

# Fausto Melotti

## *La Sequenza*

Permanent installation



**Pirelli HangarBicocca**

**EN**

# Fausto Melotti

The sculptor, poet, and musician Fausto Melotti (Rovereto, 1901 – Milan, 1986) was a pioneer of Italian and international art, acknowledged for his contribution to the development of mid-20th-century European modernism. He received his training in pre-war Milan and witnessed the horrors of both world wars, elaborating on the hostile times using the Renaissance principles of harmony, order, and geometry, which would become the cornerstones of his practice.

Fausto Melotti at  
Forte di Belvedere,  
Florence, 1981  
Photo Antonio  
Sferlazzo and  
Francesca Lucchese

Born in early 20th-century in Rovereto, in the province of Trento, in north-eastern Italy, Melotti spent most of his life in Milan, where he moved to study Electronic Engineering at Politecnico di Milano, where he graduated in 1924. Along with his scientific education, he cultivated his



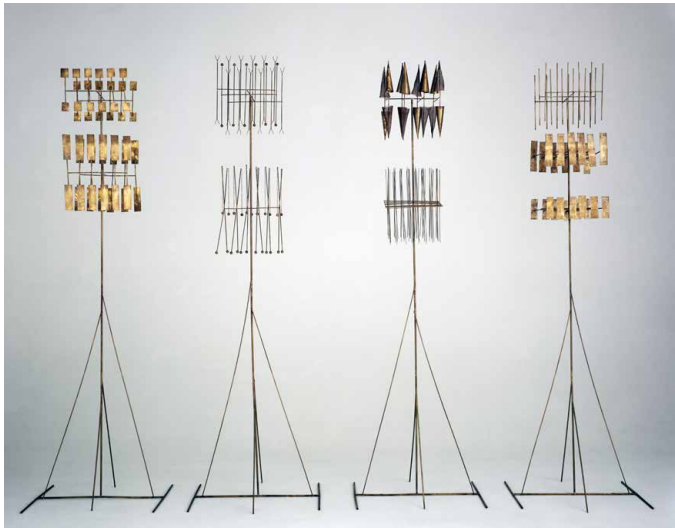
musical and artistic talents, studying piano and sculpture, and maintained relations with the greatest architects, artists, and intellectuals of the time for over 50 years. In Rovereto he had already frequented the home and studio of Fortunato Depero (1892–1960), while in the early 1920s in Milan he came into contact with the artists of Gruppo 7, a Rationalist movement established in the same city, whose theoretical principles were drawn up by his cousin Carlo Belli (1903–1991). Melotti's acquaintance with the Turin sculptor Pietro Canonica (1869–1959) stimulated his interest in sculpture, and in 1928 he enrolled in the Brera Academy where he studied under Adolfo Wildt (1868–1931), graduating with a diploma in Sculpture. During his academic training, he established a lifelong close friendship and working relationship with Lucio Fontana (1899–1968). Soon after, he started to collaborate as a sculptor and ceramist with Richard-Ginori, the renowned manufacturer of fine porcelain, and met Gio Ponti (1891–1979), with whom he would subsequently participate in two important international projects: Villa Planchart (1956) in Caracas, Venezuela, and Villa Nemazee (1960) in Tehran, Iran.

The early period of Melotti's artistic production is characterized by its merging of different influences, from metaphysics to Rationalism, from geometric abstraction inspired by Greek architecture to the Renaissance paintings of Piero della Francesca (c. 1412–1492) and the music of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750). In 1935, he joined Abstraction-Création, a group of artists formed in Paris, and in May of the same year he presented his first solo exhibition at the Galleria Il Milione in Milan, which featured a group of twenty-five plaster and metal sculptures entitled with a series of numbers, ten of which are now on

display at the Museo del Novecento in Milan. Although the exhibition was not a great success in Italy, it boosted Melotti's reputation in France and Switzerland, where he won the La Sarraz Prize in 1937.

During the Second World War Fausto Melotti's Milan studio was destroyed by the Allied bombings, leading the artist to focus more on writing. His first collection of texts, *Il Triste Minotauro* (1944), published by Giovanni Scheiwiller, dates from this period. After the war, also due to financial necessity, the artist concentrated on his work as a ceramist, for which he was awarded the Gran Premio at the 1951 Milan Triennale and, in 1958, the Grande Medaglia d'Oro ad Artefice Italiano by Milan City Council. From the 1950s and throughout much of the

*Le torri della città invisibile*, 1976–80  
Brass,  
240 × 73 × 53 cm  
248 × 73 × 63 cm  
247 × 73 × 56 cm  
238 × 71 × 63 cm  
Photo Jean-Pierre Maurer



1960s, he abandoned his abstractionist rigor in favor of a more poetic, narrative style, using materials like iron, bronze, textiles, and clay to create works in smaller formats. The theater, in the sense of a window open onto a spatial and temporal dimension that transcends everyday life, became a recurring theme in Melotti's practice.

During the 1970s, the artist received lasting recognitions from both the critics and the general public: in 1971, his first great international retrospective was inaugurated at the Museum am Ostwall in Dortmund and, in 1974, he was awarded the Rembrandt Prize by the Goethe Foundation in Basel. Melotti also resumed making large-scale works during this period. In his commissions for monumental sculptures, he returned to a more Rationalist and geometric style, juxtaposing it with a poetic, rhythmic, and musical language. In the same years, he became acquainted with Italo Calvino (1923–1985) to whom he dedicated *Le Torri della città invisibile* [The towers of the invisible city] (1976–80), a work inspired by his famous novel *Invisible Cities* (1972).

In 1977, the first great anthological exhibition devoted to Melotti in Italy was held at the Castello del Buonconsiglio in Trento, and in 1979 the solo exhibition that enshrined his artistic legacy in Milan opened at the city's Palazzo Reale. Fausto Melotti's prominence on the international art scene was reaffirmed in 1986, the year of his death, with the award of the Golden Lion at the 42nd Venice Biennale. Melotti's artistic legacy has preserved its cultural relevance at an international level, as testified by the numerous solo and group exhibitions in Italy, France, the United States, and the United Kingdom, which highlight its enduring contemporaneity.

## La Sequenza, 1971–81

Placed at the entrance of Pirelli HangarBicocca in 2010, *La Sequenza* [The sequence] is an imposing Corten steel sculpture 7 meters high and about 22 meters long, composed of identical modules with three levels of depth spanning over 9 meters that create an alternating series of solids and voids. Its modular form is a distinctive feature of Melotti's visual language, which the artist described in these words: «It is not the modeling that is important, but the modulation. This is not a play on words: the term modeling comes from model = nature = disorder; modulation comes from module = canon = order. The crystal enchants nature. The fundamentals of plastic harmony and counterpoint are found in geometry.»

Made during the final years of Melotti's career, the sculpture sums up the fundamental themes of his practice, which reach a mature harmony with this work: the notion of the theatrical space as an opening onto the suspended dimension of art, evoked by the different “wings” that open up, one after another; the principle of modulation—a rational element originating from rhythm and the study of proportions; the concept of musical derivation of a theme and its variations, rendered by the alternation of solids and voids; and, lastly, the reference to classical and Rationalist architecture in the rhythm of the Corten steel sheets. The work thus appears simultaneously linear and sinuous, natural and abstract.

*La Sequenza*, 1970  
Etching, 50 × 70 cm  
Courtesy Hauser & Wirth  
Photo Daniele De Lonti



*La Sequenza*, 1971  
Brass, 25 × 81 × 55 cm  
Courtesy Hauser & Wirth  
Photo Paolo Vandrasc

*La Sequenza* is the expression of the research that Melotti conducted for over forty years on an anti-celebratory and anti-monumental form of sculpture that was both abstract and poetic, deriving from his renewed interest in public art. The work was conceived in 1971, when the artist made a small-scale brass model of it entitled *La piccola sequenza* [The small sequence], and it was mentioned for the first time in the article entitled “Musica di linee” by the literary critic Giorgio Zampa (1921–2008) published in the *Pirelli* magazine (December 1971). However, Melotti did not have the chance to put his idea into practice on an environmental scale until 1981, when he was invited to stage a great retrospective at the Forte di Belvedere in Florence. This was the only exhibition in which he managed to see *La Sequenza* in place: the artist died in 1986, three years before a

second version of the sculpture entitled *Sequenze* [Sequences] (1989) was erected in Gibellina, near Trapani, Sicily, as part of a redevelopment plan for the town destroyed by the 1968 Belice earthquake, in which numerous artists of the time participated, including Alberto Burri (1915–1995), Mimmo Paladino, and Mario Schifano (1934–1998).

Following its first showing in Florence, *La Sequenza* was displayed again in the 1991 anthological exhibition curated by the critic Germano Celant (1940–2020) and on that occasion it was restored for the first time. Entitled “Sequenze d’Amore” [Sequences of love], the exhibition presented numerous works in dialogue with the architecture of Villa Arconati, in Bollate, near Milan, where *La Sequenza* was installed

*La Sequenza*, 1971–81  
Installation view,  
Forte di Belvedere,  
Florence, 1981  
Courtesy Hauser & Wirth  
Photo Giuliano Monaco



in the lake of the 18th-century gardens. In this unique setting, it acquired a new spatial dimension that broke its marked horizontality in favor of a more sinuous verticality, interrupted only by the recumbent metal sheets, whose reflections merge on the surface of the water. In the exhibition catalogue Celant describes the monumental sculpture: «While retaining its solidity and strong appearance, *La Sequenza* [...] nurtures an impatient, vibrant void and draws a fragility from its grandeur that transforms it into a corolla of surfaces and an amphitheater of visual sounds [... Melotti's] sculpture manages, in fact, to preserve the precarious, ethereal allure, indicating a gift of maturity, which is always based on “Nothingness”.»

In 2004, the work was donated by the artist's daughter Marta Melotti to the Pirelli Company, which conducted further restoration interventions under the supervision of the sculptor Arnaldo Pomodoro. In 2010, *La Sequenza* returned to Milan and was placed in its current position, outside the Pirelli HangarBicocca building. Along with *The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004–2015* by Anselm Kiefer, *La Sequenza* became part of the Foundation's permanent installations, acting as an imposing gate that greets visitors at the entrance to the museum.





# Public Works in Milan

Fausto Melotti's personality and oeuvre are closely bound up with the history of the philosophy and art of 20th-century Italy, when Milan was one of the main centers of innovation and creativity. The traces of the work with which the artist embellished the city, through public commissions, can still be seen today. The first of them can be found at the Cimitero Monumentale, where Melotti created several aedicula tombs for prominent Milanese families. Between 1946 and 1948 he made several bas-reliefs in bronze for the Edicola Cella and in marble for the Edicola Rossi, all depicting biblical scenes. In 1951, together with Gruppo 7 architects Luigi Figini (1903–1984) and Gino Pollini (1903–1991), he created the Edicola Achille, completing the monument's Rationalist architecture with a metal statue of the Angel of the Apocalypse in Neo-Baroque style, an unusual language for him, that reveals a lesser known aspect of his work.

In 1936 Melotti was invited to the Milan VI Triennial, and for the occasion he created the plaster sculptural group entitled *Costante Uomo* [Man constant]. The work was subsequently developed by the artist, becoming the iconic *I Sette Savi* [The seven sages], which would have numerous versions. In 1960, he created one in Viggiù stone, commissioned by Milan City Council for the Liceo Carducci. A few years later the sculptures were vandalized, and they were placed in storage until the renovation of the school in 2013. In 2021, the sculptural group finally entered the permanent collection of the Museo Nazionale della Scienza e della Tecnologia Leonardo da Vinci in Milan, and can now be admired in

*La Sequenza*, 1971–81  
Installation view, Villa  
Arconati, Bollate, 1991  
Courtesy Hauser & Wirth  
Photo Giuliano Monaco

the first cloister of the monumental building. The final version of *I Sette Savi*, in Carrara marble, dates from 1981 and is on display in the garden of Villa Reale in Milan, in front of the windows of the PAC – Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea.

*I Sette Savi*, 1960–81  
Installation view,  
Forte di Belvedere,  
Florence, 1981  
Courtesy Hauser & Wirth  
Photo Antonio Sperlazzo  
and Francesca Lucchese



Pirelli HangarBicocca is a non-profit foundation, established in 2004, which has converted a former industrial plant in Milan into an institution for producing and promoting contemporary art.

This dynamic center for experimentation and research covers 15,000 square meters, making it one of the largest contiguous exhibition spaces in Europe. It presents major solo shows every year by Italian and international artists, with each project conceived to work in close relation to the architecture of the complex, and explored in depth through a calendar of parallel events. Admission to the space and the shows is completely free of charge, and cultural mediators are on hand to help the public connect with the art. Since 2012, Vicente Todolí has been the foundation's Artistic Director.

The complex, which once housed a locomotive factory, includes an area for public services and educational activities, and three exhibition spaces whose original 20th-century architectural features have been left clearly visible: Shed, Navate, and Cubo.

As well as its exhibitions program and cultural events, Pirelli HangarBicocca also permanently houses one of Anselm Kiefer's most important site-specific works, *The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004-2015*, commissioned for the opening of Pirelli HangarBicocca, while the exterior area hosts *La Sequenza (1971-81)* by Fausto Melotti.

## Pirelli HangarBicocca

Via Chiese, 2  
20126 Milan IT

### Contacts

T. +39 02 66111573  
info@hangarbicocca.org  
pirellihangarbicocca.org



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*La Sequenza, 1971-81*

Corten steel, 700 × 2240 × 950 cm

Gift Marta Melotti, 2004

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