

PEGGY GUGGENHEIM COLLECTION

Press Release

My Weapon Against the Atom Bomb is a Blade of Grass.

Tancredi. A Retrospective

12 November 2016 - 13 March 2017

Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice

#Tancredi

Tancredi, through his his painting, creates a new poetic philosophy for those who have neither telescopes nor rockets: how lucky we are to have such crystallizations that transport us safe and sound toward other worlds.

Peggy Guggenheim

From 12 November 2016 to 13 March 2017 the **Peggy Guggenheim Collection** presents the exhibition *My Weapon Against the Atom Bomb is a Blade of Grass. Tancredi. A Retrospective*, curated by Luca Massimo Barbero, Associate Curator of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection.

With over ninety works, this much-awaited retrospective marks the return to Venice of **Tancredi Parmeggiani** (Feltre 1927 – Rome 1964), among the most original and prolific Italian painters of the second half of the twentieth century. Tancredi was the only artist, after Jackson Pollock, whom Peggy Guggenheim placed under contract, promoting his work, making it known to museums and collectors in the USA, and organizing shows, including one in her own home, Palazzo Venier dei Leoni, in 1954. More than sixty years later, Tancredi returns to the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, his reputation now beyond question, with remarkable paintings that re-create, step by step in intimate galleries, between creative fury and lyrical expressionism, the brief but meteoric trajectory of this great postwar painter.

Beginning with rare youthful portraits and self-portraits, and with Tancredi's first experiments with paintings on paper in 1950-51, the famous *Springtimes*, the exhibition narrative moves on to document Tancredi in the early 50s, a period marked by the crucial encounter with Peggy Guggenheim, to whom he became a *protégé*, and who gave him studio space in Palazzo Venier dei Leoni. The bond between them is documented by a number of works still today in the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, since enriched by the donation in 2000 to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation by Giorgio Bellavitis of nine further works on paper. The exhibition brings back to Venice paintings donated by Peggy to major museums in the United States. Masterpieces such as *Springtime* (Museum of Modern Art, New York), *Space, Water, Nature, Sight* (The Brooklyn Museum), and *Untitled (Composition)* (Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT) are exhibited here for the first time since Guggenheim donated them. Thanks to his special relationship with Guggenheim, Tancredi's art became internationally known, such that he acquired fame at an early age. This was the period in which Tancredi matured a personal style, *micro-spaziale* and polychrome, defined by some critics as "molecular". This involved a distinctive fragmentation of the pictorial mark, a fundamental component of draftsmanship in his works on paper and canvas, and a luminous palette. The energy of his marks,

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combined with the vibrancy of his colors, creates a new harmony, leading to some of the most felicitous examples of his production. Tancredi was always drawn to juxtapositions of vivid colors and to expressively abstract compositions which, thanks to the incessant motion of the brush, and a technique full of life and intensity, spread to all corners of the canvas. He would later affirm, in 1956: “I used a very simple ‘form’ to control space: the ‘point’. The point is the least measurable geometric element that there is, but the most immediately comprehensible; a dot gives the idea of the void on all sides, from behind, at its sides, in front; any dot you may make is, formally, geometry, any form relative to the dimensions of my picture have by law emptiness on all sides.” In 1952, though remaining independent, Tancredi signed the manifesto of the *Movimento Spaziale* together with Lucio Fontana; he exhibited in these years in Carlo Cardazzo’s galleries in Venice, Milan, and Rome, and his paintings entered important American collections. In 1954 Guggenheim gave him an exhibition in Palazzo Venier dei Leoni, consolidating the celebrity of the very young artist. She recalled in her autobiography, *Out of This Century*: “Gradually, he evoked a Pollock style and then finally his own. He was what is called in Italy a *spazialista*, a spatial artist. His gouaches soon filled my house. They were so delicate and airy.”

The exhibition proceeds with a section dedicated to Tancredi’s participation in art prizes and international exhibitions, such as *Tendances Actuelles* at the Kunsthalle Bern, with paintings dating from 1955 to 1959, including, among others, the series titled *A Propos of Venice*, the city he left permanently in the spring of 1959 in order to move to Milan. This section includes the series called *Nature* (1954) and some paintings exhibited in the Saitenberg Gallery, New York, and in the Galerie Paul Facchetti, Paris. Between 1959 and 1960, the human figure returned to Tancredi’s imagery, in the *Witticisms (Facezie)*. Compared, however, to his youthful drawings, the figures have been grotesquely metamorphosed. Following a journey to Norway in 1960, his love for northern painting and for the grotesque was enriched by the fiery colors and psychological drama of Edvard Munch, and by the new figuration and almost revolutionary irony that he shared with his friends of the *Anti-procès* art movement, formed around the Galleria del Canale in Venice. This was a period of crisis, and of a complete revision of his approach to painting, into which he now injected existential and political meaning. This is the vein of polemic tension that gave rise to the epigram in the title of this exhibition, “*My weapon against the atom bomb is a blade of grass*”—Tancredi’s response to the world conflicts of the time, from Vietnam, to the war in Algeria, and the Cold War between the USA and the Soviet Union. Belonging to this key moment in the artist’s career is the triptych of the *Hiroshima* series (1962), reassembled here for the first time in decades.

A further phase of experiment, in the final part of the exhibition, consists of the collage-paintings, made between 1962 and 1963, known as the *Hometown Diaries (Diari paesani)* and the *Flowers 101% Painted by Me and by Others (Fiori dipinti da me e da altri al 101%)*, which can be counted the major revelation of this retrospective and which are the product of exceptional creative verve and dramatic euphoria. Immersing himself in the climate of the new painting of the 60s, yet in open polemic with it, Tancredi created anti-heroic pictures, drenched in paint that becomes now color patch, now image allusive to war and current affairs, or huge flowers. These works mark the end of his extraordinary, brilliant and unruly career, dedicated to nature and to man. They are paintings which prelude the last year of the life of a painter who was among the most original and singular personalities in Italian art of the twentieth century. Tancredi died in 1964 aged only 37, young but ready, as Dino Buzzati wrote, to evolve into the “myth of Tancredi”.

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The illustrated exhibition catalogue is published Marsilio Editori, Venice, in English and Italian editions. It includes essays by Luca Massimo Barbero and Luca Pietro Nicoletti, a biography by Elena Forin, and, for the first time, an inventory of paintings donated by Peggy Guggenheim to American museums, researched by Gražina Subelytė.

My Weapon Against the Atomic Bomb is a Blade of Grass. Tancredi. A Retrospective is supported by Intrapresæ Collezione Guggenheim and by the museum's Institutional Patrons, BSI, Lavazza, and the Regione del Veneto. With the support of *Corriere della Sera*, Hangar Design Group has coordinated the communication image. Education programs surrounding the exhibition are funded by the Fondazione Araldi Guinetti, Vaduz.

For this exhibition, **RegalaunAlbero**, through the planting and safeguarding for 50 years of trees on Italian territory, will offset up to 150 t of the CO₂ emissions generated by the organization of the exhibition. RegalaunAlbero's initiative is defined as a "carbon sink" activity as specified in the Kyoto protocol.

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