

Paolo BONI (1925 - 2017)

Paolo Boni was born in 1925 in Vicchio in the Mugello valley, north of Florence, a village which was also the birthplace of Giotto and Fra Angelico. Until the end of the Second World War he lived in Vicchio where he worked in the Galileo optical factory. Following an air raid which almost cost him his life he decided to dedicate himself entirely to painting and he became a student at the *Liceo Artistico* in Florence. He formed a quartet of friends with Gianni Bertini, Vittorio Ottanelli and Luciano Ori.

One of his teachers, the sculptor Corrado Vigni, gave part of his studio to this talented son of a country worker so that he could paint. In 1949 he was twenty-four years old and that year he had several individual exhibitions in Florence. During the same year he met the nineteen-year-old American photographer Katherine Ann White who was visiting Europe with her mother and her brother. Following several years of assiduous correspondence, and having completed her studies and come of age, the young woman travelled to Italy to be with him. The couple married in 1953 and decided to move to Paris in 1954. Paolo became friends with the futurist painter Gino Severini who wrote the preface to his first individual exhibition at the *Galerie Voyelle* in 1954.

In 1957, while continuing his painting and sculpting, he decided to learn engraving in Stanley Hayter's workshop. However, the traditional method using acid did not suit him so he started piercing the metal plates. He later made his first engravings in relief which he obtained by using molds composed of stratifications of different types of metal.

The couple's daughter Carla was born in 1958.

In 1961, following a trip to New York where the Brooklyn Museum, the New York Public Library and the Museum of Modern Art purchased his engravings, Paolo Boni began work on a series of bas reliefs with a wooden structure covered in copper, zinc and stainless steel, in addition to sculptures and bas reliefs in marble.

The couple became friends with Christine Boumeester and Henry Goetz, and later with Alberto Magnelli, painters of a previous generation who played an important bridging role in the mid-century. This friendship gave rise to this love of the south which was given concrete expression with the building of a combined home and workshop in Vallauris. On the Côte d'Azur they mixed with André Villers, Alexandre Istrati, Natalia Dimitriesco, Roger Collet, Robert Péro, Pierre Gastaud, Xavier Longobardi, Paul Revel, André Cottavoz, Pierre Theunissen and many other artists.

In 1965, a major individual exhibition of Paolo's work was held at the *Musée Picasso* in Antibes with paintings, sculptures, bas-reliefs and engravings showing the diversity of his production.

Over the years, his work concentrated on two axis: *graphisculpture*, a term the Milanese gallery owner Alfonso Ciranna coined in 1970 in order to define the special nature of Paolo's engravings, and painting, the one enriching the research of the other.

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In 1971, Gayzag Zakarian, the dealer and publisher, published a catalogue of all the *graphisculptures* created up to then: *Oeuvre Gravé 1957-1970* (Engraved work 1957-1970). For artists' books illustrated with his *graphisculptures* Paolo worked with contemporary writers such as Michel Butor, Maurice Roche and Georges Perec, who became his friend.

In July 1969, man walking on the moon and the space conquest made a deep impression on Paolo Boni. The opening up of these horizons new, together with the invention of acrylic paint, enabled him to completely renew his subjects, which were before concentrated on human beings and landscapes, with the appearance of round targets, aircraft, arrows and later amazing flying objects incrustated in highly colored and surrealist spaces. This new style was accompanied simultaneously by work on perspective and stripes, obviously influenced by the works of the Italian Renaissance.

Between the late 1980s and 2004 his sense of space and his ingenuity concentrated mainly on painted cut wood which revisited all the classic *genres* which had appeared in his works down the years, from the oil paintings of his youth to his sculptures, *graphisculptures* and bas reliefs; these latter creations represent the result of his incessant investigation of the use of relief. Paolo Boni has left us with treasures of invention and originality.

The "engineer of the imagination", as his friend the writer Perec called him, died on 29th March 2017 in Paris leaving a collection of about one thousand five hundred works.

He had many individual exhibitions in Europe and the United States and since 1978 he also participated in major international art fairs like the former *Saga* and the *FIAC*. The collections of thirty-eight major museums throughout the world contain his works.

Selected solo and duo shows

1953 *Mostra di Paolo Boni*, Bottega d'Arte Minutelli Cioli, via Guicciardi 10 r, Firenze, Italy.

1954

Paolo BONI, Galerie Kirchgasse, Zürich, text of Michelangelo Masciotta, Swiss.

Paolo Boni Peintures, Galerie Voyelle, Paris, text of Gino Severini.

1961 *Boni*, Galerie Bonaparte, G. Zakarian, Paris, France.

1962

Boni, Point Cardinal, Paris, France.

Boni, galerie de l'Université A. G, Paris, France.

1963 Galerie Claude Haefely, Montréal, Canada.

1964 *Boni*, galerie Cavalero, Cannes, France, text of M. Masciotta.

1965 *Paolo Boni*, Musée d'Antibes, France.

1968 *Paolo Boni*, Associated American Artists, 605 Fifth Avenue, NYC, with catalog and text of Richard S. Field, USA.

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1969

BONI - dessins reliefs gravures, Galerie Harmonies, Grenoble, France.
Boni, Kunstgarden, Helsinborg, Danemark.

1970 *Grafisculture di PAOLO BONI*, Galleria Ciranna, Milano, Italy.

1971

BONI- Sculptures- Reliefs - Grafisculptures (First presentation of *Oeuvre gravé*, Editions Zakarian), Galerie Lucie Weill Au Pont des Arts, Paris, France.

Paolo Boni - Grafisculptures, Associated American Artists, New York NY 10022.

Boni, galerie RIVOLTA, Lausanne, Swiss.

1973 *BONI [reliefs]*, Galerie Bonaparte, G. Zakarian, Paris, France.

1975

Paolo BONI - Reliefs, sculptures, gravures, Galerie Paul Bruck Luxembourg.

Paolo BONI, Galerie Bonaparte, Paris, France.

1977

Paolo Boni, Målningar - Skulptur - Etsningar, Konstgarden, Danemark.

Paolo Boni, Toninelli Arte Moderna, Roma, Italy.

Boni, Galleria Planetario, Trieste, with text of Franco Gentilini

1979

Paolo Boni, Istituto Italiano di Cultura, NYC, USA.

Paolo Boni - Pinturas y grabados, Granada.

1985

Paolo Boni, Galleria d'arte moderna, Caserta, Italy.

Paolo Boni, Galleri Praestegaarden, Dannemare Lolland.

1988

Paolo Boni, dipinti, incisioni, sculpture, Palazzo reale di Caserta.

1990

Paolo Boni, Palais de l'Europe, Menton, France.

1993

Paolo Boni - Rilievi Policromi, Galleria Idearte, Roma, Italy.

1999

Paolo Boni, De l'être humain, Centre européen d'art contemporain Chapelle de la Miséricorde, Vallauris, France.

2000

Grafiscultures di Paolo Boni, Fondazione Biblioteca di via Senato, Milano, Italy.

2004 *Paolo Boni, The Art of « GraphicSculpture »*, Higher Art, Paddington

2005 *Paolo Boni -Peintures, reliefs et gravures*, avec Cuchi White, groupe Quartz, Vallauris, France.

2013 *Paolo BONI*, Retrospective Rennes, France.

2018 *Hommage à Paolo Boni*, galerie 24Beaubourg, Paris, France.

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