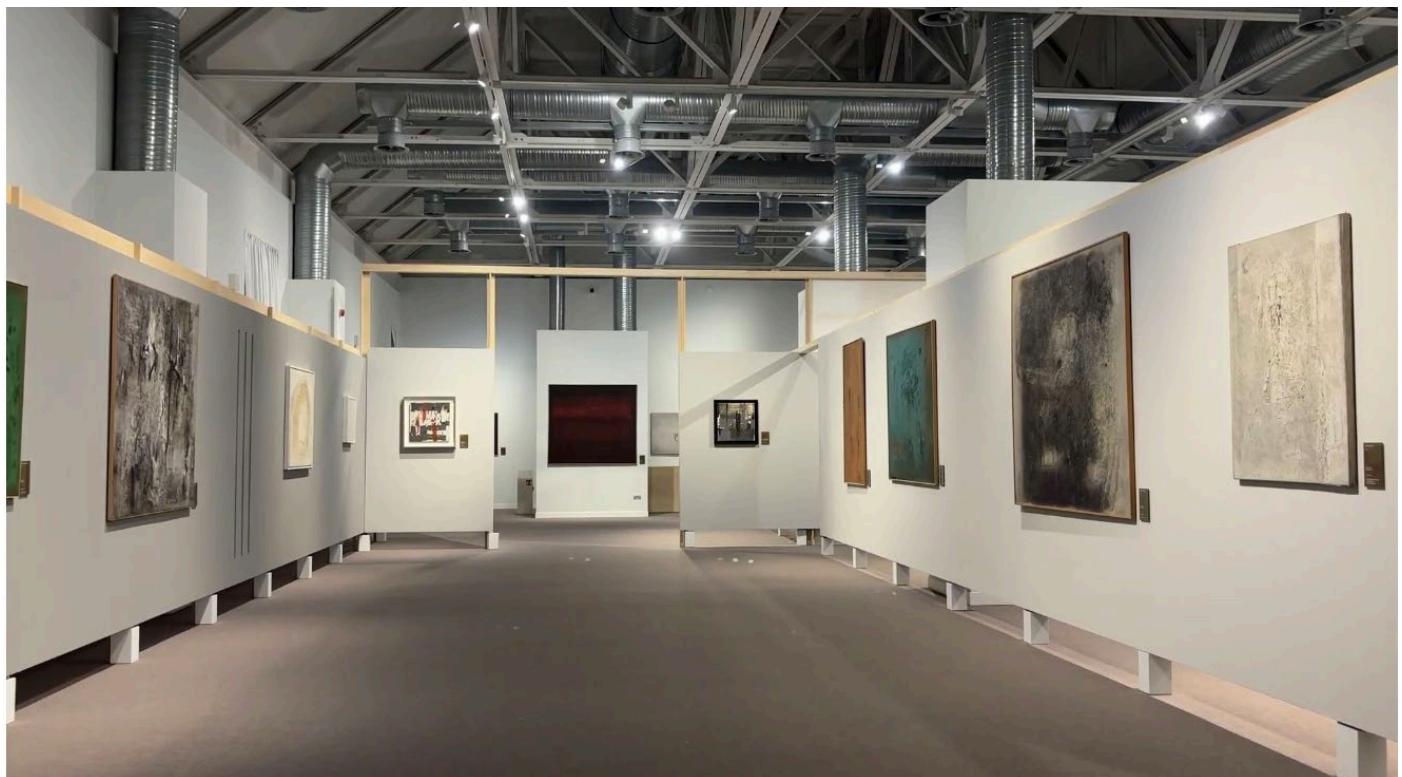


JULIET

From figure to essential sign: the art of Bice Lazzari at Palazzo Citterio in Milan

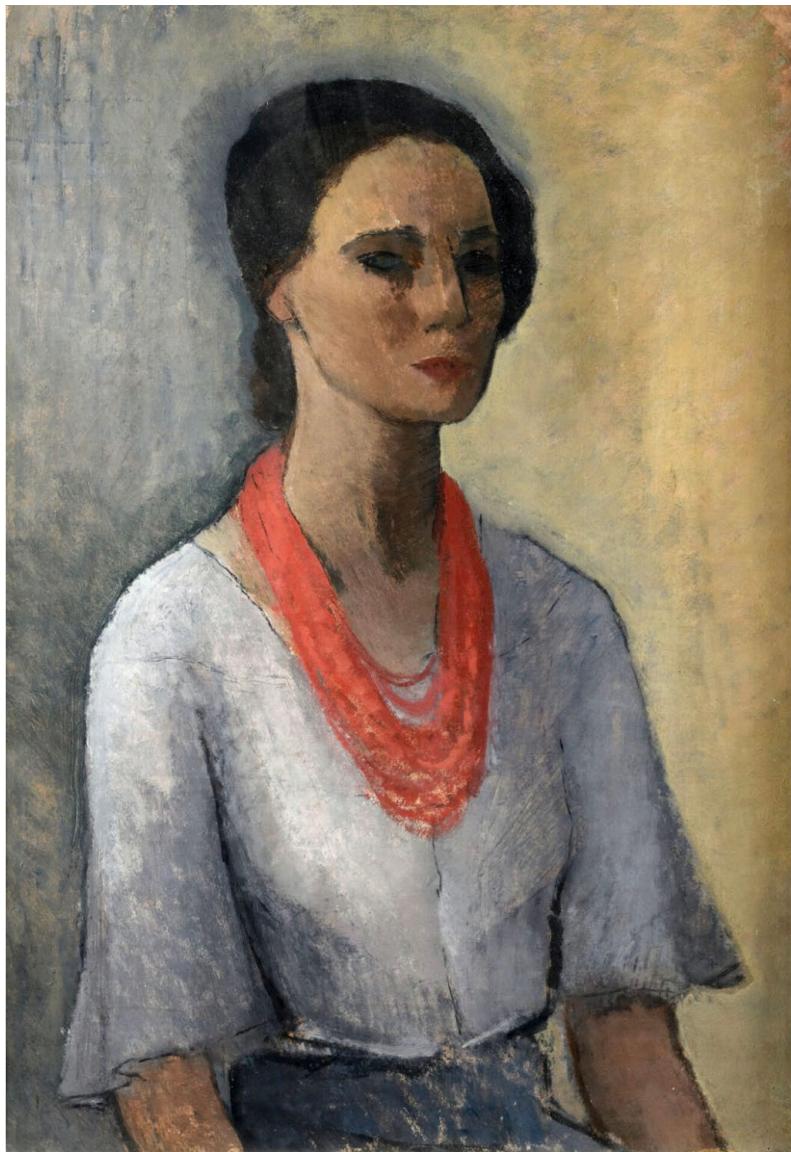
by GIOVANNI CROTTI • 27 DECEMBER 2025 • REVIEWS

It was the first half of 2003 when the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice organized an exhibition titled “Kandinsky and the Abstract Adventure,” in which the only woman present was an Italian artist. Venetian by origin and deceased in 1981 (thus two decades earlier), Bice Lazzari has long been remembered as the first Italian painter of abstraction, the one who rejected “every static and socially accepted pictorial form”, as written in the presentation by the curator of this Milan exhibition, which has, among its merits, above all that of turning attention to a (very) unjustly little-known artist. “I linguaggi del suo tempo” is, in fact, the title of a very rich retrospective hosted in the rooms of the brand-new Palazzo Citterio and curated by Renato Miracco, in collaboration with the Bice Lazzari Archive in Rome.



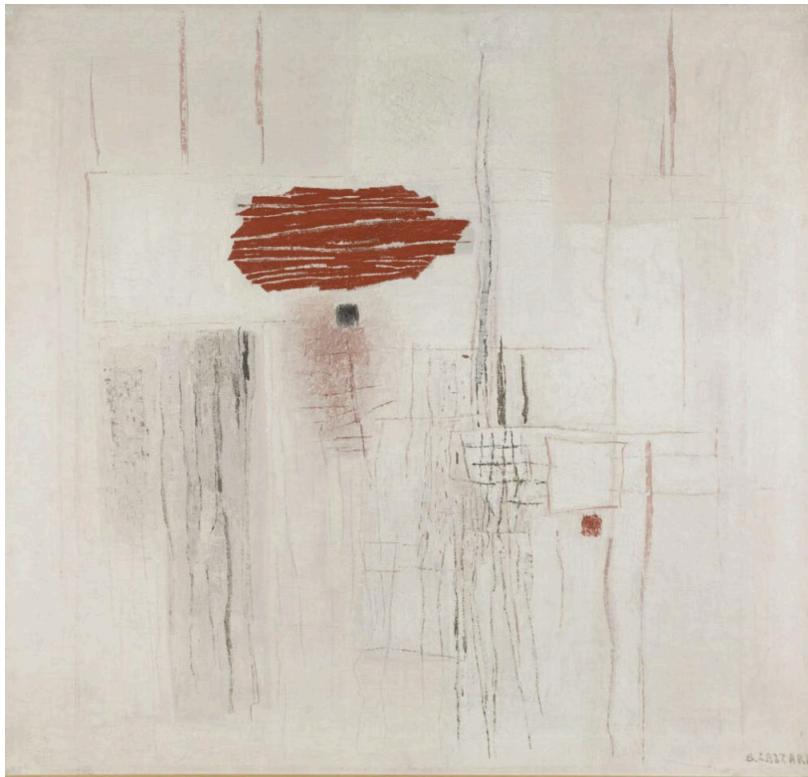
“Bice Lazzari. I linguaggi del suo tempo”, exhibition view at Palazzo Citterio, Milan, courtesy Palazzo Citterio

Divided into two main sections, the retrospective shows us the versatile artistic caliber of Bice Lazzari, capable of expressing herself in figurative painting, spatialism, abstract and informal art, through an artistic immersion that includes 110 works. The first period spans the decades between 1925 and 1957: it is a long artistic phase in which figurative stylistic elements are present as well as material artistic artifacts, a period that represents the phase of Bice's existence between the ages of 25 and 57. The second period, instead, spans from 1958 to 1981 (the year of the artist's death) and, in this time frame, Bice Lazzari's art definitively takes flight toward the shores of abstraction and informal art that, however, was already present in embryo in the final part of the first period. The exhibition path is accompanied, moreover, by numerous texts by the artist, as well as a series of poems all titled with the name of a location and often, in their content, references to the colors of landscape and art.



Bice Lazzari, "Autoritratto", 1929, oil on prepared cardboard, 72×50 cm,
courtesy Palazzo Citterio

Being a retrospective very rich in works, it will not be possible here to make a precise analysis of each one, but rather to trace common exploratory lines. First of all, the continuous experimentation with surface, with a wide use of techniques, from collage to acrylic, from sketch to tempera, from oils to pencil, from pastel to lenci cloth, in a continuous "impulsive spirit without control" (the artist's words from 1981) and above all without a chronologically linear thread. In Morandian flavor is in fact a depiction of a domestic kitchen table without title from the 1930s, but already for some years some abstractions had appeared (1925), with continuous anticipations of artistic signs that would be familiar in the post-World War II period.

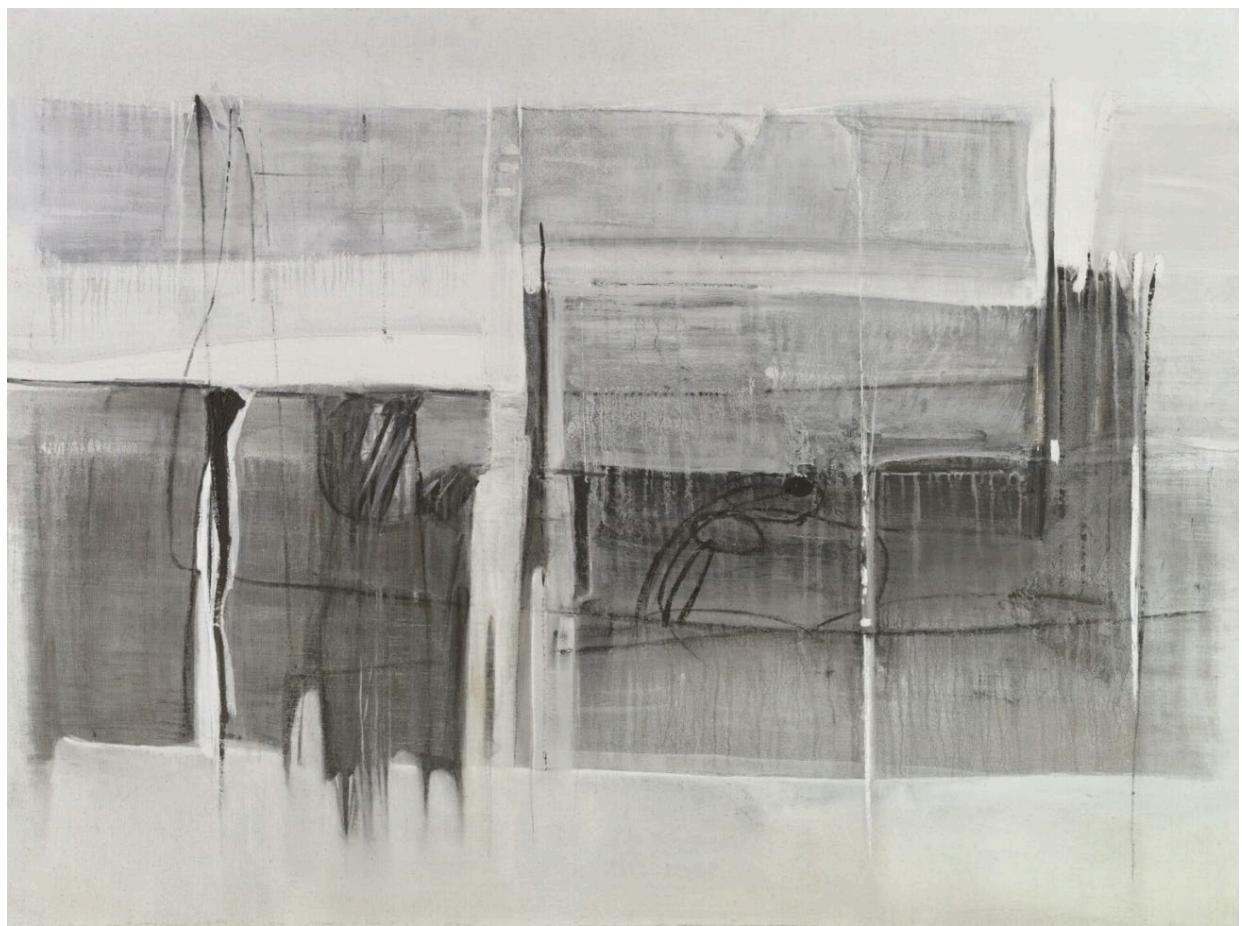


Bice Lazzari, "Racconto n. 2", 1955, oil on canvas, 85.5×90 cm, courtesy Palazzo Citterio

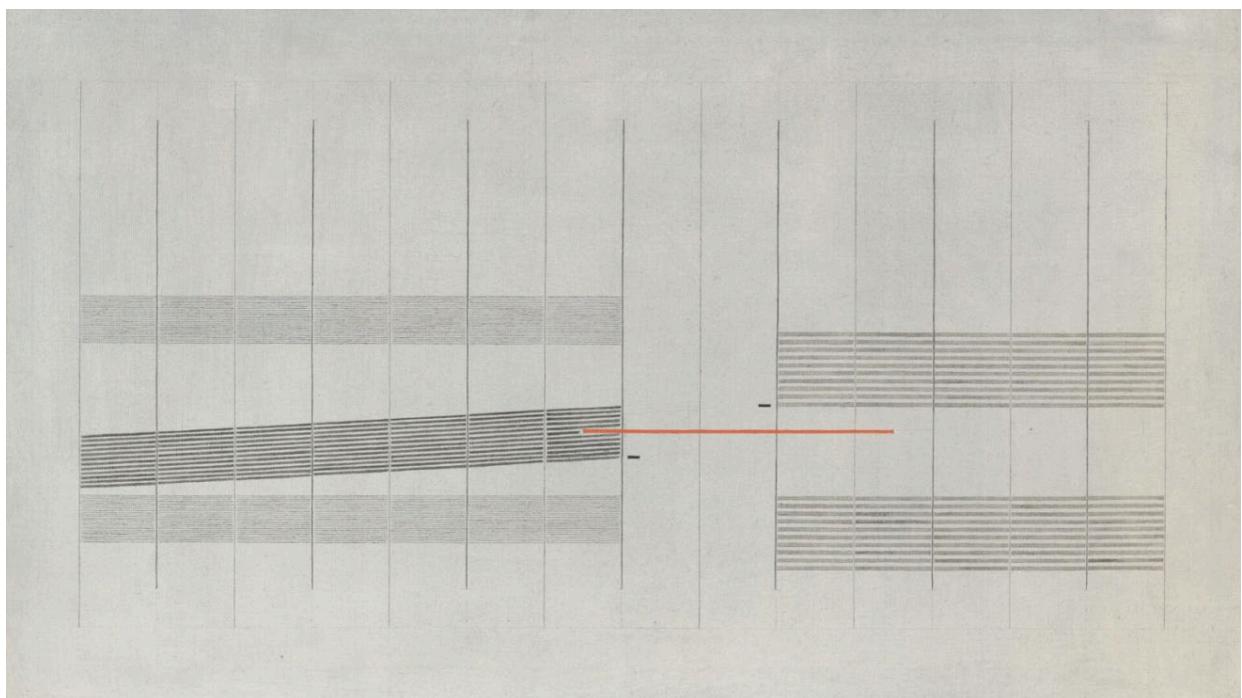
An extraordinary pair of inlays on lenci cloth titled "Cushion" (1928 and 1930) combines optical illusion with three-dimensional effect geometries and ideally sits alongside tapestries or loom-woven wool works. These are years in which, on one hand, Bice Lazzari dedicated herself to the applied art of jewelry and fashion accessories with a vague colonial flavor, on the other she explored brushstrokes of the formless on canvas and even on mosaic (a magnificent large-scale "Vanity" from 1949).

In 1952, although formally still in the so-called first period, abstraction takes flight more clearly. "Traces of Red" from 1954, "Blue Architecture" from 1955, "Tale Number 7" from 1957, the superb "Traces in Time", also from 1957, "Moon Game", again 1957, are just some of the works that this necessary rediscovery places before our eyes, in a constant flow of research and very evocative abstractions. "One who gets it into her head to restart life when she's fifty years old..." says one of the texts supporting the exhibition and, indeed as already mentioned, a new phase does not begin, but an inspiration and artistic instinct already present since the 1920s evolves and, from now on, exalt the artist's interiority, continuously in unwanted connection with the international spirit of the time. A common thread, perhaps, can be found in the continuous recourse to geometric forms, such as the triangle, circle, square, which, by the artist's own admission, were landing places unknown to her but always underlying her majesty "space".

Almost serving as a bridge between the two chronological souls of the retrospective, there is, inside a display case, a large page from an editorial publication with, in enormous letters, the year 1964. If it is true that the second artistic period of Bice Lazzari begins, in the curator's intentions, in 1958, 1964 is the year of the definitive distancing, also publicly displayed, of Bice Lazzari from Italian figurative and neo-figurative art. It is the definitive affirmation, in her creativity, of light, space, sign and the structure of the work, with an absolute return to geometry that intensifies as she approaches the end of her career, often assuming a more essential form. In the same period, due to constant exposure to forms of organic poisoning, the use of oil also closes to open definitively to acrylic and to sand, glue and tempera, always on canvas.

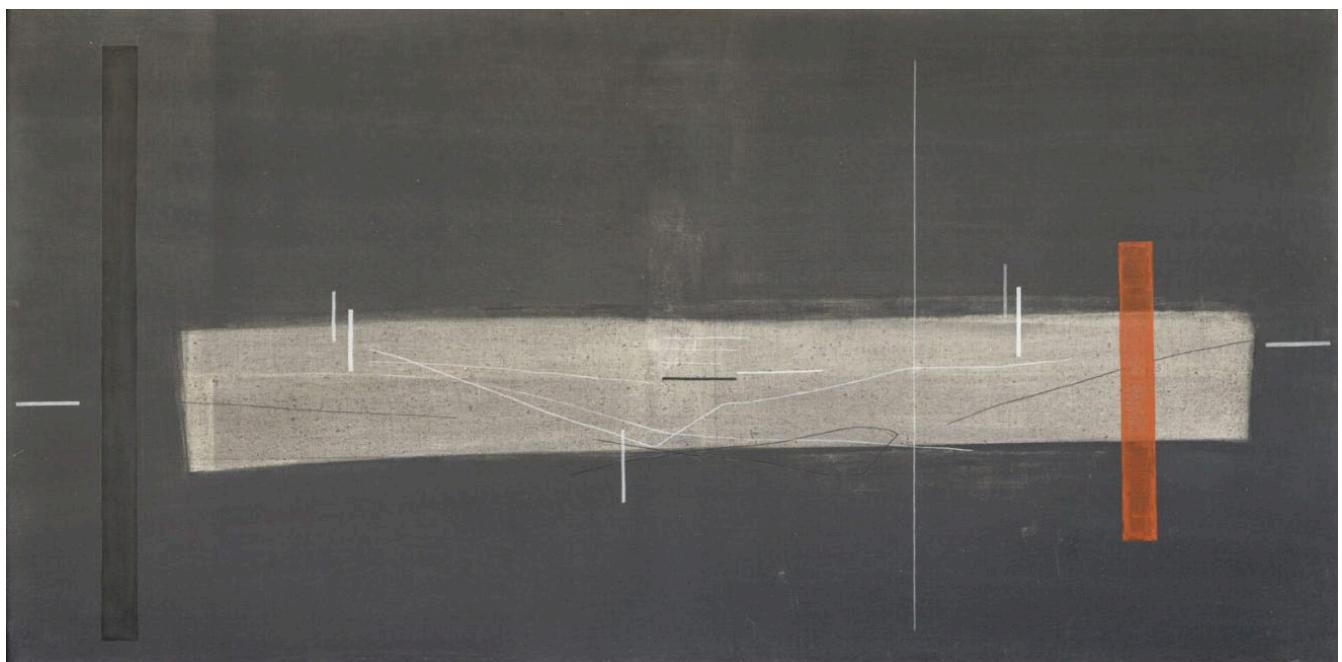


Bice Lazzari, "Sequenze", 1963, tempera, glue and sand on canvas, 156×195 cm, courtesy Palazzo Citterio



Bice Lazzari, "Acrilico n. 4", 1975, acrylic on canvas, 93×164 cm, courtesy Palazzo Citterio

And so works based on rigorous visual research emerge that no longer leave room for objects and stories but revolve around essential and more basic signs. The relationship between artist and canvas space becomes even more intense in this second phase. We cite "Red Signs Number 2" (1959), "Surface LRH 7" (1959), "Untitled" (1960), "Sequences" (1963), "Measures and Signs n. 10" (1965), a stunning large-scale "Untitled" from 1973, "Sequence of the Sign" (1974), works that already in their titles reveal the artistic path definitively taken by Bice Lazzari and that present themselves to the visitor's eyes as luminous and engaging. A path in which methodical discipline asserts itself more rigorously, mastery of material becomes meticulous, visual harmony rises to the focus of the artist's research, vividly interested in what happens beyond national borders and beyond the boundaries of visual art. In many of her works, after overlaying layers and encrustations of mixed material, the artist intervenes with signs and scratches that enhance the research and conceptuality.



Bice Lazzari, "Senza titolo", 1973, acrylic on canvas, 93×164 cm, courtesy Palazzo Citterio

Palazzo Citterio, with this marvelous retrospective, thus pays a dutiful tribute to the community and to history, shining a great beam of light on an artist who interpreted the time always near and to come. Bice Lazzari's art is a creative arc in which all signs converge on the one most felt by the artist: essentiality and space. Figurative, applied art, abstraction, geometries and informal art are the stages that, in a richly informative way, this exhibition brings to general attention. The exhibition "Bice Lazzari. The languages from her time" is accompanied by the homonymous catalogue, curated by Renato Miracco and published by Allemandi.