

# *The Adventures of the Arts in Early Italian Television*

## *Issues and Models of Representation*

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### **Résumé/Abstract**

Since the earliest stage of Italian television, the arts have represented a crucial topic within the cultural and pedagogic project of the public-service broadcaster, the Rai. A strong interplay between television, “the most popular medium”, and art characterizes this seminal phase of the medium’s history in various ways. The aim of the paper is to reflect on some of the main issues concerning the representation of the arts in the first period of Italian “black-and-white” television, starting from an archival dig intended to bring back to light the most important programmes on the arts produced in the Fifties and the Sixties. The paper will reflect specifically on the main features of these programmes (production style and general approach), alongside their shared mission, that was to seek to educate the general public on art, through the frequent involvement of historians and art critics.

### **Mots clés/Keywords**

Italian TV history; Public Service Broadcasting; Cultural TV; Rai; Art Programming.

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## Introduction

Amid mutual mistrust and misunderstandings, reciprocal exchanges and glorification, Italian television has built a sixty-year relationship with art, starting precisely on 3 January 1954, the day regular Rai broadcasts began. It opened with the light programme *Arrivi e partenze (Arrivals and Departures)* presented by Mike Bongiorno and continued with the celebrated in-depth cultural programme *Avventure dell'arte: il Tiepolo (Adventures in Art: Tiepolo)*, the first production that the public service broadcaster dedicated to the story of figurative art, a monograph on baroque painter Gianbattista Tiepolo. Unfortunately, no audiovisual material of the programme has been preserved in the Rai archives, and it is only through secondary sources (such as daily newspapers or the Rai house organ, “Radiocorriere”) that we can glean its general characteristics: that it was broadcast at 7 pm on the Rai’s only channel at the time, Programma Nazionale, and produced by art historian Antonio Morassi, one of the first exponents of the Italian cultural elite to accept the challenge of the new medium (Grasso, 2006). This pioneering programme shows how Italian television’s relationship with the arts in the early days, termed “palaeo-television” by Umberto Eco, was strong and close from the very beginning (Eco, 1983). Ever since the new communication medium first entered the Italian social limelight, in the mid-1950s, art on television became primarily a theme, a content topic, the object of a rich variety of attempts – with varying degrees of success – to translate art history, art trends, artworks and their creators into the language of television (Bettetini, Grasso, 1988). The debut of television marked the start of a whole host of television programmes dedicated to recounting art: looking back at the first decade of the TV’s life in Italy, we can scour various programmes that revolve around art, all featuring some similar characteristics. First of all, a common production style: they were programmes made by the technical and artistic resources within the Rai, sometimes using a television studio or (more rarely) simply services filmed in external locations. Photographic reproductions of the works were used a great deal as support for a “didactic” approach to looking at the works, often commented with a voiceover. Their shared mission was to seek to educate the general public on art, through the frequent involvement of historians and art critics, as well as a “cultured” model of presenter – when there was one – who was an expert in the sector. Very often these programmes also drew on a similar selection of featured works and artists :

great emphasis was given to the Italian tradition, in line with the strong national imprint of the Rai at the time as it strove to use television as an additional means to build a sense of national unity.

The main focus of these programmes was to educate the general public, thus linking the destiny of art on TV to that of other branches of knowledge such as literature, history, science and technology. Some very significant examples of the Rai's educational mission in these fields were Sapere (Knowledge), started in 1967, and Orizzonti della scienza e della tecnica (Developments in Science and Technology), on air since 1966.

Arts programming has been ever present throughout the history of Italian television. Even so, it has gone through distinct phases with different intensities and frequencies of production and broadcasting activity, in a constant arduous quest for a successful expressive, industrial and production model. The first stage of the medium's life (dating back approximately to the first decade of Italian TV), when the Rai held its monopoly and its managers fielded a clear vision of the educational editorial guidelines that it should follow, is an especially interesting period in which to observe this relationship, then at peak operation.

The pages of the TV magazine "Radiocorriere", a Rai in-house organ, in the first week of January 1954 are very significant for our understanding of the relationship between early Italian TV and the arts. The magazine celebrates the start of regular TV broadcasting in Italy with a simple, solemn statement: "Today, Television is born". This caption accompanies a black-and-white picture affording readers a glimpse of both Michelangelo's dome at St Peter's and the brand-new Rai transmitter at Monte Mario. The caption is quite evocative and slightly rhetorical: "Up in the Roman sky, the Monte Mario TV station rises not far from Michelangelo's dome. Two eras, two different worlds, but the same civilization". This sense of continuity, the claim that the new medium is (or could be) a legacy of a great civilization and culture, was widely felt among the early Rai managers, who were keen to treat, and present to the general public, the new media technology as the continuation of a solid national humanist tradition (Scaglioni, 2015).

Along with literature and theatre, the arts (meaning painting, architecture, sculpture, approached mainly from a historical point of view) rapidly became a type of content used by the public service broadcaster to "legitimate" the new medium in the era of its institutionalization and to secure its cultural significance as a

vehicle of humanist knowledge for its broad popular audience, following the example of other prestigious international broadcasters, especially the BBC (Walker, 1993).

Indeed, this elective affinity between the arts and television is an important part of the early public service broadcasting project in Italy (Bourdon, 2011). The Rai modelled itself on the British public-service broadcaster's cultural and educational mission set out by Lord John Reith for the BBC from the 1920s. At the outset of Italian TV, the idea of it being a "public service" was strong. It was an organizational model but also an ideal that led to the planning of television's functions on the back of the managers' cultural and political ambitions. In other words, it was the expression of a cultured intellectual elite (Grasso, Penati, 2015). While in the first decade of Italian TV, the most popular programmes which helped to promote the mass diffusion of the television medium were mainly entertainment models (in particular game shows and quizzes, often originating in America), these were accompanied by a line-up realizing the early managers' desire to think of the television as a "teacher", inspired by formulas of educating the general public and school pedagogy. In those first years, the Rai invested in education in particular through several genres, from adaptations of the most important Italian and European novels to a purely "didactic" use of the small screen to teach the language to the illiterate populace. The most explicit example is the educational programme for illiterate adults, *Non è mai troppo tardi* (It's Never Too Late To Learn, 1960-1968), a direct copy of the school lesson formula, presented by a real teacher, Alberto Manzi.

Albeit in the early years of Italian TV the public service's cultural mission was exalted, the relationship between art and television has never been smooth and linear. It was riddled with contradictions, mutual suspicion, resistance to the popular nature of the medium and its industrial spirit. It was a suspicion expressed in particular by part of the Italian intellectual world who deemed and labelled the TV as a popular, trivial medium. As declared by Mario Landi, one of the first Italian television directors, in the 1963 documentary celebrating the Rai, *La tv – dieci anni prima* (*Television – Ten Years Ago*), it was seen as a sort of "comic by-product" (Grasso, Trione, 2014). The art-television relationship raises a number of issues about the links between highbrow and lowbrow, between the "purity" of art and the industrial purposes of television (Elsaesser, 1994,

Ellis, 1991). Indeed, the debate on the TV's status was particularly heated in this period, with harsh criticism and pessimistic visions of the medium's role in spreading "mass culture", meant in highly negative terms: the most famous, postulated by Alberto Moravia, designated television audiences as a sort of "sub-Italy" (Piazzoni, 2014). Nevertheless, not all intellectuals held these negative views of television: as also shown by an analysis of the programming dedicated to art in this period, these programmes were united by the involvement of academics, critics and thinkers, as will be explained later.

Considering this historical context, this article offers a historical analysis of the development of this relationship during the medium's period of institutionalization, from 1954 to the early 1960s (the Rai's second national channel launched in 1961). Those were times of black-and-white viewing, of a schedule with a handful of mostly popular programme genres punctuated by gaps, and of the Rai's central role as the monopoly public-service broadcaster, the only body allowed to broadcast until the mid-1970s. In particular, the article focuses on and analyses the most significant cases from the two main pathways embarked upon by early Italian television to tell the story of art. One of these, which we could name "direct model", was based on the principles of formal art-history teaching, coherent with the pedagogic mission characterizing the idea of public service. The other was an "indirect" model in which art appeared not as a planned element in an educational "syllabus" but as a background, a pretext, a reference that inspired set designs, graphics and languages of programmes often with entertainment ends.

### **Early Italian TV and the arts: a strong mission to educate the general public**

As anticipated in the previous section, the relationship between early Italian television and the education of the general public in art can be understood only in light of the cultural project that hallmarked Rai editorial policy in the early years of television (Monteleone, 1995). That cultural project was long an expression of one of Italy's main historical national cultures. Indeed, the Catholic culture found expression in the work of the early

Rai management, especially under the first two directors general, Filiberto Guala then Ettore Bernabei, and head of programming Sergio Pugliese, who, also by way of the “public service television”, planned to carry out a guided and “gentle” modernization of the country.

Those first years of the medium forged a solid model for representing art on television, primarily through the formula of regular serial cultural features and special documentaries. It was also a model used in other spheres of Rai educational television, for example in science programmes such as the series *Orizzonti della scienza e della tecnica*.

Early Italian television took inspiration from the three “ideal pillars” of the BBC public service broadcasting model: to educate, inform and entertain. They were complemented by an additional all-Italian mandate, closely interrelated with the Catholic cultural project for the new communication medium (Scaglioni, 2015). The small screen and its programmes were to be an instrument of cultural unification, of the country’s modernization through programming heavily structured around key genres, in which the entertainment also had to involve an educational approach (such as in the case of general knowledge quizzes). This education of the general public had a crucial role in spreading that humanist tradition that had characterized Italian culture through the centuries and that was finally opening up to a potential mass audience. As early Rai manager Angelo Romanò recalled, “[u]sing the great classics seems to be peculiar to Italian television. [...] The classics evoke the profound permanent structures on which the image of humankind is built in the great humanist-Christian tradition” (Romanò, 1985, 102). In this approach to art education, the idea of a national slant is evident from the “canon” of art emerging from these programmes. Their strong national focus aimed to build a collective identity for the TV audience and for Italian citizens, boosting knowledge of the country and its artistic heritage among a public that still had very few possibilities of getting around or travelling due to the difficult economic conditions following the Second World War.

Academics and, more broadly, intellectuals had a particularly important role in this commitment to spread knowledge about the arts and artists in the Rai’s early cultural programming (Grasso, 1993). In specific connection to the programmes dedicated to art, art critics and scholars were a key feature of this period of Italian broadcasting history. Indeed, the early Rai management

sought to involve the few intellectuals willing to “sully” themselves with new medium.

There are many examples: the two most important Italian art critics, Roberto Longhi and Giulio Carlo Argan, were both involved in the art programmes of this first decade, and were called upon as experts for interviews with the Rai journalists in popular magazine programmes such as *Arti e scienze (Arts and Science)* or *L'approdo (The Dock)*. Their role was above all to comment on the contemporary art world in criticisms of exhibition openings, as is the case of Argan in *Arti e scienze* with his comments on the inauguration of an important exhibition of paintings from the Parma school, visits to the main Italian museums, and analyses of specific works.

Art historian and critic Giulio Carlo Argan is an especially important example. Argan was one of Italy's foremost art historiographers and critics, and one of the first intellectuals to accept the challenge of the new communication medium (Casini, 2012). He appeared in the programmes as an expert commenter and participated in the (limited) theoretical debate on television's role in relation to art, suggesting that television should find its own form of artistic expression perhaps also by working alongside Italian artists.

TV had not yet established its medium-specific languages, so in Argan's case, as with the few other Italian art critics who appeared on the Rai in the early years, academia set the rules of engagement. As a result, the programmes used very specialized terminology and storytelling styles, very similar to those of a university lecture. Suffice it to think of the programme *L'approdo*, which had a scientific committee, much like academic journals, comprising some of the most prestigious Italian intellectuals: a team including critics, scholars and artists. In a context in which a large part of the Italian population was still illiterate<sup>2</sup>, it was a very ambitious educational project, which did not fully take into account the broad public it was addressing and aimed its communication at a solely upper and middle-class target. This lack of attention to finding a “popular” style of communication is also evident from some stylistic aspects of the construction of these first educational programmes. In a

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<sup>2</sup> According to ISTAT, in 1951 only 46% of Italian population could read and write, “Italia in cifre”, <http://www.istat.it/it/files/2011/03/Italia-in-cifre.pdf>.



comment on the exhibition “Capolavori ritrovati” (*Rediscovered Masterpieces*) in an episode of *L’approdo*, Roberto Longhi visits the rooms of Palazzo Vecchio in Florence and dwells on some significant works while interviewed by a Rai journalist; significantly, no attempts are made to create a backdrop or frames to achieve a captivating and dynamic television language. For the whole time, Longhi has his back to the camera filming him as he observes and comments on the works hanging on the walls, which had been shown to the audience previously in a front-on shot.

The limitations of TV technology, with its low image definition and small screens, also influenced how art was represented; sound and speech prevailed over the actual images: this was another reason why the presence of critics and intellectuals capable of building a discourse around the works was so significant in the production styles of the art programmes of this early period. As emerges clearly from Argan’s appearances in *Arti e scienze*, the discursive oral aspect of the commentary, as in academic lectures, was the principal focus in these early programmes.

### **The arts and early Italian TV programmes: models of representation**

By examining the principal models of representing the arts in programmes during the early years of Italian TV history, two main paths can be identified through which Italian paleo-television approached this field. Each spawned many important Rai programmes of the 1950s and early 1960s. We refer to the first (and also the most significant) path as “direct”, because it is very clearly related to public-service broadcasting’s explicit educational mission. According to the programmes belonging to this model, TV acted, or at least attempted to, as a substitute for academia. Indeed, in the 1950s, the medium was in its infancy, and its languages, purposes and communication style were shrouded in considerable uncertainty. Other environments (radio, theatre and academia) and their communication rules inspired many of the initial Rai programmes. Following the famous definition by Raymond Williams, the TV itself was a content-less medium, whose contents and communication styles were borrowed from other existing spheres and media (Williams, 1974). Moreover, in the special Rai “Culturali” division, which dealt with art and other cultural matters, many of the professionals and practitioners had academic backgrounds and aspired to make an important contribution to the Italian intellectual and scientific milieu. The most prominent figures were Leone Piccioni, head

of “Culturali”, and close colleagues such as Emilio Garroni, Alfredo Di Laura, Alvise Zorzi, Anna Zanoli, Giulio Macchi, Franco Simongini, Ugo Gregoretti, Anna Maria Cerrato, Maurizio Corgnati and Raimondo Musu.

This first “direct model” resulted in specialized magazine programmes and art documentaries, all with similar traits: a highbrow specialist approach to art, focusing mostly on painting, sculpture and architecture from the classical Italian tradition, with a mere educational approach; they were produced (literally) as “written essays” accompanied by images (and photos) often from the Rai archives. The result was a sort of “illustrated paper” that transposed the arts from books and scientific journals to the TV screen with no particular adjustments.

This specialist highbrow model essentially failed to accomplish the mission of educating the brand-new mass TV audience in the arts. Illiteracy levels were very high in 1950s Italy, as was linguistic fragmentation. Indeed, each area had its own dialect, and a common national standard, hitherto missing, was introduced during the decade through the spread of television nationwide. Cultural tourism was also under-developed, with low attendances at exhibitions and museums.

The second path of representing the arts on early Italian TV was indirect and oblique. This model treated art not as content in which to educate the general public but as an opportunity and a test bed for experimenting with new languages and communication styles, a way for television to grow as an autonomous medium, increasingly independent from other cultural environments and existing media. The arts trickled down, in a more spontaneous and unplanned way, into some genres that were very distant from the classical model of cultural TV. These genres included TV fiction, a new wave of irony-laced TV reports and an innovative, eccentric way to use music, editing and voiceovers. Art also came together with the TV genre seemingly most distant from the cultural TV model: *Carosello*, the daily round-up of commercials.

Some of the programmes that were an expression of the “direct model”, aimed at educating the general public in the arts, were devised as if to assemble an imaginary museum collection; others focused on explaining a single masterpiece to the audience, as in *Avventure di capolavori* (*Adventures in Masterpieces*), or explored the greats of Italian art once again. Other examples of this important form of expression are *Dieci minuti con...* (*Ten Minutes with...*, 1956–58) or *Galleria* (*Gallery*, 1958–62), which

both profiled various artists. Two important examples were also *L'arte di Francisco Goya* (The Art of Francisco Goya, 1959) and *La leggenda di Sant'Orsola* (Saint Orsola's Legend, 1961), both produced by famous film director Luciano Emmer, whose work was fundamental in shaping the Rai's early approach to art programming.

Just as the drama series tradition sought to piece together an ideal library to educate viewers and give them core knowledge of the humanities, so the arts programming built an "intangibile and ideal museum". It assembled all the authors, styles and masterpieces considered vital for bringing humanism to Italian public service television and crucial for forging a common national identity through television.

A second group of programmes can be classified as a Grand Tour; they strove to present Italy to Italian TV viewers, showing the most prestigious museums, archaeological sites, and so on. *Musei d'Italia* (Italian Museums), produced once again by Garroni, is the most significant example. For the first time, efforts were made to get out of the TV studio to film in a real location and produce something that was specifically suitable for the TV screen, as demonstrated by an episode shot at the Capitoline Museums in Rome. The initial sequences of the episode feature images of the museum rooms, with a series of shots familiarizing the spectator with the space and finally leading to the room where Garroni is found: when the camera frames him, he explains to the spectators that the museum rooms have been selected for the transmission "both for artistic reasons and bearing in mind those most suited to television filming", as Garroni states in the first episode.

Considering these programmes from a merely industrial perspective, they were strategic not only because they allowed the Rai to accomplish its educational mission but also because they required very few production resources. As Emilio Garroni stated, "Avventure di capolavori was a very cheap programme; it cost just a few thousand liras. We used only fifty photos or so, sometimes library footage (if available), and one or two narrators" (Bolla, Cardini, 271). Also, we must not forget the limited technological potential of TV screens, a world away from today's HD and 3D standards, which made it even harder to present the arts in a spectacular way. The production methods of these series and documentaries were all similar. They entailed mostly filming in the studio, often live, an ample use of voiceovers to comment on

the (still and moving) library images used to flesh out the content, and the on-camera presence of the programme author, who was usually a recognized expert in the field, often an academic. The filming was very simple, often with a fixed camera. The televisual impact of the artworks shown was inevitably limited by both the lack of colour and the sheer smallness of the early television screens, which often forced the programme-makers to resort to sleight of hand. As Alfredo di Laura, a contributor to *Avventure di capolavori*, recalls, “a Pollock painting measuring four metres by two appeared to television viewers as a little thing 25 centimetres across. So, in front of the picture [Di Laura] placed a person who then went away, to show the painting’s scale by comparison with the human figure. For smaller paintings, [he] started to use a tape measurer” (Bolla, Cardini, 271).

Another frequently used model was the weekly “magazine”, a collection of brief clips (often introduced by a presenter), sometimes exclusively about the arts and sometimes inspired by a more holistic idea of culture and knowledge, also including science and technology. Examples of regular art programmes included *Le tre arti* (*The Three Arts*, 1955–58) and *Arti e scienze*, devised by Leone Piccioni to cover a variety of fields. After airing for a few years, *Arti e scienze* was phased out to accommodate one of Italian palaeo-television’s most important programmes, *L’approdo*. Once again, Leone Piccioni was its *éminence grise*. As already anticipated, it began in 1963 with ambitious aims, having started a few years earlier as a radio magazine on culture and the arts, and became a Rai-published science journal that could boast a scientific committee including some of the intellectual elite’s leading lights, from writers and poets (novelist Riccardo Bacchelli and poet Giuseppe Ungaretti) to critics and scholars (Roberto Longhi, Emilio Cecchi and Carlo Bo). *Arti e scienze* is a particularly significant example for understanding the broad style of the Rai’s early educational programmes: first of all, a “general” knowledge format, capable of ranging from humanities subjects (literature, classical theatre, figurative arts) to science, medicine and technology. The programme consisted of filmed reports, with simple graphics separating the various subjects, which were organized into regular features. There was no presenter or television studio, and the programme was limited to a sequence of filmed reports made by different Rai journalists and editors, who were at times present on camera during the reports, and others only as a voiceover. The programme consisted of two regular features dedicated to art, *Arti figurative* (*Visual Arts*) and *Storia dell’arte* (*Art*

*History*), with the frequent use of interviews with experts (such as Argan) called upon to comment on events such as exhibition openings, restorations of famous works, re-discovered paintings, or to promote famous pieces of Italy's past artistic heritage from a historiographic slant. Therefore, the features played a dual role: the "scholastic" role of transmitting knowledge on the artistic tradition, and the role of providing news on contemporary affairs in the art world. Once more, the academic model of spreading knowledge laid the ground rules for arts programming on TV, implicitly catering for a specialist audience endlessly motivated to attend these televised lectures. The educational approach was pushed by the Rai but did not always achieve great practical results.

An equally important example of this is the *Avventure di Capolavori*, a series of 30-minute episodes, three of which are preserved in the Rai archives. All are dedicated to works and artists from the national tradition: in the formula of a monograph on a single work or monument (the Colosseum or Pope Paul III by Titian) or on an artist (Vittore Carpaccio and the Legend of Saint Ursula). Each episode was directed by a different person, while all of them were written by Garroni together with other professionals from the Rai's "Culturali" department (often Alfredo Di Laura). The programme used a studio, with a set design very significant of the Rai's pedagogical approach in this period: the space is small and occupied by a desk backed by a reproduction of the *Guernica* by Pablo Picasso. Alongside the desk is a photographic reproduction of the work or works under analysis in the episode, which Garroni approaches to explain some details or to familiarize the public with it. The storytelling in the episodes is based on Garroni's monologues, alternating with moments when one (or more) voices enter off-screen to comment on a gallery of fixed images, mainly photographic reproductions, always connected to the topic of the episode.

Garroni's discursive rhetoric is very significant: a cultured style of communication, with a wealth of technical terms and specialist language, as well as direct references and quotations from an ancient tradition of art criticism. Indeed, every episode builds a small anthology of art criticism through passages read by Garroni and the off-screen voices from "classic" authors such as Carlo Ridolfi, seventeenth-century scholar and author of a monograph on Venetian painters, Lodovico Dolce, sixteenth-century writer whose works are used to give more information on the works of Titian, or Padre Colagrossi ("author of a monumental monograph on the Colosseum"). As a result, the

discourse is very complex, also because of the variety of period Italian which was a long way from the linguistic standards of the time. The rhetoric of Garroni, professor of philosophy and aesthetics, emerges clearly from his way of speaking: his is constantly a highly scientific approach. For example, in the information on the Colosseum, Garroni excuses himself on several occasions for the lack of philological scruples in the episode. He justifies himself by the fact that the monument “lives in the history of art but also of custom”. “Here we are halfway between legend and history”, Garroni concludes at the end. The reading of the works is based on an iconographic approach and putting the artist into the historical context, rather than on reading the technical elements such as the composition, technique and visual style.

Moving on to the second model characterizing the representation of the arts on early Italian television, we shall now briefly highlight some significant examples. The first is a TV documentary written and produced in 1960 by notable Rai journalist and film-maker Ugo Gregoretti. *Caccia al quadro (Picture Hunt)* is a field report in two parts that shifts the attention for the first time from an ideal of art narrowed down to great masterpieces and universally acknowledged masters to “lower-profile issues”, and more curious and eccentric topics: the art buyers’ and collectors’ market, forgers or “pataccari”, and the antiques trade, exploring the vicissitudes of the Marani family of Roman antique dealers. This episode in particular, *Il mestiere dell’antiquario (Antique Dealer)*, opens with a very ironic and amusing tone: from a reconstruction through photographs and voiceovers of the life of Louis XVI of France it goes to the homes of British collectors before arriving at the Marani’s antiques shop, “surprising” them with the camera in a moment of intense working activity. Gregoretti never appears in the video, but through the voiceover he builds a lighthearted and comic dialogue with the Marani clan: the communicative style of the series of documentaries is much less highbrow and more popular compared to the classic examples of educational art programmes, with a faster pace also thanks to the variety of settings and visual materials shown (the Marani family, various parts of the city, period furniture storehouses, private homes). As Gregoretti himself stated, when reflecting on the representation of the arts on early Italian TV, “the discourse about the arts had always been too specialized, boring and austere. That is absolutely fine if this discourse comes from academia but less so from a TV screen exposed to the storms of the remote machine” (Bolla, Cardini,

158). Compared to other TV documentaries from this early period, *Caccia al quadro* shows interesting signs of change and innovation (in the use of jazz music specially composed by Theo Usuelli and in the script laced with jokes and witticisms), even if it remained a “standalone” experiment of sorts.

TV fiction also provided the opportunity to experiment with new styles of “art storytelling”, as the biopic model offered the perfect means to represent the life of exceptional artists and their masterpieces. *Vita di Michelangelo (Life of Michelangelo)*, directed by Blasi in 1964 and featuring film star Gian Maria Volontè in the title role, is the most significant example of all. Produced to mark the anniversary of the great artist’s death and presented by the Rai as a “cultural show”, it is an innovative mix of fictional scenes played by actors (in a strongly theatrical style) and documentary sequences with voiceover commentary to describe Michelangelo’s most significant works. The artist is presented as a character, and the importance of his art is strictly tied to the uniqueness of his personality.

Finally, we discuss the last and somehow more “modern” arena in which early Italian television experimented with new languages in the representation of the arts. Unexpectedly, in the first phase of Italian TV history, art is present, even in the most important expression of television, as an industry: commercials and advertisements. A few artists (such as Pino Pascali and Armando Testa, illustrator, painter and subsequently copywriter) contributed as set designers to the creative processes for several episodes of *Carosello*, one of early Italian TV’s most popular programmes that aired between 1957 and 1977 on the Italian public service and that comprised a series of advertisements with a mix of promotional and creative ends (Barra, 2012; Guarnaccia, 2004). Each “Carosello” was a short film lasting just a few minutes that began as pure entertainment and concluded with a brief presentation of the featured product brand (Giusti, 1995). The entertainment often had interesting links with the figurative arts, and one trend was to use artworks as stylish design elements. The popular pasta brand Barilla produced a series of commercials featuring famous pop singer Mina. Mina performed her biggest hits in front of a set consisting of reproductions of contemporary Italian paintings (by the likes of Mario Schifano). Her costumes and movements were tailored to reflect the style of the paintings, courtesy of famous set and costume designer Piero Gherardi, a member of Federico Fellini’s creative troupe. A second trend

consisted in reprising the languages and stylistic features of contemporary art movements, as with the *Carosello* for Montana Meat, whose graphic design is directly inspired by the cartoon style of Pop Art.

Despite having no educational aims, these examples represented an important arena for cross-fertilization between television and art (albeit a less explicit one, often outside the strict region purview of public-service television's educational remit).

The powerful initial *imprinting*, the formula for telling the story of art established more or less in the first decade of the new communication medium's life, continued from the late 1960s into the early 70's largely intact but with some signs of change. The educational vision that director general Ettore Bernabei imparted to the Rai as a vehicle of "permanent education" for its viewers reached its full flowering in this period. The relationship between TV and the arts in this early and "experimental" stage of the medium's history already featured many of the enduring models of representing the arts on Italian TV. On one hand, there was the specialized academic model that typified the public service for many years and is now paradigmatic of the themed digital channels devoted to art; on the other, the "entertainment" model, taken to extremes by the experiments of commercial TV in the 1970s and beyond.

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