the collateral events, and the attention to developing the audience all led to greater travel discounts. The 1934 Biennale, which ran from 1 May until 15 October, offered 70 percent train fare discounts for 1–20 May and 1 July–15 September, and 50 percent discounts for 21 May–30 June and 16 September–15 October. Honeymooners were eligible for 80 percent discounts.<sup>78</sup> Both the train fare program and the entry tickets were priced to attract large crowds for the Biennale's central events: Biennale administrators further reduced train fares for inaugurations and closings, and on the closing day of the 1934 Biennale a press release announced that 'the entrance ticket for this final day is reduced without exceptions to one lire'.<sup>79</sup>

While the Biennale pursued primarily the middle classes, it made growing gestures toward working-class attendance during the course of the 1930s. Fascist rhetoric spoke of the need to create an Italian culture open to all citizens and, thus, the Biennale opened its doors to 'the people' – but only certain deserving groups or on special days.<sup>80</sup> Maraini declared Sunday, 6 October 1934, 'People's Sunday' with entrance tickets reduced to half price.<sup>81</sup> At a normal price of 5 lire, the Biennale was too expensive for a working-class Italian, who could attend a movie for half that amount. Because the dictatorship did not want to unhinge the Biennale from its prestigious identifications, entrance tickets at the show remained higher, in this period, than tickets to the mass-based political exhibitions, such as the *Mostra della rivoluzione fascista* which cost 2 lire. Attendance figures attested to the success of the 'People's Day': Saturday (a work day), 5 October, drew 1816 visitors, while the 'People's Sunday' the following day attracted 3081 spectators.<sup>82</sup> Organizers consciously worked to create a context for attendance that would minimize working people's discomfort: the long opening hours on Sunday, 'People's Days' and discounted tickets were part of that effort. For the 1936 Biennale, *Dopolavoro* (the Fascist afterwork organization) members entered the Biennale for 2.50 lire, half the regular 5 lire entry fee, and riders on the 'popular trains' visited for 1.50 lire.

If travel and entrance discounts were designed to bring in a socially mixed audience, the Biennale's publicity materials continued to use the elite ambience of the event as a selling point. The institution's first clientele remained a crucial part of its self-conception and one of its attractions under Fascism. The pageantry and pomp of the Biennale inaugurations and ceremonies highlighted the continued participation of the Italian and European upper classes. Fascism wanted to appropriate the prestige of the Biennale; this required the participation of the exhibition's original constituency. Elites had been the mainstay of the pre-Fascist Biennale and gave it its distinctive aura; Maraini worked hard not to lose their support as the institution moved in new directions. For all the

inaugurations of 1928 through 1942, the House of Savoy was well represented. In 1932, 1934, 1936, 1938 and 1942, King Victor Emmanuel III opened the Biennale, together with the current Minister of National Education. In 1934, the Biennale press office mailed 1596 invitations for the inauguration ceremonies and festivities which included banquets and fancy dress balls.<sup>83</sup> This number included 461 senators, 400 deputies, 200 'various personalities', fifteen ambassadors, eight members of the Italian Academy, and ten directors of galleries and museums.<sup>84</sup> Biennale press releases always included lists of dignitaries, aristocrats and celebrities in attendance at the Biennale. Advertising in 'the great Italian and foreign hotels' and 'foreign luxury magazines' persisted throughout the period.<sup>85</sup>

By 1934, the Fascist-administered Biennale had pursued and successfully attracted large-scale and socially diverse tourism. As Maraini exulted: 'The International Biennale of Art ... [has] produced interest from all over the world and [has] brought a tremendous boost to Venetian tourism – doubling the number of visitors since the last exhibition.'<sup>86</sup>

The search for evidence of ever-expanding audiences led to special attention to the compilation of attendance figures and the constant sending of tallies to Mussolini's office and the Ministry of National Education.<sup>87</sup> By the close of the 1932 Biennale, Maraini claimed success: in 1932 attendance reached 250,000 spectators, as compared to 193,000 in 1930 and 172,000 in 1928.<sup>88</sup> For the 1934 event, the Biennale administration celebrated a jump in attendance to 450,000 visitors.<sup>89</sup> These increases mirrored the success of newly established programs, such as the Music, Drama and Film Festivals, better publicity and increased train discounts.

Fascist sponsorship moved Italian elite culture in numerous directions in a search for enlarged constituencies. The canonical power of bourgeois patronage was challenged by official support for diverse forms within an elite context. Fascism's evolving and heterodox cultural politics, with the powerful interest in accommodation, was conditioned by the pursuit of cultural consumers. By 1938, the regime had transformed the genre of the art exhibition. To attract new audiences, it sponsored experimentation and welcomed film, popular music, drama and the decorative and public arts. Fascism's commitment to mass entertainment and national culture had percolated up to the Biennale, which could no longer cater predominantly to arts connoisseurs and a *haut-bourgeois* clientele.

Of course, the transformation detailed here represented a single example of the Fascist regime's larger cultural politics. From the 1920s through the collapse of Fascism, cultural policy remained in constant flux, shaped by shifting economic, social and rhetorical priorities.

The Venice Biennale, as transformed by its Fascist administrators, offered a multitude of possibilities to the visitor. By 1936, a menu of cultural choices greeted spectators. From the Mickey Mouse cartoons of the Film Festival to the Goldoni plays of the Theatre Festival to the Venini vases of the decorative arts

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pavilion, the Biennale had become a cornucopia of forms and entertainments. The Fascist regime's goals of commercial development, popular success, cultural innovation and legitimation had coincided to reconfigure the structure and content of high culture in Italy.

## Notes

- 1 'Il programma della I. Esposizione d'Arte Cinematografica', *Gazzetta di Venezia*, 3 August 1932.
- 2 *L'arte nelle mostre italiane IV*(1) (January 1939): 3.
- 3 'La prima esposizione internazionale d'arte cinematografica', *Gazzetta di Venezia*, 24 May 1932.
- 4 See: Richard J. Golsan, *Fascism, Aesthetics and Culture* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1992); Andrew Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Alice Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Walter Adamson, *Avant-Garde Florence: From Modernism to Fascism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).
- 5 For the visual arts, Laura Malvano describes the multiplicity of imageries supported or accepted by Fascism and Fascism's changing use of those imageries: Laura Malvano, *Fascismo e la politica dell'immagine* (Turin: Bollati Boringheri, 1988). The notion of Fascist artistic diversity came into general acceptance with the 1982 Milan exhibition (catalogue *Anni trenta: Arte e cultura in Italia* (Milan: Mazzotta, 1983)).  
Reassessments of the architectural legacy of Fascist Italy have been particularly fertile. See: Giorgio Ciucci, *Gli architetti e il fascismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1989); Richard Etlin, *Modernism in Italian Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991); Diane Ghirardo, 'Italian architects and Fascist politics: an evaluation of the rationalists' role in regime building', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 39(2) (May 1980): 109–27; idem, *Building New Communities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); Silvia Danesi and Luciano Panetta (eds) *Il razionalismo e l'architettura in Italia durante il fascismo* (Venice: Edizione 'La Biennale di Venezia', 1976); Dennis Doordan, *Building Modern Italy* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1989).  
Film studies has produced a number of works detailing the varied forms the cinematic arts took during the Fascist era. See: Gian Piero Brunetta, *Cinema italiano tra le due guerre* (Milan: Mursia, 1975); James Hay, *Popular Film Culture in Fascist Italy* (Bloomington, Ind.: University of Indiana Press, 1987); Marcia Landy, *Fascism in Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Riccardo Redi (ed.) *Cinema italiano sotto il fascismo* (Venice: Marsilio, 1979); Elaine Mancini, *Struggles of the Italian Film Industry during Fascism, 1930–1935* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1985). On theater under Fascism see: Mabel Berezin, 'The organization of political ideology: culture, state and theater in Fascist Italy', *American Sociological Review* 56 (October 1991).
- 6 Paolo Rizzi and Enzo di Martini, *Storia delle Biennale, 1895–1982* (Milan: Electa, 1982), p. 37.
- 7 Secondary sources on the Venice Biennale of International Art are limited. The most important works are Romolo Bazzoni's memoir, *60 anni della Biennale di Venezia* (Venice: Lombroso Editore, 1962), and Lawrence Alloway, *The Venice Biennale, 1895–1968* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969). Bazzoni served as administrative director of the Biennale from 1920 to 1948. The Biennale published a short monograph on the exhibition's growth and development over the years: Paolo Rizzi and Enzo di Martini, *Storia della Biennale, 1895–1982* (Milan: Electa, 1982).

- In addition, I. Moroni has attempted to establish the Biennale as the reflection of 'official' aesthetic tastes in Italy since 1895: I. Moroni, *L'orientamento del gusto attraverso le Biennali* (Milan: Edizioni 'Le Rete', 1957).
- 8 Patricia Mainardi discusses the interconnected display of 'art' and 'industry' at the French Universal Expositions: Patricia Mainardi, *Art and Politics of the Second Empire* (New Haven, Conn., 1986). In *Painters and Public Life*, Thomas Crow argues that the salons of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were strongly shaped by popular tastes. Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life* (New Haven, Conn., 1985).
  - 9 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).
  - 10 Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: the Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988); idem, 'William Shakespeare and the American people: a study in cultural transformation', and Paul DiMaggio, 'Cultural entrepreneurship in nineteenth-century Boston: the creation of an organizational base for high culture in America', in Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, *Rethinking Popular Culture* (Berkeley, Calif., 1991).
  - 11 Victoria de Grazia, *The Culture of Consent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 127.
  - 12 Funk and Wagnalls (1969) *Standard Desk Dictionary*, New York: Reader's Digest Books Inc: p. 135.
  - 13 Mussolini announced the strategy of 'decisively reaching out to the people' in a 1932 speech: 'Al popolo napoletano', Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. XXV, ed. Edoardo and Duilio Susmel (Florence: La Fenice, 1958), p. 50.
  - 14 Jeffrey Schnapp and Barbara Spackman (eds) 'Selections from the great debate on Fascism and Culture: *Critica Fascista 1926-1927*', *Stanford Italian Review* VIII (1-2) (1990): 235-72.
  - 15 On the massification of the party in the 1930s and attempts to mobilize various portions of the population see: Teresa Maria Mazzatosta, *Il regime fascista tra educazione e propaganda, 1935-43* (Bologna, 1978); Giovanni Lazzari, *I Littoriali della cultura e dell'arte* (Naples: Liguori Editore, 1979).
  - 16 On youth organization and socialization see: Tracy Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight: the Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Italy* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Carmen Betti, *L'Opera Nazionale Ballila e l'educazione fascista* (Florence, 1984). On women and Fascism see: Victoria de Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).
  - 17 Victoria de Grazia discusses the targeting of Fascist culture according to social class. Victoria de Grazia, *The Culture of Consent: the Mass Organization of Leisure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). See, especially, 'Privileging the clerks', pp. 127-50, and 'The formation of Fascist low culture', pp. 187-224.
  - 18 Simonetta Lux, 'Avanguardia, traduzione, ideologia: itinerario Sironiano attraverso un ventennio di dibattito' (unpublished essays) (Rome: Cattedra di Storia dell'Arte Contemporanea, Università di Roma, 'La Sapienza', 1985-6), p. 4.
  - 19 On Giuseppe Volpi Conte di Misurata, see: Roland Sarti, 'Giuseppe Volpi', in Fernando Cordova (ed.) *Uomini e volti del fascismo* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1980), pp. 523-46, who finds Volpi exceptional for his abilities in both politics and industry; Sergio Romano, *Giuseppe Volpi: industria e finanza tra Giolitti e Mussolini* (Milan: Bompiani, 1979), especially Chapter 18, 'Il mito di Venezia', pp. 195-202.
  - 20 Romano, *Giuseppe Volpi: industria e finanza tra Giolitti e Mussolini*, p. 8.
  - 21 One interpretation credits Volpi with a 'grand strategy for Venice' - to link its industrial port, Porta Marghera, with its tourist port, Piazza San Marco. See Rizzi and di Martini, *Storia della Biennale*, p. 37.
  - 22 In a process similar to the one responsible for the reorganization of the figurative arts

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- show, Maraini lobbied Mussolini, Giuliano and Giurati in March and April of 1931 for government funding and support. With official backing established in late 1931, the Music Festival took the shape it would hold for the rest of the decade.
- 23 *Archivio Storico dell'Arte Contemporanea (ASAC)*, Busta 88, 'corrispondenze varie'.
  - 24 The press welcomed the symmetrical organization of the Music and Art shows: 'there will be certain "national pavilions", concerts dedicated to the music of a single nation, and certain "international pavilions" which will offer the music of several nations in the same concert' ('Il 2a Festival Internazionale di Musica', *Gazzetta di Venezia*, 13 January 1932).
  - 25 ASAC, Busta 83, Press release – 1934 Biennale.
  - 26 ASAC, Busta 88, 'corrispondenze varie'.
  - 27 ASAC, Busta 62.
  - 28 ASAC, Busta 88, 'corrispondenze varie'.
  - 29 ASAC, Busta 82, Press release – 1934 Theater Festival.
  - 30 Elio Zorzi, 'Inaugurazione della III Mostra Internazionale del Cinema', *L'Illustrazione Italiana*, 18 August 1935, p. 345; 'La prima Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica', *Gazzetta di Venezia*, 24 May 1932. The films at the first show came from Germany, the United States, France, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Holland, with the largest number of entries coming from the United States and Germany. 'Un elenco di films', *Gazzetta di Venezia*, 24 July 1932.
  - 31 *L'Arte nelle Mostre Italiane IV* (1) (January 1939): 7, 24.
  - 32 Elio Zorzi, 'Inaugurazione della III Mostra Internazionale del Cinema', p. 345.
  - 33 'Un elenco di films'; 'Referendum Pubblico – Ia Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica', *Archivio Centrale dello Stato*, Presidenza Consiglio dei Ministri (ACS, PCM) (1934–6), 14.1.4677; Gian Piero Brunetta, *Cinema italiano tra le due guerre* (Milan: Mursia, 1975), pp. 67, 71; Marcia Landy, *Fascism in Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 15. See also: Vito Zagario, 'Il modello sovietico: tra piano culturale e piano economico', in Riccardo Redi (ed.) *Cinema italiano sotto il fascismo* (Venice: Marsilio, 1979), pp. 185–200.
  - 34 'Relazione per l'assegnazione dei premi alla Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica', ACS, PCM (1934–6), 14.1.4677.
  - 35 ASAC, Busta 82, 'Il convegno internazionale di teatro – bando per il concorso d'arte drammatica'.
  - 36 Patricia Mainardi makes a similar point about the Second Empire's search for the allegiance of spectators and cultural producers: Patricia Mainardi, *Art and Politics of the Second Empire* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 17.
  - 37 ASAC, Busta 92, 'Relazioni per il conferimento dei premi'.
  - 38 Wolfsonian Foundation, medallion collection, 82.782.1.1.
  - 39 'L'esito del referendum', *Gazzetta di Venezia*, 24 August 1932.
  - 40 ASAC, Busta 92, English language brochure, 1934.
  - 41 *Il Gazzettino*, 11 July 1937.
  - 42 Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 122.
  - 43 ASAC, Busta 83, Press release – 1934 Biennale.
  - 44 ASAC, Busta 92, 'Stampati', 'La Biennale di Venezia – II Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica – Relazioni per il conferimento dei premi'.
  - 45 Zorzi, 'Inaugurazione della III Mostra Internazionale del Cinema', p. 345.
  - 46 Peter Bondanella, *Italian Cinema from Neo-Realism to the Present* (New York: Fredrick Ungar, 1983), pp. 11–12.
  - 47 'Appunto per S. E. il Capo del Governo', 18 December 1933, ACS, PCM (1934–6),



- 14.1.4677. This propaganda film placed 'special emphasis upon the birth of the province of Littoria'.
- 48 *Le Mostre d'Arte in Italia IV* (1) (January 1939): 7; 'Appunto per S.E. il Capo del Governo', 9 September 1935, *ACS, PCM* (1934–6), 14.1.4677. The figure of 55,237 for 1937 was also cited by Maraini in a telegram to Mussolini on 9 September 1937. See: *ACS, PCM* (1937–9), 14.1.2966, sottofascicolo 5.
- 49 'Appunto per S. E. il Capo del Governo', 9 September 1935, *ACS, PCM* (1934–6), 14.1.4677.
- 50 *ASAC*, Busta 92, English Language Brochure, 1934.
- 51 *ASAC*, Busta 63, fascicolo 'Padiglione Venezia'; 'XVII Biennale d'arte – Le norme per la sezione d'arte decorativa', *Gazzetta di Venezia*, 21 November 1931. The decorative arts section was subject to the same regulations as the figurative arts section.
- 52 *XIX Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte, 1934* (Venice: Carlo Ferrari, 1934), p. 18.
- 53 *ASAC*, Registre vendite (4), 1932 and 1934.
- 54 Volpi, Biennale closing speech, 14 October 1934, in *ASAC*, Busta 80, 'Biennale propaganda'.
- 55 Susan Sellers, 'Mechanical brides: the exhibition', *Design Issues* 10 (2) (Summer 1994): 70.
- 56 Debora Silverman writes of the dual function of the craft renaissance in the French Third Republic. See: Debora Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 43–51.
- 57 *XIX Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte, 1934*, p. 213.
- 58 Some Fascist officials, such as Emilio Bodrero, proposed the decorative arts as an arena for employment opportunities: 'Richiamo alle arti decorative', *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 14 October 1931.
- 59 See: Barbara Melosh, *Engendering Culture* (Washington and London: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); Walter Kalaidjian, *American Culture Between the Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
- 60 'Manifesto della pittura murale', *La Colonna* (December 1933), as reprinted in Lux, 'Avanguardia, traduzione, ideologia', p. 272.
- 61 'Manifesto della pittura murale', *La Colonna* (December 1933), as reprinted in Lux, 'Avanguardia, traduzione, ideologia', p. 272.
- 62 *XXI Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte, 1938*, p. 15.
- 63 *Le Mostre d'Arte in Italia IV* (7–10) (July–October 1937): 65.
- 64 *Le Mostre d'Arte in Italia II* (6) (June 1935): 1.
- 65 *ibid.*
- 66 *XXII Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d'Arte, 1940*, p. 10.
- 67 Robin Lenman, 'Painters, patronage, and the art market in Germany, 1850–1914', *Past and Present* 123: 127.
- 68 Diane Crane, *The Transformation of the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 7.
- 69 *ASAC*, Busta 57, fascicolo 'Pubblicità – 1930'.
- 70 Letter, 18 April 1930, Società italiana affisioni to Zorzi, *ASAC*, Busta 57, fascicolo 'Pubblicità'.
- 71 *ASAC*, Busta 63, 'Pubblicità – 1932'.
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- 74 *ASAC*, Busta 63, 'Pubblicità – 1932'.
- 75 *ASAC*, Busta 63, 'Pubblicità – 1932'.
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## Articles

- 77 *Il Gazzettino*, 17, 19 and 22 July 1930; *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 24–25 October 1930.
- 78 *Notiziario Turistico*, 9 April 1934; ASAC, Busta 92, fascicolo 'Stampati – 1934'.
- 79 ASAC, Busta 88, fascicolo 'corrispondenze varie – 1934 – comunicati stampa'.
- 80 Biennale memo, 5 October 1934, ASAC, Busta 88, 'corrispondenze varie 1934'.
- 81 Biennale memo, 5 October 1934, ASAC, Busta 88, 'corrispondenze varie 1934'.
- 82 Biennale memo, 5 October 1934, ASAC, Busta 88, 'corrispondenze varie 1934'.
- 83 ASAC, Busta 89, 'corrispondenza'.
- 84 ASAC, Busta 89, 'corrispondenza'.
- 85 ASAC, Busta 80, 'Piano di pubblicità'.
- 86 Telegram, 17 October 1934, Maraini and Volpi to Mussolini, ACS, PCM 14.1.283, sottofascicolo 5.
- 87 Memo, 13 December 1932, Biennale to PCM, gabinetto, ACS, PCM (1934–6), 14.1.283, sottofascicolo 4; letter, 7 May 1934, Maraini to Mussolini, ACS, PCM 14.1.283, sottofascicolo 5.
- 88 Memo, 23 December 1932, Maraini to PCM, Capo Gabinetto, ACS, PCM (1934–6), 14-1-283, sottofascicolo 4; 'La chiusura della 18a Biennale Veneziana', *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 2 November 1932, p. 9.
- 89 Minutes of meeting of the Comitato direttivo, 29 January 1935, ACS, PCM (1940–2), 14.1.730, sottofascicolo 1-D. Attendance figures for 1934 reveal a discrepancy: in 1939 Maraini quoted 361,917 visitors for 1934, as opposed to Volpi's 450,00. *Le Mostre d'Arte in Italia VI* (1) (January 1939): 6.