MILTON GLASER
NELLA CITTÀ DI PIERO
PALAZZO INGHIRAMI
A SANSEPOLCRO 2007
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Vimer
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Giuliano il Giovane in a scene unexpectedly relegated to the background. This saggio cercherà di tracciare la natura e l’evoluzione di questa fascinazione, iscrivendosi su un numero di opere che si ispirano alla pittura di Piero.

First of all, it is worth recalling that, although Piero now ranks among the undisputed personalities of the history of art, modern interest in his work is relatively recent. After his death in 1492, he was mostly neglected by critics. This was for a number of reasons. For one, little was known about him; had it not been for Vasari’s biographical account in the Vite, the artist might have been forgotten. Also, only a small number of works survived, and most of those were in places off the beaten path, such as Arezzo, Borgo Sansepolcro, Urbino, Perugia, and Rimini. Last but not least, his austere, undramatic style was out of keeping with the aesthetic preferences of the time. Piero’s figures were perceived as being wooden and expressionless. They perform extraordi

Piero’s reputation in Europe grew especially in the early 20th century in the wake of modernist aesthetics. Post-Impressionism and Cubism predisposed the public to respond to the master’s emphasis on geometric order, his sparing use of detail, and his reliance on mass, light and colour rather than line and chiaroscuro. It was especially the appreciation of Seurat and Cézanne that led some avant-garde circles to Piero. The two French artists shared with him a number of features, such as the simplification of compositions into abstract forms, the monumental qualities of the figures, and their “primitivism.”

The earliest American painters who were influenced by Piero discovered him precisely through contacts with European modernist circles, in the first decades of the 20th century.

The first group of artists we shall consider are the Precisionists. This movement, which emerged in the 1920s, focused on the depiction of industrial architecture and machines – subjects that were turned into basic geometric patterns and shown in clear light. The Precisionists celebrated technology, which, especially during the years of the Great Depression, functioned as an optimistic symbol of American power and achievements. Though indebted to Futurism, they opted for a figurative style, seeking inspiration from the early Renaissance.

Milton Glaser’s watercolours inspired by Piero della Francesca’s paintings are a declaration of love, the most extensive celebration of his genius made by an American artist. Milton Glaser’s watercolours inspired by Piero della Francesca’s paintings are a declaration of love, the most extensive celebration of his genius made by an American artist. Piero’s name is very rarely mentioned in connection with American art, yet the Renaissance master has enthralled artists there for several decades and made a strong impact on their output. This essay will attempt to trace the nature and evolution of such a fascination, focussing on a number of works that were indebted to Piero’s paintings.

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The British were among the earliest appreciators of Piero. Suffice it to recall that the Baptism, the Nativity and Saint Michael, which now hang in the National Gallery in London, were acquired by British collectors between 1859 and 1861. To these works should be added the Virgin and Child with Four Angels, now at the Clark Art Institute of Williamstown (Massachusetts), which was purchased by Sir Walter Titevelyan as early as 1837. Piero’s revival was part and parcel of some art lovers’ enthusiasm for the so-called Primitives, the artists of the early Renaissance. They revered the art of the Trecento and Quattrocento because its “simplicity” suggested deep spirituality. Piero also appealed to some for his classical qualities. The Battle Between Heracles and Chosroes, in particular, evoked the Parthenon marbles which were on public display at the British Museum.

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La fama di Piero in Europa si sviluppò agli inizi del Novecento sulla scia della nascita dell’estetica modernista. Il Post-impressionismo e il Cubismo predisposero il pubblico ad apprezzare l’impostazione fortemente geometrica dei dipinti del maestro, l’uso parsimonioso dei dettagli e la preferenza data alla massa, alla luce e al colore a scapito della linea e del chiaroscuro. Fu soprattutto l’immaginazione di Seurat e Cézanne a guiderci verso Piero: i due artisti francesi condideranno le sue opere con l’aiuto di alcune caratteristiche, quali la semplicizzazione e la monumentalità delle figure e il loro “primitivismo.”

I primi pittrici americani ad essere influenzati da Piero scopriranno il maestro, nei primi decenni del Novecento, proprio tramite i loro contatti con gli artisti modernisti europei.

Per cominciare, prenderemo in considerazione un gruppo di artisti noto con il nome di Precisionisti. Questo movimento, emerse negli anni Venti, si concentra sulla raffigurazione di architetture industriali e macchinari ridotti a forme geometriche essenziali, e richiariati da una luce cristallina. I Precisionisti celebravano la tecno-
One of the leading figures of Precisionism was Charles Sheeler (1883-1965). The painter visited Paris – the art capital of the world – in 1909. There he met Michael Stein and his wife Sarah, who, like the other Steins who had settled in the French capital (Michael's brother, Leo, and his sister, Gertrude), were keen collectors of avant-garde art. From Paris, the young painter travelled to Italy, where he became acquainted with Piero. As he was to explain in an interview:

“I discovered Piero della Francesca at Arezzo – you saw pictures that were really planned like a house. By an architect. One doesn’t build a house just on impulse. They didn’t start piling bricks hoping it would turn out to be a house. They really did have their blueprints.”

It would be pointless to seek in Sheeler’s works, and indeed in those of other Precisionists, specific references to Piero’s paintings. The master’s influence was generic. They learned through his example a way of looking at the world. Sheeler’s Silo (1938) [Fig. 3] is a painting that could have been inspired by Piero in so far as the forms are solidly constructed, thoughtfully arranged, austere and crisply lit.

Mention should also be made of Elsie Driggs (1898-1992), the only woman artist who participated in the Precisionist movement. She travelled to Italy in 1922 together with other students from New York’s Art Students League and the painting instructor Maurice Sterne, a modernist artist. In Rome, she met Leo and Nina Stein, who talked to her about Piero himself, as well as Piero’s style. Driggs’s pictures were well received by the critics and dealers, and she was soon established in the American art market. Her work was shown in several Parisian galleries, and in 1927 she was given her own exhibition in New York, where she was compared to the great 19th-century French painter James McNeill Whistler. Driggs’s paintings were characterized by their thoughtfulness, austere and crisply lit. She was able to see the Resurrection and the Madonna della Misericordia because the rooms were locked. She later visited the Steins in Florence and found herself “in the company of scholars and collectors. The talk was of Piero the Francese. It was not just enthusiasm, it was a cult,” she remarks.

Driggs found in Piero’s work “a desire for structure and order, for simplicity and strength” – qualities which we find, for instance, in Pittsburgh (1927) [Fig. 4]. She herself considered this painting, which depicts imposing smokestacks inspired by the city’s steel mills, as Piero-esque:

“My Gallery (the Daniel Gallery) hailed it as ‘the new classicism,’ but when people would ask me about it, I would say ‘that is my Piero della Francesca,’ and they would say: ‘who is he?’”

The Precisionists were not the only modernists to be spell-bound by Piero. Another fervent admirer of the painter was Marsden Hartley (1877-1943). Hartley was introduced to the art of Cézanne, the Fauves and Picasso through Alfred Stieglitz’s “291” Gallery in New York, which was, in the early 20th century, the most influential gallery of avant-garde art in America. His European sojourns (1912-1915 and 1921) strengthened his modernist credo. In Paris, he was welcomed into Gertrude Stein’s salon of progressive writers and painters. In Berlin, he frequented Expressionist circles. Modernism led him to the Italian Primavesi, whose directness of form and colour he appreciated. Hartley visited Arezzo on his way to Rome in December 1923 to see the Cycle of the True Cross. He described this visit at length in his diary, raving at the fresco’s dignified spirituality, aloofness, “incomparable sense of arrangement,” “majesty of style,” and “austere peace and simplicity,” and referred to Piero as “my mind idol.” Around the same time, he wrote an essay entitled “Arezzo and Piero” in which he concluded that “the world of art would not be the same if Piero had not been dispatched into it to give it tone and temper, dig.
nity and concept.” Hartley was unable to travel to Sansepolcro, but was sufficiently familiar with the Resurrection to marvel in his diary at its “startling sense of the immediacy of an idea.” He discussed this fresco at greater length in another essay, “Some words on Piero and Masaccio,” written ten years later. The Resurrection inspired him to paint a number of monumental and hieratic portraits, such as Down East Young Blades (c. 1940), which depicts three fishermen of the Maine region (New England) [Fig. 5].

Joseph Stella (1877-1946), an Italian-born artist who came to New York in 1896, also deserves mention. During his visits to Europe (he first returned there in 1909), he came into contact with various avant-garde artists (Matise, Modigliani, Carrà and the Futurists). Like other modernists, he was attracted by Piero’s enigmatic figures, his simple, majestic and sharply delineated forms, and the decorative qualities afforded by their careful arrangements. Several paintings he executed in the 1920s evoke Piero’s work. For instance, The Amazon (1926) [Fig. 6] paraphrases the Portrait of Battista Sforza (Fig. 7) – a painting that especially charmed him, as he discussed this fresco at greater length in another essay, “Some words on Piero and Masaccio” [Alcune parole su Piero e Masaccio], scritto attorno al 190. Si spiega alla Resurrezione per dipingere diverse scene monumentali e terrificanti, come Down East Young Blades [I rudi ragazzi di Down East] (c.1940), che rappresenta tre pescatori della regione del Maine (New England) [Fig. 5].

Auch Joseph Stella (1877-1946), artista di origini italiane venuto a New York nel 1896, merita di essere menzionato. Durante il suo viaggio in Europa (vi tornò la prima volta nel 1909), entrò in contatto con diversi artisti d’avanguardia (Matise, Modigliani, Carrà e i Futuristi). Alla stregua di altri pittori modernisti, era attirato dalle figure enigmatiche di Piero, dalle loro forme semplici, solenni e chiaramente delineate, e dalle qualità decorative che risultano dalla loro elaborata disposizione. Diverse pitture eseguite da Stella negli anni Venti ricordano l’opera di Piero. Amazon (1926) [Fig. 6] per esempio, parodia lo Ritratto di Battista Sforza (Fig. 7), un’opera che lo colpì in modo particolare, come attesta la dettagliata analisi formale che ci ha lasciato.

Son oggi al cospetto della duchessa d’Urbino. Una fotografia of the cranium and forehead is perfect and flaws uninterrupted, trickles down calmly, verbally but in silence, until it defines with exquisitely eloquent the slightly bowed nose and the hint of evil intention in the cut of the bile-stained mouth; then, as the still babyish chin, it becomes rounded before collecting and retaining within firm edges the flooding solidity of the long and youthful round neck. The houndadres comes together at the base of the skull, encircling the ears with a mass which comes to an oblique point at its summit with a tangle of folds like coiled viscera, and then falls in straight bands spread out as though protecting the neck.

A s well as appealing to modernist artists, Piero was venerated by the muralists of the 1930s and 1940s – in particular those who contributed to the schemes launched by President Franklin Roosevelt during the Great Depression to provide employment to artists and enrich the country artistically: the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), which was set up on an experimental basis in December 1933, and the Section of Painting and Sculpture of the Treasury Department (referred to as “The Section”), which took over from it in 1934. The latter scheme, which ended in 1940, was organised on a competitive basis.

Fotografia di Giovanni Maria Bergamaschi, da Piero e Masaccio, la Sala Rossa, 1953.

Oltre a piacere ai modernisti, Piero fu venerated dai muralisti degli anni Trenta e Quaranta, in particolare modelli di coloro che contribuirono ai progetti avviati dal Presidente Franklin Roosevelt durante la Grande Depressione, volti a fornire lavoro agli artisti e ad arretrare il paese dal punto di vista artistico: il Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), progetto per le opere d’arte a carattere pubblico, che fu creato in via sperimentale nel dicembre 1933, e la Section of Painting and Sculpture of the Treasury Department (settore pittura e scultura del Ministro delle Finanze) (sovente chiamato “The Section”), che si sostituì al precedente nel 1934. Quest’ultimo programma, che venne sciolto nel 1940, era organizzato su base competitiva.
world, the Resurrection of Christ. Whenever I am in Italy, I make a pilgrimage to Borgo to see that picture, and I find my soul refreshed from seeing it. [...] I hope the day may come when we too may develop a Piero della Francesca."

Equally revealing is a letter addressed to Bruce by his assistant Edward Rowan, in August 1936, regarding a field trip to Italy that had been planned for the officials of the Section, but was finally cancelled. Rowan notes disappointing:

*It would have been wonderful [...], and I think I could have brought something of value to the Section after seeing the Pieros, the Signorellis and the Campo Santo in Pisa – but that's all for another time."

George Biddle (1885-1973), who originated the idea of a government-supported mural programme in 1933 (he suggested to-President Roosevelt, an ex-classmate from Harvard), makes a number of references to Piero in his diary. On 1st January 1935, while in the middle of painting a mural entitled *Society Freed by Justice* for the Department of Justice in Washington DC, he noted that he had dreamt of being Piero di Franzcesca. On 3rd May 1948, he reminisced, "I devoted his works. I used to think the Resurrection of Christ to be the most beautiful painting in the world." Though Biddle's paintings are not specifically Piero-esque, many of the murals that were executed during and under the auspices of the Section bear the master’s mark, as a few examples will show.

The painting *Westward Movement: Justice of the Plains* (Verso Ovest: la giustizia delle piantine), by John Stuart Curry (1897-1946) realized for the Minister of the Giustizia nel 1937 [Fig. 8],"cipsia alla Vittoria di Costantino [Fig. 9]. Esso illustra alcune famiglie di pionieri con i loro carri coperti e i boschi che affrontano la speranza dell’oro (gli attacchi di due fuorilegge mascherati). Come nell'affresco di Piero, il modello somigliano, calmo ed fiducioso con il quale il gruppo ordinato di persone avanzano all'unisono è posto in contrasto con la scena scompigliata e turbolenta raffigurante u uomini in cavallo. Il cavaliere in uniforme blu, reso di profilo, insegna all'uomo baudo alla sua sinistra che indica l'ovest, riecheggiano il ritratto di Costantino che ostenta la Croce, e il soldato rivestito dell’uniforme al suo fianco [Fig. 10]; mentre il dettaglio del bandito che si volta indietro sul cavallo rampante si ispira ad uno dei cavaliere in ritratto (Fig. 9)." Equally indebted to Piero is the Texas artist Tom Lea (1906-2001), whose interest in the Renaissance master was sparked to his mentor, the muralist John W. Norton (1876-1934). On Norton’s advice, Lea travelled to Europe in 1930 to familiarize himself with the great artistic traditions of the past. His sojourn began in Paris. There, as we learn from an autobiographical account, he bought a book on Piero and decided to visit Italy. "Though he does not name its title, he is likely to have been the French or English translation of Roberto Longhi’s seminal monograph on Piero, which had recently appeared. Arezzo was one of the highlights of Lea’s Italian trip.

*We stayed in Arezzo a few days. And I found that I could buy 8x10" black-and-white prints from Alinari. [...] So we bought a whole set of these there in the church of San Francesco that Piero had done. And we didn’t base to sketch because we had the photographs and they were good photographs. The second day I was there, we gave the old scrivini a tip, and he let me climb up on the choir stalls so I could touch the bottom of Piero’s work, and it was lovely. [...] We loved [...] the severity of Piero in the Church of San Francesco.*

This was an experience that deeply affected Lea’s work, as is shown by the mural he painted in 1938 in the Federal Court of Washington, annotated that he had sought of see Piero della Francesca. “Il 3 maggio 1948, ricorda: “Divoravo le sue opere. Consideravo la Resurrezione di Cristo il più bel dipinto del mondo.”

Sebbene le pitture di Biddle non siano propriamente piero-"francescanesche, molti dei murali eseguiti sotto l’autoriscia della Section, portano l’impronta del maestro, come mostrano alcuni esempi.

Lea’s 1938 trip to Sansepolcro, where he met the local priest and bought a copy of Roberto Longhi’s monograph on Piero della Francesca, is also linked to the visit of the *Pass of the North* (Verso il Nord, 1938) by Edward Rowan, who in 1933 had suggested the idea of a project for the officials of the Section, primarily for the students of the Department of Justice. Lea’s visit to the town led him to buy 8x10" black-and-white prints from Alinari. “So we bought a whole set of these there in the church of San Francesco that Piero had done. And we didn’t base to sketch because we had the photographs and they were good photographs. The second day I was there, we gave the old scrivini a tip, and he let me climb up on the choir stalls so I could touch the bottom of Piero’s work, and it was lovely. [...] We loved [...] the severity of Piero in the Church of San Francesco.”

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house of El Paso, his hometown. Entitled Pass of the North [Fig. 11], this work depicts the protagonists of the history of the region: the ranger on horseback, the conquistador Coronado, the friar, the vaquero, the settlers, the gold-diggers, the Apaches, etc. Paintings celebrating the explorers and settlers of the West usually depict them as men of action—fighting Indians, wild-horse racing, hunting, ranching, etc. Lea chooses to immortalise them by representing them majestically immobile and calmly grouped in clusters in front-like arrangement, like some of the figures in Piero’s frescoes. Like Curry’s mural in the Justice Department, Lea’s includes precise borrowings. The mounted ranger pointing forward with the American flag flying behind him [Fig. 12] alludes to the portrait of victorious Constantine on horseback [Fig. 10]; while the figures that are shown frontally, with thoughtful or impassive expression (such as the vaquero with the right knee slightly bent and the Franciscan grasping the Cross [Fig. 17]), are reworkings of Piero’s resurrected Christ [Fig. 14].

Piero also influenced Ethel Magafan (1916-1993), who trained at the Colorado Springs Fine Art Center under Boardman Robinson and Frank Mechau—a two artists steeped in Renaissance art. The mural Cotton Pickers (c. 1940) [Fig. 15], which she painted for the Post Office in Wynne, Arkansas, is based on the Arezzo scene depicting the Queen of Sheba’s Adoration of the Holy Wood and her Meeting with Solomon [Fig. 16], as indicated by various features. The figures are arranged rhythmically close to the picture plane and the bags of cotton are carried by two of them in trail-like fashion. The structuring of the scene into two main parts, the first featuring an architectural element (the shack) and the other a tree, also reflects Piero’s painting.

Finally, mention must be made of Philip Guston (1913-1980). Born in Canada from Russian parents, Guston spent his formative years in Los Angeles where, exhorting
and of the Baptist had been pinned to his kitchen wall for twenty-five years [Fig. 22].

Piero also cast his spell on some of the leading exponents of Magic Realism. Like its European counterparts, this movement, which was started in the 1930s, was characterised by a sharp focus, an emphasis on stillness, geometric compositions and an eerie atmosphere.

We shall begin by considering Grant Wood (1892-1941), who is usually placed thematically with the Regionalist School – the group of artists who rejected the subject matters and abstract modes dear to the European avant-garde to paint the urban and rural America of their time in a figurative style – but is stylistically related to Magic Realism.

When discussing the paintings of Wood’s maturity, which have an austere and monumental quality, art historians stress his debt to Seurat, Flemish and German Renaissance art and the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity), which he would have encountered during his trips to France and Germany in the 1920s. Yet Piero was another source of inspiration. His influence is evident, for instance, in Arnold Comes of Age [Fig. 23], which Wood painted in 1930 to mark the twenty-first birthday of his friend and studio assistant Arnold Pyle. The simply delineated figure, its frontal stance and thoughtful expression, and the trees in the background – one with full foliage and the other virtually bare – suggest that this work was largely modelled on the Resurrection [Fig. 14]. The unusual detail of the naked bather in the background, one of whom recalls the carthusian removing his clothing in the Baptist [Fig. 24], confirms that Wood had been looking at Piero. The debt to the master is also discernible in a drawing entitled The Flagellation of a Man and a Cow [Fig. 21] (nonché delle Battaglie di Paolo Uccello). Gupton crea una composizione compatta sistemando le figure in uno spazio ristretto. Qui lo spazio è definito dalla relazione fra le figure piane e semplificate, e dalla loro disposizione ritmata, piuttosto che dalla profondità illusionistica.

Sebbene Guston si convertisse presto all’astrattismo, conservò un forte senso della costruzione architettonica. Continuò a venerare Piero anche quando, a tratti, abbandonò la simmetria in favore di forme colorate organizzate fluidamente e dipinte in modo espressionistico. Intervistato all’Università di Boston nel 1966, dichiarò che da ventcinque anni teneva in cucina una riproduzione della Flagellazione e una del Battesimo [Fig. 22].

Piero ha ammaliato anche alcuni dei principali esponenti del Realismo Magico. Come i suoi contemporanei europei, questo movimento, che prese avvio negli anni Trenta, privilegiava le forme statiche, delineate con precisione, le composizioni geometriche e le atmosfere misteriose. In primo luogo ci soffermeremo su Grant Wood (1892-1941), che viene tradizionalmente associato dal punto di vista tematico alla scuola Regionalista – gruppo di artisti che, dunque, la sua posizione frontale, l’espressione assorta e gli alberi sullo sfondo, uno ricco di fogliame e l’altro parzialmente spoglio – lasciano pensare che l’opera prenda spunto dalla Resurrezione [Fig. 14]. L’uniforme dettaglio dei bagnanti nudi sullo sfondo, uno dei quali richiama il catecismo che si svolge nel Battesimo [Fig. 24], conferma che Wood aveva studiato Piero. Il debito verso il maestro è confermato dal dipinto Saturday Night Bath [Bagno di sabato notte] [Fig. 25] che l’artista eseguì nel 1937. Quest’opera allude agli stessi dipinti di Piero: l’uomo intento all’abbeveratoio ricorda il Cristo in piedi, mentre la figura che si spoglia risente nell’atto di asciugarsi il bagnante che si prepara al battesimo. Va notato anche che il disegno di Wood ha un formato insolito: il bordo superiore è a luna, come quello del Battesimo e di molte altre pale d’altare rinascimentali.

Piero è presente in varie opere di Paul Cadmus, Jared French e George Tooker. Questi artisti vengono spesso considerati insieme poiché dipinsero nudi e tre a tempeste, perché la...
ing being a tempera painting entitled *Washing the White Blood off Daniel Boone* (1939) [Fig. 28]. Daniel Boone, one of the most celebrated American folk heroes, was a militia officer during the Revolutionary War of 1775-1783, who was captured by the Shawnee Indians in 1778 and adopted into the tribe. The choice of the painting's subject matter (an initiation ceremony) led French to use Piero’s *Baptism* [Fig. 24] as a model, replacing the figure of Jesus with Boone.  

George Tooker (born in 1920) has been greatly attracted by Piero’s solid figures, their careful spatial arrangement and the mysterious quality of his light. His paintings deal with urban claustrophobia and alienation, the facelessness of buildings, as well as themes of a meditative and spiritual nature. *Builders* (1952) [Fig. 29] depicts a bare-footed spectral figure set against a luminous sky appearing to a group of four men. It recalls the *Dream of Constantine* [Fig. 31] and the *Baptism* (the mysterious figure is a near replica of the angel of mezzo) [Fig. 30]. The painting is a poetic statement on the destruction of nature through urbanisation. The female figure confronting the builders is a likely personification of Nature.  

As this brief survey covering the first half of the 20th century indicates, though Piero was still little known to the general public, his reputation among artists was well established, to the extent that some of them treated him as a cult figure. Painters could acquaint themselves with his work through different channels. In major art schools, such as the Art Students League and the Art Institute of Chicago, Piero was far from being an obscure figure; he was discussed and appreciated, as it emerges from the autobiographical accounts of a number of artists. William G. Waters’s monograph on Piero – the first to be written in English – appeared in 1901; it was of a series of volumes entitled “The Great Masters of Painting and Sculpture.” It enjoyed wide circulation, as did the English translation of Longhi’s book (as evidenced by the volumes’ presence in numerous Ameri- can libraries).  

If institutions and certain publications could provide young American artists with the initial exposure to Piero’s paintings, stimulating their interest, their infatuation was usually triggered by the actual experience of seeing Piero’s works in Europe. As the descriptions they provide in diaries, letters and other documents reveal, they were spellbound by the frescoes. Interestingly, often their trips to Arezzo and Sansepolcro followed a sojourn in Paris, where contacts with modernists fired their enthusiasm for Piero’s “abstract” style. To visit the towns which boasted the master’s works, these artists could rely on the Baedeker’s guide to Central Italy, which devoted a growing attention to Piero.  

The number of major studies on Piero that began to ap-
pear in the middle of the 20th century” helped widen the artist’s appeal. The Piero cult has led to numerous artists paying tribute to him through various forms of appropriations (parodic manipulations, reiterations, pastiche, visual citations, etc.), as well as through the imitation of specific stylistic features.

Andy Warhol made a print of the Madonna and Child with Saints and Federico da Montefeltro (1984), but selected only the painting’s upper part, which depicts an ostrich egg hanging from a giant shell (Figs. 32, 33). The drastic elimination of the Sacra Conversazione and the focusing on the egg are an ironical comment on the vast amount of literature that iconographers have devoted to this detail.  

The portrait of Battista Sforza executed by Larry Rivers (1923-2002) implicitly celebrates Piero’s “modernity.” The drawing (1990) [Fig. 3], the young woman wearing a simple red dress is modelled on the Amor and, at times, incorporate visual citations of his works. In one picture, the singing angels from the Nativity hover in front of the window to serenade the house’s occupants. In another, the image of God from the Arezzo Assunzione reappears in a kiosk to offer a hotdog to a woman with joined hands who resembles one of the worshippers of the Madonna della Misericordia. In Triple Bicycle Triptych (2004) [Fig. 37], the angels of Piero’s Madonna del Parto (Fig. 38) open the shutters to reveal the sublime beauty of the countryside and invite one to make the most of it (bicycles await to be ridden, in the middle ground).

do vero menzionare anche il testo di Aldous Huxley. Along the Road, resoconto dei suoi viaggi nell’Europa continentale, che uscì nel 1927. Comprende un capitolo sulla Resurrezione intitolato “The Best Picture” [Il dipinto più bello], che deve aver molto colpito gli artisti, poiché l’espressione si ritorna, in relazione all’affresco di Sassopetrò, negli scritti di alcuni di loro. Viene usata, per esempio, da Ed- ward Bruce e George Biddle nei due testi sopra citati. Tom Lea, il cui murale Furo in the North ricorda la Resurrezione, come già evidenziato in queste pagine, menziona il testo di Huxley nella sua autobiografia, e sottolinea che fu da esso influenzato:

“I vaggi [di Aldous Huxley] sulle varie cose che aveva apprezzato in Europa ebbero un forte impatto su di me. Quando più tardi mi recai in Europa, tentai di vedere molte delle cose di cui aveva parlato.”  

Se le accademie d’arte e certe pubblicazioni potevano fornire ai giovani artisti americani la prima opportunità di vedere le opere di Piero e stimolare così il loro interesse, l’infanzia avveniva di solito in Italia, in seguito al contatto diretto con i suoi dipinti. Come si evince dalla lettura di diari, lettere e altri documenti, essi rimanevano incantati dagli affreschi. È interessante notare che spesso i viaggi ad Arezzo e Sansepolcro erano congiunti con un soggiorno parigino dove la frequentazione di circoli modernisti li riempivano d’entusiasmo per lo stile “attratto” di Piero. Per recarsi nelle città che conservano le opere del maestro, questi artisti potevano affidarsi alle guide Baedeker sull’Italia Centrale, che a Piero dedicavano crescente attenzione.  

Le molte e importanti pubblicazioni su Piero appaiono a partire dalla metà del Novecento, hanno contribuito ad ampliare la reputazione dell’artista. Il culto di Piero ha indotto numerosi artisti a celebrarlo attraverso varie forme di appropriazione (manipolazioni parodistiche, rivisitazioni, pastiche, citazioni visive, ecc.) e attraverso l’imitazione di particolari caratteristiche stilistiche.

Andy Warhol ha realizzato una stampa della Madonina con Rambino, Sanza e Federico da Montefeltro (1984) selezionando solo la parte superiore della tavola, che rappresenta un uomo di struzzo appeso ad una gigantesca conchiglia (Figg. 32, 33). La drastica eliminazione della Sacra Conversazione e l’attenzione rivolta al motivo dell’uovo, vuole essere un commento ironico sulla mole di letteratura che gli iconografi hanno dedicato a questo particolare.  

Il ritratto di Battista Sforza eseguito dall’artista pop Larry Rivers (1923-2002) è una celebrazione implicita della “modernità” di Piero: il disegno (1993) [Fig. 3], espone insieme ad altre appropriazioni creative di dipinti celebri in una mostra tenutasi alla Marlborough Gallery di New York nel 1993, er l’unico che si rifa a un artista antecedente al XIX secolo.  

I dipinti di Alan Felts furono rifatti alle figure di Piero nelle posture e nei gesti, nonché nel loro distacco emozionale, e talvolta contengono citazioni visive delle sue opere. In Amor (1990) [Fig. 35], l’immagine della ragazza che porta un semplice abito rosso è ripresa dalla Madonna della Misericordia (Fig. 36) – di cui una riproduzione si trova sopra il caminetto, parzialmente coperta da quella di Ingres. Un’altra opera di Piero, il Ritratto di Battista Sforza, compare in maniera discreta (l’immagine risulta sostanzialmente tagliata dal bordo destro del dipinto di Felts), appesa al muro.  

Le fotografie di Maureen Banker testimoniano del fascino che esercitano su di lei le audaci sperimentazioni di Piero con i cartoni e il loro riutilizzo a rovescio (per preparare le lastre per la stampa è necessario invertere le immagini), il carattere sacro di cui è imbottita Sansepolcro, e la “presenza” dei personaggi principali del pittore nella vita qua...
Milton Glaser’s wide-ranging series of watercolours inspired by Piero were begun in spring 1989 during an extended stay in Radda, in the Chianti region – a visit, made in the company of his wife, Shirley, that was also intended to celebrate his 60th birthday. Piero is an artist that had fascinated him since his student days in New York. He first discovered him in 1950, by visiting the Frick Museum, which, as well as boasting the Saint John Evangelist, had just acquired the Augustinian Nun and Augustinian Monk. The year he spent in Italy (1951-52) as a student on a Fulbright Scholarship at the Accademia di Belle Arti of Bologna – an experience that made a significant impact on him, as he has declared on many an occasion – provided him with an opportunity to deepen his understanding of Piero. As well as visiting the churches and museums that preserved Piero’s works in Italy, Glaser travelled to London, Lisbon and Berlin to examine his paintings first hand.

A study of Glaser’s watercolours provides us with the opportunity to find out what attracts him most about Piero. It is worth pointing out that, unlike most of the artists we have looked at, Glaser does not merely allude to Piero’s work by imitating his style, nor does he choose to reproduce a few details from it in a new context. His paintings are immediately recognisable as being largely based on Piero’s works. They were intended as “a simple reflection” of Piero’s genius (see interview).

Interestingly, the watercolour drawings do not deal with whole paintings or complete scenes from frescoes. They isolate details in order to analyse their stylistic and compositional features, and consider their creative potentials. Captivated by Piero’s habit of reusing motifs with slight positional features, and considering their creative potentials, Glaser reimagines the Death of Adam scene in several ways. Using a motif that strongly appeals to his classical sensibility trained by Giorgio Morandi at the Bologna Academy, he isolates the athletic nude elegantly leaning on the shepherd’s staff. In another rendition, he repaints the nude in its original context, the right-hand section of the Death of Adam. In a surreal recreation of the scene, a man in a richly coloured and elaborate Renaissance costume, depicted frontally, occupies the place of the young woman who attends old sick Adam. Adam’s recumbent corpse has been moved from the centre of the original fresco, to the extreme right of the new composition (where only his head is visible).

The twin portraits of Federico da Montefeltro and Battista Sforza also feature repeatedly in the watercolours series. Milton Glaser deprives them of the sweeping vistas to focus on their profiles, and then moves them about. For instance, he places them back to back, or, after reversing Federico’s portrait, makes them both turn right, partly overlapping. The aim is to explore the new formal relationships that the rearrangements engender. In one illustration, the iconic face of the resurrected Christ is inserted incongruously between the portraits of Battista and Federico – a contraposition that recalls Piero’s frequent practice of contrasting the frontal and the profile in his paintings.

The geometry underlying Piero’s images intrigues Milton Glaser, as is indicated by a number of drawings: the figure lifting his funnel-shaped hat from the Exaltation of the Cross, the sleepy soldier at the foot of Jesus’s tomb, and the series of portraits of Federico and Battista. In one of the portraits, the Duke’s features have been reduced to a few essential lines and colours. Details such as the eye socket, the tip of the nose, the earlobe, and the facial spots have become perfect spheres, while the hills in the background have been rendered as the intersecting curves of two trun...

Morte di Adamo

Death of Adam

Milton Glaser ponders his Nuptiae sarcofago nella sua casa a
Milton Glaser medita davanti al sarcofago Nuptiae nella sua casa a Woodstock

Glaser’s work area in his Woodstock studio. Il lavoro del Glaser in suo studio di Woodstock

Still life ar lunch. Piatto noto oppure pranzo.
Milton Glaser was bound to be seduced by Piero della Francesca. Looking at his graphic design output (of which this catalogue provides a number of examples), one finds confirmation that the two artists are kindred spirits: a rigorousness, a strong feeling for design and for beauty, stunning originality, and a keen interest in the replication technique are their hallmarks. One may also add that they share a sense of compassion – a quality in Milton Glaser revealed by his numerous graphic contributions to humanitarian social causes.

cated circles. In another portrait, Federico’s “simple” profile has been further abstracted through the imposition of a cruciform grid. The four rectangles resulting from the split acquire a life of their own, charming us as elegant abstract compositions. The “flatness” of Battista’s and Federico’s faces is emphasised through splashs of colour applied freely and allowed to smudge haphazardly, like abstract expressionist drippings on a canvas.

Glaser also isolates and lovingly analyses the broad view in the Uffizi Dittico, and the enchanting landscapes in the Nativity, the Resurrection and Victory of Constantine. Of the latter landscape, he “restores” the lacuna caused by the ravages of time to delight us with the full portion of the curving river and its reflections. He dwells with equal admiration on the solidity of the forms and the restrained elegance of the figures draped in heavily folded garments. He pays repeated attention to some of Piero’s most striking images, such as the soldier who cold-bloodedly pierces his opponent’s throat and the catechumen removing his shirt (a spontaneous act that contrasts with the ritualistic stillness of the Baptism scene).

Milton Glaser non poteva non essere sedotto da Piero della Francesca. Le sue opere di grafica (di cui questo catalogo fornisce diversi esempi) ci confermano che i due artisti hanno spirito affini: il rigore, un forte senso della composizione e della bellezza, una straordinaria originalità e uno spiccato interesse per la tecnica del riutilizzo delle immagini sono le loro particolarità. Si potrebbe aggiungere che essi condividono il senso della compassione – una qualità in Milton Glaser rivelata dalle numerose opere di grafica eseguite a sostegno di cause umanitarie e civili.

delle immagini più sorprendenti di Piero, quali il soldato che con sangue freddo trafigge la gola dell’avversario e il catecumeno che si spoglia (un atto spontaneo che contrasta con l’immobilità rituale della scena del Battesimo)
1. This section includes some of the results of the research on Piero della Francesca's influence in the United States. The work of M. de Waart, "Washington DC," in the Smithsonian American Art Museum, is a significant study of the influence of the artist in the United States. The work of Y. Jaffe, "Piero della Francesca in the United States," is a valuable contribution to the understanding of the artist's influence in the United States. The work of T. Craver & Margo (eds), "Tom Lea: an Oral History," is a valuable contribution to the understanding of the artist's influence in the United States. The work of J. Adair Margo, "Chair of the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities," is a valuable contribution to the understanding of the artist's influence in the United States. The work of B. Craver & Margo, "Tom Lea: an Oral History," is a valuable contribution to the understanding of the artist's influence in the United States. The work of I. Adair Margo, "Chair of the President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities," is a valuable contribution to the understanding of the artist's influence in the United States.

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Drawings after Piero
Disegni ispirati a Piero
San Ludovico of Telos, Sansepolcro

The Death of Adam (detail), Arezzo
The Death of Adam (details), Arezzo

The Dream of Constantine (detail), Arezzo
Battle between Heraclius and Chosroes (detail), Arezzo
The Queen of Sheba's Meeting with Solomon (detail), Arezzo
The Queen of Sheba’s Adoration of the Holy Wood (detail), Arezzo
The Exaltation of the Cross (detail), Arezzo

The Discovery of the True Cross (detail), Arezzo
Portraits of Battista Sforza and Federico da Montefeltro, Florence
The Resurrection (detail), Sansepolcro
The Resurrection (detail), Sansepolcro

The Baptism of Christ (detail), London
The Queen of Sheba’s Meeting with Solomon (detail), Arezzo

The Nativity (detail), London

Saint John the Evangelist, Polyptych of Saint Augustine (detail), New York
Silkscreens and Lithographs
Serigrafie e Litografie
Bathers at Brera, Lithographic print
Drawings and Watercolours
Disegni e Acquerelli
Portrait of de Chirico, Colored pencil on board

Portrait of Klimt, Colored pencil on board
Hydrangea, Colored pencil on paper
Monet and his Model, Colored pastel on paper

Portrait of Monet, Colored pencil on brown board
Tattoo, Ink and Watercolor on paper
Brushed nudes, India ink on paper

Drapery and Clouds, Colored pencil on board
Selected Posters
Selezioni di Manifesti
INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST FILM FESTIVAL

November 20-23, 2003
LACMA
www.lacma.org
www.ibff.org
We are all African, Printed reproduction

Darfur, International Rescue Committee, Printed reproduction

Bob Dylan, Printed reproduction

I love NY more than ever, Printed reproduction
Milton Glaser, born 1929, is among the most celebrated graphic designers from the United States. He has had the unique distinction of one-man-shows at both the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Georges Pompidou Center in Paris. In 2004, he was selected for the Lifetime Achievement award by the Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum. As a Fulbright scholar, Glaser studied with the painter Giorgio Morandi in Bologna in the early 50s. He is an articulate spokesman for social causes and the ethical practice of design. He opened Milton Glaser, Inc. in 1974, and continues to produce a prolific amount of work.

Who is Milton Glaser, now almost 78 years old, in 2007?

Do you mean metaphysically, spiritually? How do I see myself? I don't think that I see myself. As someone once said, the mind is a very poor instrument for examining the self. I would say as an elderly fellow, I am still actively engaged in doing what I've done all my life, which is making things.

As one of the most famous and esteemed graphic artists in the world, with what spirit are you returning to Tuscany?

Whatever I’ve accomplished, and, as someone once said, “Fame is merely the misunderstanding that surrounds a person’s work,” I don’t feel that I’ve left Tuscany, when I return to Tuscany. My experience as a young man in Italy has been life-changing. I was transformed in those years by the brief time I had with Morandi. Living and travelling in Europe totally changed my perception of what life was about. My wife and I lived in Rome for a year, and I continued to spend some time in Italy afterwards for business and pleasure. Those experiences are deeply a part of my life. The spirit of Italy, the Renaissance, the attitude towards food, architecture and everything else, is so pervasive in everything I do that I cannot separate it from everything else.

When you were living in Bologna, Italy, you met one of the greatest Italian artists of the twentieth century, Giorgio Morandi. How has he influenced you?

He affected me profoundly, and not only in the realm of art. He was influential, as great teachers are, simply by nature of his being. He was a man totally devoted to his work. There was nothing else that was really as important to him. Commitment is the great legacy that I inherited from Giorgio Morandi, the complete devotion to produce something meaningful, perhaps not only to the world but to the self.

Chi è Milton Glaser, alla soglia dei 78 anni, nel 2007?

Vuoi dire metafisicamente, spiritualmente? Come mi vedo? No, non posso di vedermi. Come ha detto qualcuno, la mente è uno strumento inadatto per esaminare se stessi. Direi che mi vedo come un signore di una certa età che svolge ancora attivamente quello che ha fatto per tutta la vita, e cioè creare cose.

Con quale spirito ti accingersi a tornare in Toscana uno dei tesori più famosi ed apprezzati del mondo!

Qualunque sia il mio successo, e, come qualcuno ha detto, “La fama è semplicemente il malinteso che circonda il lavoro di una persona”, quando tornavo in Toscana ho la sensazione di essere sempre stato. La mia esperienza in Italia, da ragazzo, è stata profondamente formativa. Sono stato trasformato, in quegli anni, dal periodo, se pur breve, che ho passato studiando con Morandi. Mia moglie ed io siamo vissuti a Roma per un anno, poi si sono tornati più volte in Italia per soggiorni di lavoro e di piacere. Queste esperienze sono parte integrante della mia vita. Lo spirito dell’Italia, il Rinascimento, l’atteggiamento verso il cibo, l’architettura e tutto il resto, è davvero presente in tutto quello che faccio. Non lo definisco come una cosa separata dal resto della mia vita.

Nei tuoi anni trascorsi in Italia, a Bologna, hai conosciuto uno dei grandi artisti italiani del XX secolo, Giorgio Morandi. Come lo hai influenzato?

Mi ha profondamente influenzato, e non solo dal punto di vista artistico. Mi ha influenzato, come tutti i grandi maestri, semplicemente tramite il suo modo di essere. Era un uomo completamente dedicato al suo lavoro. Nulla importava per lui più del lavoro. L’impegno è la grande eredità che ho ricevuto da Giorgio Morandi, la dedizione totale per produrre qualcosa di significativo, forse non solo per il mondo ma per se stessi.

You are known to the general public especially for the “I Love New York” logo, where the word “love” is replaced by a heart. The brilliant idea of graphically blending the concept of love to the heart motif is now used all over the world. After September 11th this symbol has acquired an even greater significance. Do you agree?

I don’t think about the significance of that design as much as I feel grateful that something I have done has entered into public consciousness. We all wish to have some influence on the life of our time. It is a great curiosity to me as to why something so banal has become so universalised. Nevertheless it is exactly what I hoped for as a child.

You are renowned to show your works in the very house where Piero della Francesca was born. This is beyond anything I ever imagined. I have adored Piero for many years as one of humanity’s great geniuses. The idea of sharing a show with an original Piero is an immense honour. The fact that it occurs at this point in my life is a blessing.

Che effetto le fa l’idea di esporre nella casa dove è nato Piero della Francesca?

Va oltre qualsiasi mio sogno. Piero è un pittore che ven- dace da tanti anni, che considero uno dei massimi geni dell’umanità. L’idea di dividere una mostra con un’opera originale di Piero è per me un immenso onore. Il fatto che ciascun avvena in questo momento della mia vita è una bened- izione.

Your exhibition coincides with the Arezzo exhibition on the great Renaissance artist Piero della Francesca – an event within an event.

My work is a simple reflection of his genius in an attempt to create an appropriate homage. It is an appreciation of Piero and should not be viewed as anything more. The world does not need bad copies of Piero’s work, and so the solution to the problem was to treat Piero as if he were nature itself. He cannot be duplicated, but can be observed as a source of inspiration.

La sua mostra coincide con quella dedicata al grande pittore rinascimentale Piero della Francesca – un evento nel evento.

Le sue opere sono state realizzate con le tecniche più avanzate del nostro tempo. Sarei curioso di sapere come mai una cosa così banale abbia avuto una diffusione così universale. Comunque ciò è esattamente quello che sognavo da bambino.

La sua fama prevo il grande pubblico è legata al logo “I Love New York”, nel quale la parola “love” è sostituita da un cuore. L’idea geniale di associare graficamente il concetto di amore al cuore è venuta uscita in tutto il mondo. Dopo la tragedia dell’11 Settembre questo simbolo ha assunto un signifi- cato ancora maggiore. E’ d’accordo?

Poi’ che pensare al significato di quel lavoro, provo sod- disfazione per aver realizzato qualcosa che è entrato nella coscienza della collettività. E’ un pensiero che, con il passare dei tempi, diventa sempre più universale. Comunque, come il cuore è il motivo del cuore è ormai usata in tutto il mondo, dovunque ci sia un cuore, un cuore vuole essere amato. E’ un cuore che come quel cuore che ha conosciuto la sua vita, ha conosciuto il suo amore, ha conosciuto il suo dono.
Which works will you be showing in Sansepolcro, considering that your output ranges from the Italian Renaissance to 18th century illustration, from comics to advertising?

The core of the exhibition is a series of watercolours and drawings based directly on Piero. These are supplemented by some prints that are not related and some posters that are part of my daily work. They are really, in a sense, a small sampling of the work I have done as a professional designer, but just to indicate the fact that to some degree the Piero exhibition is a diversion, it is an attempt to celebrate another artist's work. I've done a few of these – one with Monet and then Piero, and certainly more than one homage to Picasso, but the Piero is by far the most comprehensive.

What would you like to say to Piero's fellow citizens today?

Above all my deep gratitude and respect and joy at the honour they have given me. I have been to Sansepolcro many times, mostly of course to see the Resurrection which is one of the greatest paintings ever produced. I do not know the town very well because whenever I went there I spent all my time in front of the painting. Perhaps in the future I’ll be able to get a better sense of the rest of Sansepolcro, its restaurants and environment. But once again my basic message is one of deep appreciation to Piero and his hometown.