

GRAPHISCHE SAMMLUNG

ETH zürich

Exhibition Brochure English

TICINO IN THE SPOTLIGHT.
ARTISTS IN
ITALIAN-SPEAKING
SWITZERLAND

GRAPHISCHE SAMMLUNG
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1

Introduction

2

Ticino and Europe

3

Woodcut

4

Printed in Ticino

5

Creative Exchange

6

Ticino as a Landscape

Introduction

The canton of Ticino is the gateway to the South of Europe, often evoking romantic notions of palm-fringed shores, alpine mountain ranges and a Mediterranean climate. As a place of longing, it continues to captivate travellers and artists alike. Indeed, Ticino has time and again been a centre of artistic activity, whose history is shaped in part by the region's location. It is the only canton located entirely south of the Alps, which over the centuries has created a cultural proximity to Italy that compels artists from the Ticino villages to study and work in the Italian centres. Similarly, during the 18th and 19th centuries, people from the upper echelons of society discovered Switzerland as a travel destination. Enchanted by travel journals and by the picturesque landscape renderings of the *Schweizer Kleinmeister* (Swiss minor masters), Ticino increasingly became a tourist destination. With the opening of the Gotthard Road Tunnel in 1882, a fast and direct connection between the south and north of the Alps was created for the first time, resulting in lasting benefits for travel and exchange between artists.

The exhibition of the Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich highlights the cultural landscape of Ticino from two different perspectives. On the one hand, the exhibition looks at Ticino as a motif, whether in landscape portrayals, as a place of creative output or as an essential part of an artistic biography. On the other hand, Ticino is shown as a cultural space, as the domain of artists, the meeting point of diverse positions and as a source of inspiration, visible, for example, in the founding of various artists' groups such as *Der Grosse Bär* or *I Solidali*, and the activities surrounding the artist's colony on Monte Verità.

Addressing the diversity of Ticino's cultural landscape, the exhibition presents the canton as a complex space of interaction and exchange, and as a cradle of important artistic influences. Instead of a chronological narrative, the exhibition is based on thematic focal points. All of the works shown are from the holdings of the Graphische Sammlung itself, covering a broad range of subject matter.

Curated by Saskia Goldschmid, Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich

Ticino and Europe

A particular characteristic of Ticino is its *Italianità*, the cultural proximity of the canton to neighbouring Italy. This relationship goes back a long way: even before the official founding of the canton in 1803, the areas of the Ticino bailiwicks, due to their location south of the Alps, were integrated into the cultural landscape of Lombardy. The creative influence of the Lombardy region can still be felt today in many of Ticino's cultural characteristics. The fact that many Ticino artists have emigrated to the Italian centres or studied at the art academies is also an expression of these geographical and cultural bonds.

Milan in particular, with its renowned Accademia di Brera, was an important destination for Ticino artists well into the 20th century. Not only did they develop their skills there, but they also established contacts with the local art scene. However, the activities of Ticino artists are by no means limited to Italian cities: Paris, Berlin and London are also among the places where they received their artistic training.

In addition to temporary stays for educational purposes, the canton has a long tradition of artistic migration, which has always produced a particularly large number of success stories. This is reflected in the phenomenon of the *Magistri Comacini*. The term refers to master builders, most of whom came from the region of Como, but also from the canton of Ticino. They were active throughout Europe from the Middle Ages onward, and their buildings made a significant contribution to European architectural history. At the same time, artists such as Pier Francesco Mola, Giorgio Domenico Fossati and Pietro Bettelini also bear witness to the presence of Ticino artists in various European centres.



Serge Brignoni (1903–2002)

Untitled, 1971

Colour lithograph

Serge Brignoni was born near Chiasso and is considered an important Swiss representative of the avant-garde. The artist spent his childhood in Bern, and in 1921 his family ultimately returned to Ticino. Although Brignoni often spent time in Milan as a young artist, he decided to continue his artistic training not at the Accademia di Brera but at the Hochschule für bildende Künste in Berlin-Charlottenburg. He subsequently settled in Paris, where he had exchanges with numerous artists, including Max Ernst, Hans Arp and Alberto Giacometti. The onset of the Second World War brought him back to Switzerland. Brignoni is known for his surrealist style, which is expressed in *Untitled* through the abstraction of male and female forms, which Brignoni combines with a contrasting colour palette.



Pietro Sarto (*1930)

The Fire, 1976

Heliogravure and aquatint

Born in Chiasso, Pietro Sarto left Italian-speaking Switzerland as a child. His mother Esther is a descendant of the ancient Fontana family of Ticino, which produced several successful architects in the 16th and 17th centuries. As a young artist, Sarto spent several years in Paris, where he studied engraving with Albert Flocon and John Friedlaender. His relationship with the medium of painting is reflected in his graphic work, in which Sarto turned primarily to the subject of landscape. In his atmospheric landscapes, the sky with its moving clouds, who constitute the main protagonists of his works, is connected to the sea or the earth by a curved horizon.



Anita Spinelli (1908–2010)

Five Masqueraders, around 1930–1939
Colour lithograph

Anita Spinelli, an artist from the Chiasso region, was one of the first female Swiss students at the Accademia di Brera in Milan. With the rise of fascism in Italy, Spinelli returned to Ticino, where she set up a studio. In 1933, together with other artists, including Aldo Patocchi and Ugo Cleis, Spinelli founded the group *I Solidali* (The Solidarists). Together they organised exhibitions in Mendrisio and Lugano and maintained contacts with artists in northern Switzerland. The works shown in the exhibition belong to the artist's early period and stand in contrast to the brightly coloured paintings that characterise her later work. On the other hand, they reveal another central element of her artistic approach: the study of the human figure.



Pier Francesco Mola (1612–1666)

Caricatures, around 1634–1666
Pen and brown ink

The Baroque painter Pier Francesco Mola was baptised in Coldrerio in Minusio on 9 February 1612. His father, Giovanni Battista, was a master builder in Rome, so Mola moved to the city at the age of four and spent most of his artistic career there. In 1641–42, he painted one of his first frescoes for the Carmelite chapel in his hometown of Coldrerio, which can still be visited today. The artist's versatility is evident in his drawings, which are characterised by their unconstrained approach. Ideas, usually executed with just a few strokes, turn into compositions through the interplay of light, shadow and colour. The richness of the genres to which Mola devoted himself in his drawings is also impressive: from the preliminary sketch to the amusing caricature, landscape studies or academic drawings, Mola sought inspiration in a wide variety of expressive modes. In this particular work, Mola uses both sides of a paper to create a series of caricatures. Furthermore, he makes use of the pressed-through washes by incorporating them into the compositions.



Pietro Bettelini (1763–1829)

Madonna of the Candelabra, around 1780–1829

Engraving and etching

Born in Caslano, Pietro Antonio Leone Bettelini was an important engraver hailing from the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland. After his training in Bologna, the young Bettelini first went to Paris and then to the Royal Academy in London, where he came into contact with the artist Angelika Kauffmann, among others. Back in Italy, Bettelini enjoyed particular renown for his reproductive engravings after works by the great masters of Italian painting. In 1806 he won the first prize at the Accademia di Brera for an engraving after Bartolomeo Schidone and subsequently held the chair of etching at the renowned Accademia di San Luca in Rome. Bettelini made this engraving after a painting by Raphael, one of the most important artists of the Italian Renaissance. He recreates Raphael's composition, which, following the depictions of the Roman emperors, flanks Mary and the infant Jesus with candelabra to represent them as the rulers of Paradise



Nicola Zabaglia (1664–1750)

Floors and Bridges by Nicolae Zabaglia, 1743

Letterpress, etching and engraving

In his book, the Italian builder Nicola Zabaglia focuses not only on his own achievements, but also on the most famous accomplishment of the Ticino builder Domenico Fontana. Born in 1543 in Melide near Lake Lugano, Fontana worked as a stuccoist in Rome from 1563. Among his successes was his appointment as *Architetto principale* by Pope Sixtus V, under whom he carried out several alterations to St Peter's. In particular, he caused a sensation when he moved the obelisk *Pyramis beati petri* (Pyramid of St Peter) from its southern location on the Vatican hill of St Peter's Basilica, 300 metres away, to the newly built St Peter's Square. Fontana's idea of laying the monument flat using a machine he had designed and then re-erecting it in the square won him the contract against 500 other applicants. On 10 September 1586, he successfully completed the project. He was richly rewarded by the Pope and the event is recorded in an inscription on the base of the obelisk, which has survived to the present day.

Woodcut

The woodcut is one of the oldest printmaking techniques. Parts are cut out of a wooden block in relief-like manner. The raised areas that remain are inked and printed on paper by hand or with a press, creating an inverted impression.

Looking at art on paper in Ticino at the beginning of the 20th century, it is noticeable that woodblock printing was a particularly thriving technique. Ticino xylographers such as Aldo Patocchi, Felice Filippini, Ugo Cleis or Ubaldo Monico often began their careers as autodidacts and achieved a high degree of virtuosity through their extensive involvement with the technique.

Behind the Ticinese fascination with the woodcut lie influences from both North and South. From Germany and northern Switzerland, the expressionist woodcut found its way to Ticino through artists such as Walter Helbig, Ignaz Epper and Hermann Scherer. They dealt mainly with themes of social injustice, which they interpreted in a highly expressive and contrasting formal language.

Italy also became an important reference point for Ticino woodblock prints, especially in the form of the magazine *L'Eroica*, which was founded in 1911. The monthly magazine was one of the most innovative art and literary magazines in 20th-century Italy, combining poetry and art in the form of woodcut illustrations.

Amid world wars, economic crises and rapid industrialisation, Ticino artists, influenced by both North and South, thus created a black-and-white manifesto dedicated above all to the ups and downs of their local reality.



Felice Filippini (1917–1988)

Christ Presenting His Stigmata, 1938
Woodcut

Felice Filippini, born in Arbedo in the district of Bellinzona, is known as a *scrittore di immagini*, a writer of images. This was the title of an exhibition dedicated to the artist at the Museo Villa dei Cedri in Bellinzona in 2005. This title refers to the fact that Filippini is known for both his literary and artistic work. As an artist, Filippini was an autodidact who became active in the 1930s through stays and participation in studios such as Ugo Zaccheo's in Locarno or Carlo Cotti's in Lugano. Woodcut, like painting, was one of the media Filippini explored at the beginning of his career. From 1940 onward, however, the artist became particularly renowned as a fresco painter, and his murals still adorn many public buildings in Ticino. In his woodcuts, Filippini focused on figurative compositions. Here he reinterprets one of his most popular subjects, the Crucified Christ.



Ugo Cleis (1903–1976)

Luglio, 1968
Woodcut

"And still I am fascinated by the art of woodblock printing. I have remained faithful to it, in fact it has become a passion for me, and I am constantly endeavouring to achieve perfection."

This is how Ugo Cleis, born in Diepflingen in the canton of Basel-Landschaft, describes his relationship with the woodcut. Cleis found his spiritual home in Mendrisiotto in 1934 and his partner for life in Lisa Vela. He became involved in the cultural scene of Ticino, was a member of various societies and belonged to the artists' group *I Solidali*, together with Anita Spinelli, Guido Gonzato and Aldo Patocchi, among others. The latter commented in the magazine *Xylon* on his friend's unique style, which he described as "Mendrisiotto paired with something new" and a "fusion of Impressionism and Expressionism". In addition to being an artist, he was also the director of the Museo Vincenzo Vela for many years. In recognition of his efforts, the street leading to the museum is today known as "Via Ugo Cleis".



Fritz Jordi (1885–1938), publisher
Heinrich Vogeler (1872–1942), publisher,

Various artists

Fontana Martina. Semi-monthly magazine,
1932

Woodcut, partly coloured by hand

To escape the constraints and pressures of a highly industrialised society, people continue to organise themselves into collectives. This was certainly the case for the Bernese printer Fritz Jordi and the German artist and writer Heinrich Vogeler, who founded the socialist settlement *Fontana Martina* in Ronco sopra Ascona in 1929. However, *Fontana Martina* was by no means an attempt at complete social isolation. With its bimonthly magazine published between 1931 and 1932, *Fontana Martina* is also a testimony to the fight against fascism and in favour of democratic socialism. In 1924, Jordi bought a deserted village in a breathtaking location overlooking Lake Maggiore and the Brissago Islands, accessible only by foot. Originally a socialist settlement based on agriculture, it began to transform itself into an artists' community in 1930. Among those present were Carl Meffert, also known as Clement Moreau, the artist couple Heinz and Else Lohmar, Yoshida Blenk and Eugen Fröh.

Jordi, a passionate book printer who had brought his printing press to the settlement, soon put it to work and the first issue of the magazine appeared in mid-October 1931. Vogeler's co-editorship was Jordi's way of paying tribute to his friend, who had since emigrated to the Soviet Union. From then on, the magazine was published twice a month, with the exception of June 1932, "because of field and garden work, so that we do not get lost in the *Gjät* (weeds)". In addition to the original graphics by artists such as Eugen Fröh, Else Lohmar and Carl Meffert, Fritz Jordi wrote most of the articles and composed the magazine from individual letters in lead type. According to Meffert, Jordi never used a manuscript and instead set down his texts from memory. Both the original graphics and the texts deal with themes such as social injustice, anti-fascism and the everyday life in Ticino. Due to the economic situation and lack of manpower, Jordi had to discontinue the magazine in November 1932.



Aldo Patocchi (1907–1986)

Danae, 1937

Woodcut

Born in Basel, Aldo Patocchi was an autodidact who achieved great virtuosity as a xylographer. From a young age, and especially after his family moved to Ticino in 1913, he was fascinated by the woodcuts shown to him by his teacher Giuseppe Zoppi. As a result, Patocchi devoted himself to the technique from the outset and, thanks to Zoppi, was able to establish a relationship with the *Eroica* publishing house. For years, the young artist illustrated works by Italian poets for the publisher, while his woodcuts also attracted a great deal of attention at home and abroad. This can be seen, for example, in his participation in the Venice Biennale, his appointment as a commission member of the Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich and, finally, in his role as co-founder and president of XYLON. Patocchi's main subject is Ticino with its people, houses, landscapes, and plants. The beholder of Patocchi's works encounters not only the real world, but also religious and mythological figures, such as Danae and Zeus as a shower of gold.



Ubaldo Monico (1912–1983)

Tensione, 1975

Woodcut

Ubaldo Monico's woodcuts are characterized by abstract compositions that reflect the artist's technical skill. He began his career as a self-taught artist around 1932. Initially, his close contact with the editor of the Italian magazine *L'Eroica*, Ettore Cozzani, had a formative influence. Cozzani, who advocated the expressive style characteristic of the woodcut and opposed its imitation of other techniques, taught Monico for several years and gave him advice on composition and technique. His friendship with Giovanni Bianconi and Aldo Patocchi also left its mark on the artist. In the 1950s Monico made his way into abstraction with a series of heads, the *Teste*, whose figurative elements dissolve as the series progresses. Against Monico's black backgrounds, bundles of lines move, geometric arrangements emerge, or tiny strokes form curvilinear structures.

Printed in Ticino

The printing workshop is a place of collaboration. Printers and artists work together to bring an idea to paper, combining creative image design and craftsmanship. There are two printing workshops in Ticino whose work is particularly well documented in the holdings of the Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich. Two men with the same surname are credited with their activities: François Lafranca and Franco Lafranca.

Franco Lafranca

The artist and printer Franco Lafranca, born in Sierre in 1953, founded his printing workshop *L'Impressione* in Locarno in 1990. In his studio, in addition to letterpress and silkscreen printing, he worked with various intaglio techniques such as etching and copperplate engraving. He collaborated with many artists, including Peter Stiefel, Giuseppe De Giacomo, Paolo PAM Mazzuchelli, Giancarlo Bisi, Mariarosa Mutti, Francine Mury, Samuele Gabai and Ingeborg Lüscher. Since 2005, in addition to creating original prints, he devoted himself increasingly to (art) books through his publishing house *ANAedizioni*. Franco Lafranca, who died in 2017, also left a lasting mark on the cultural landscape of Ticino as an exhibition organiser and with his land art project Campo Nomade Primaveraile in Sabbione, an interdisciplinary platform for artistic activities that still exists today.

François Lafranca

“Lafranca is the classic autodidact, who is fortunate to possess all the attributes required of a craftsman and an artist: He has a natural sensitivity, an impartiality that allows him to approach all problems directly. This makes him an artist who is open to all suggestions.”

This is how Heiny Widmer describes the second printer, François Lafranca, in the artist's book *Bon à tirer* in 1980. Born in the Maggia Valley in 1943, Lafranca's reputation as a papermaker, printer, publisher, musician, and artist extends far beyond the borders of Switzerland. He studied for a year at the School of Applied Arts in Biel before founding his first workshop, *Ateliers Lafranca*, at the age of 22. Here he collaborated with artists such as Ben Nicholson, Hans Richter, Mark Tobey, Hans Arp, and Arturo Bonfanti. With his first wife Hedda, he founded *Editions Lafranca* in 1966, which lasted until 1986. In 1976 he converted a sawmill in Collinasca into a paper mill to produce his own paper. He also set up a sculpture and printing workshop there. The paper produced in Collinasca, the unmistakable *Carta Lafranca*, is used by artists such as Gianfredo Camesi, Marischa Burckhardt and Gottfried Honegger.



Ingeborg Lüscher (*1936)

L'Impressione Edizioni (Franco Lafranca)

Untitled, 1994

From *L'Impressione Edizioni - l'abbonamento* 1994

Silkscreen

Ingeborg Lüscher worked as an actress in Germany and Switzerland before deciding to start anew by moving to Ticino in 1967. Self-taught, she began her artistic career and moved into Hans Arp's former studio in Locarno. Through her participation in *documenta 5*, she met her future partner, the art historian and curator Harald Szeemann, with whom she lived in Tegna from the 1970s onwards. In 1984, Lüscher, whose multifaceted artistic oeuvre ranges from painting, sculpture and photography to prints and video art, began an extensive exploration of sulphur and ash as artistic materials. Luminous bright yellow and intense black meet in her paintings, sculptures and graphic works. The relationship between nature and man, light and darkness, life and decay is thus brought to the fore.



Paolo Mazzuchelli (*1954)

L'Impressione Edizioni (Franco Lafranca)

Untitled, 1993

From *L'Impressione Edizioni - l'abbonamento* 1993

Etching and chine collé

Paolo Mazzuchelli is among the most important Ticino artists of his generation. Like many artists from the region, he studied at the Accademia di Brera in Milan, but returned to Ticino in 1975, where he still lives and works today. Always in dialogue with the artistic movements taking place in the rest of Switzerland and in Italy, Mazzuchelli began to move in the circle of the artist, architect and writer Franco Beltrametti, a leading Swiss representative of the Beat Generation, in the 1990s. As a result, Mazzuchelli increasingly explored the relationship between signs and poetry, adopting drawing and writing as his primary means of expression. From then on, the relationship between the image and the written word became a constant, one that is also present in the work printed by Franco Lafranca. The collaboration between Lafranca and Mazzuchelli was particularly intensive in the 1990s.



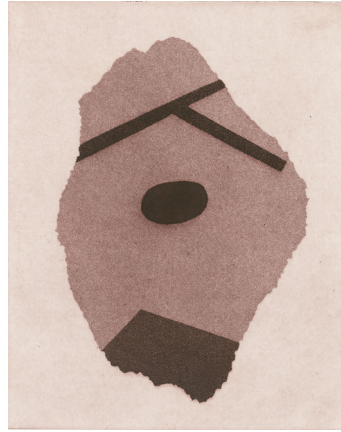
Mark Tobey (1890–1976),

François Lafranca (*1943)

Untitled, 1970

Aquatint

Mark Tobey is considered a pioneer of Abstract Expressionism, a North American art movement of the 1940s and 1950s. Inspired by his travels to China and Japan and by East Asian and Arabic calligraphy, the artist created a visual language in his *White Writing Paintings* that helped him achieve great success, first in America and then internationally. At the age of 70, Tobey settled in Basel, where he maintained contact with the British artist Ben Nicholson, who printed all his etchings in the workshop of François Lafranca. It was not Nicholson, however, but the poet Gotthard de Beauclair that introduced Tobey to the Ticino printer in 1970. De Beauclair himself had spent most of his childhood among the artists of the Monte Verità colony. After a week of intensive work at Tobey's house in St. Alban, the collaboration with Lafranca resulted in twenty aquatint prints.



Flavio Paolucci (*1934)

Ateliers Lafranca (François Lafranca)

Untitled, 1986

Aquatint

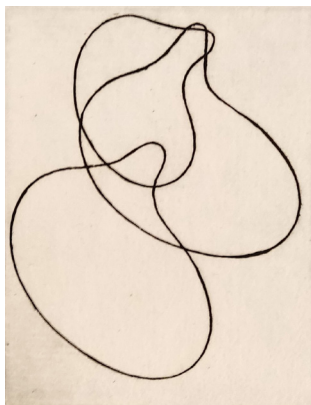
Flavio Paolucci was born in Torre in the Blenio region and now lives and works in Biasca. After studying at the Lugano Cantonal School and working in the studio of Oscar Bölt in Locarno, Paolucci attended the Accademia di Brera between 1955 and 1957. The artist's stays in Paris and Morocco led to an abstraction and an increasingly conceptual approach to the object and its materiality. Paolucci was also inspired by Arte Povera (poor art). This artistic movement, which originated in Italy, is known for its use of a wide range of everyday materials in artworks and installations. Consequently, his creations always oscillate between image and object, characterised by abstract forms that are never entirely non-representational due to the use of materials and forms frequently inspired by nature.

Creative Exchange

A new form of mobility between north and south emerged in Switzerland with the opening of the Gotthard Tunnel in 1882. The Canton of Ticino, which until then had only been accessible from the north via the Gotthard Pass, became a cultural centre with an international audience, thanks to fast and direct connections and the popular imagination of its untouched beauty. While some artists chose to stay only temporarily, others found their second home in Ticino.

The area around Ascona, with its palm trees and Lake Maggiore, continues to attract artists from all over the world. While Marlene Dietrich and Hermann Hesse stayed at the Caffè Verbano in the town, other artists and intellectuals were drawn to the magical mountain of truth, Monte Verità. Above Ascona, overlooking the lake and the Brissago Islands, a group of five people, including the pianist Ida Hoffmann and her sister Jenny, the son of a factory owner Henri Oedenkoven and the brothers Karl and Gusto Gräser, founded a vegetarian commune and naturopathic sanatorium on four hectares of land in 1900. Over the years, an international artists' colony developed around the Gräser brothers, who were poets and artists themselves. Among the visitors were Hans Arp and his companion Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Marcel Janco, Lou Albert-Lasard, Hans Richter, Marianne Werefkin, Paul Klee, Filippo Franzoni and, last but not least, Hermann Hesse, who made his first attempts at painting in the surroundings of Monte Verità. Finally, in 1926, the German banker Baron Eduard von der Heydt bought the estate and had the Bauhaus-style Hotel Monte Verità built on it. Later, both the mountain and large parts of von der Heydt's art collection were given to the Canton of Ticino. The history of Monte Verità and its many creative figures was presented in an exhibition by Harald Szeemann in 1978, which, after a great success with the staging on Monte Verità, was also shown in Zurich, Berlin, Vienna and Munich.

But even beyond the famous mountain, there are many encounters, collaborations and friendships between artists who have left their mark on the cultural landscape of Ticino.



Hans Arp (1886–1966)

Editions Lafranca

Lines, 1966

Etching

The legacy of the German-French artist Hans Arp can still be felt in Ticino today. Arp is one of the most important exponents of the avant-garde. In 1915 he visited the colony on Monte Verità for the first time, where many of his friends lived. Ascona and the colony cast a spell on the artist, and in the following years Arp spent every summer in Ascona with his partner, the artist Sophie Taeuber-Arp. With his second partner, Marguerite Hagenbach, he finally bought a house in Locarno in 1959, which became his studio and retirement home. At the same time, he moved into the studio complex of the sculptor Remo Rossi. Here, with neighbours such as Hans Richter and Italo Valenti, he created numerous sculptures, which he donated to the town after an exhibition at the Castello Visconteo, making him and his wife honorary citizens. The two works on display here were created in collaboration with the Ticino printer François Lafranca. Shortly after Arp's death, Lafranca was gifted two copperplates by the widowed Marguerite Hagenbach. The plates were coated with varnish and the motif had been etched by Arp, but the plate had not yet been treated with acid.



Mario Botta (*1943),

Four sheets from the portfolio *Untitled* (Portfolio of sketches of the church San Giovanni in Mogno), around 1989

Chalk lithograph

Architect Mario Botta is one of Switzerland's most important and influential architects, having designed numerous buildings in Switzerland and abroad. In 1996, Botta was also instrumental in founding the Accademia di Architettura in Mendrisio, the canton's first school of architecture, where he was also a professor.

His architectural style is characterised by massive facades made of natural stone, brick, or concrete, and by a simple and strictly geometric formal language. These characteristics can also be seen in the Chiesa di San Giovanni Battista in Mogno. After an avalanche destroyed the 17th-century church in the spring of 1986, Botta was commissioned to build a new one. Botta gave his building the shape of a sloping oval with a rectangular base and modelled its size after the original church tower. The lithographs presented here show a selection of Botta's sketches for the church, which has attracted many visitors since its completion in 1996.



Walter Helbig (1878–1968)

Three men strolling, 1925

Woodcut, hand coloured

The German artist Walter Helbig lived in Switzerland from 1911 onwards and, together with Hans Arp and Oscar Lüthy, founded *Der Moderne Bund*, one of the first Swiss avant-garde artists' associations. Like many artists, Helbig moved to Ascona in 1924, where he met Marianne von Werefkin. With her as the driving force, they founded the group *Der Grosse Bär* (Ursa Major), which, like the constellation, consisted of seven members: Helbig and Werefkin were joined by Ernst Frick, Albert Kohler, Gordon McCouch, Otto Niemeyer and Otto van Rees. Rather than a stylistic association, the group pursued a joint exhibition activity that was not restricted to its members. In addition to exhibitions in Ascona, usually at the Museo Comunale or the Casa Serondine, *Der Grosse Bär* also exhibited in German-speaking Swiss cities such as Bern, Zurich and Lucerne.

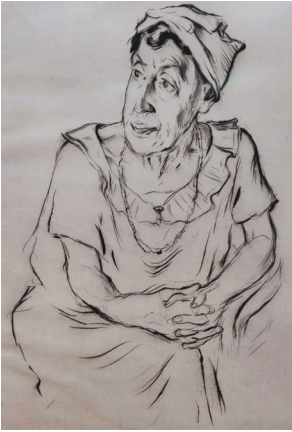


Imre Reiner (1900–1987)

Untitled, undated

Colour lithograph

In 1931, Imre Reiner settled in Ruvigliana, near Lugano, after having lived in various metropolitan areas as an artist, typographer and draughtsman. Known for his skills as a graphic designer and typographer, Reiner wrote publications on graphic design. At the same time, he devoted himself to his multifaceted artistic activity, which he pursued primarily as a painter and printmaker. As an illustrator, he worked with various printmaking techniques, from woodcut to etching. He was often interested in the relationship between text and image as well as the illustration of classical literature. In the 1940s he moved away from the more illustrative-naturalistic character of his early work. Instead, surreal landscapes, implied and allusive forms or calligraphic signs are set against a luminous background against which Reiner often juxtaposes multi-layered and complex fields of colour.



Gregor Rabinovitch (1884–1958)

Painter Mariane Werefkin, 1928

Etching

During one of his many stays in Ascona, Gregor Rabinovitch met his fellow countrywoman, the Russian artist Marianne von Werefkin, affectionately known to the locals as the "Grandmother of Ascona". In her homeland, according to Ernst Probst, she was given the name "Russian Rembrandt" at an early age. During her time in Germany, she began to paint in an expressionist style. From 1918, von Werefkin lived in Ascona, where she became one of the most dazzling figures of the local scene: "Ascona teaches me not to despise anything human, to love the immeasurable happiness of creativity and the misery of material existence in equal measure and to carry them within me like a treasure of the soul." The artist was not only active in the environment of Monte Verità and introduced the mountain to its future owner, Eduard von der Heydt. She was also the founder of the artists' group *Der Grosse Bär* and, together with Ernst Kemptner, the founder of the Museo Comunale in Ascona, to which she donated several of her works despite her impoverished circumstances.



Johannes Robert Schürch (1895–1941)

Self-portrait with death and model, 1930

Etching and drypoint

"I paint only me, I paint my life, my self, my agonies, my joys, my devotion, my hope and my anger.... Look, every tree is poor and lonely and wants to grow up into the sky and into the light; also every man is poor and lonely.... Something must come... Even the dead things cry out for something, the animal, the plant, the mountain, the tree, the human being, the sky and the rocks..."

Robert Schürch's first decade in Ticino, when he settled with his mother in Monti near Locarno after the death of his mentor Ferdinand Hodler, was marked by seclusion and great poverty. This self-portrait was created during this period. His isolation changed abruptly with his move to Ascona in 1932, when Schürch broke away from his mother and, in addition to relationships with the circle around Marianne von Werefkin, developed a close friendship with the Swiss artists Ignaz Epper and Fritz Pauli, who had also relocated to Ticino. Schürch portrayed the latter on his deathbed. In art, the friends are united by intensity and suffering as important motifs in their works.

Ticino as a Landscape

Ticino is not only a place of artistic activity, its landscapes also continue to serve as artistic motifs. Mountains, lakes, churches, villages and towns – the perspectives from which the canton has been depicted in pictures are many and varied. While some artists work from personal impressions and memories, others concentrate on the reproduction of tourist sites. The latter in particular oscillate between romantic idealisation and topographical correctness. Certain places, such as Lugano, Bellinzona or the Madonna del Sasso in Locarno, are repeatedly chosen as motifs, but their representations differ according to the period in which they were created and the artistic intention that lies behind said creation.

A similar approach can be found, for example, in the work of the Ticino xylographers Giovanni Bianconi and Aldo Patocchi. In their depictions, these artists succeeded in documenting life in Ticino. Patocchi's works show his typical blend between fantastic figures and everyday scenes. In the series *La morte nel Ticino*, it is Death in the form of a skeleton who observes people while hiding between houses or standing in the fields. Giovanni Bianconi, on the other hand, devoted himself to a faithful representation of everyday life in Ticino.

But German-speaking Swiss artists such as Ludwig Hess or the Düsseldorf-born Wilhelm Huber also captured Ticino in idealised landscape paintings in the 18th and 19th centuries. Often framed by trees, their idyllic and atmospheric depictions portray Ticino as a truly magical place.



Matthäus Merian the Elder (1593–1650)
Topographia Helvetiae, Rhaetiae et Valesiae, 3rd German edition, around 1654
 Engraving and letterpress

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, the so-called Swiss Illuminated Chronicles were produced, parchment and paper manuscripts that are generally interpreted as an expression of an incipient Swiss national consciousness. The target audience was an urban elite. Southern Switzerland is also represented in these illustrated chronicles. However, their focus often lies in the depiction of battles, such as Arbedo in 1422 or Giornico in 1478. In such early views, topographical accuracy is not the main concern, and much springs from the artistic imagination. This showcase presents the first accurate view of Italian Switzerland, engraved by Matthäus Merian. These copperplate engravings of the cities of Bellinzona and Lugano were first published in 1640 in Martin Zeiler's *Itinerarium Italiae*. For almost 100 years, views of Italian-speaking Switzerland were based on these engravings. Zeiler and Merian used them again in their *Topographia Helvetiae*, as shown here in the 1654 edition of the book.



**Johann Heinrich Meyer (1755–1829),
 Ludwig Hess (1760–1800)**
Picturesque journey to Italian Switzerland,
 1793

Letterpress and etching

On 16 May 1789, three men from Zurich with different artistic backgrounds set out together on a journey over the Gotthard Pass. They were Johann Heinrich Meyer, a painter, writer and engraver, Ludwig Hess, a butcher by trade who combined his profession with drawing and painting, and their teacher, Johann Conrad Steiner, considered the most talented of the three painters. Bound by a deep friendship, but above all by a common interest in nature and the countryside, which was expressed in their respective works, the three landscape painters travelled to Italian-speaking Switzerland in search of new creative inspiration. The drawings and sketches they made along the way find an interesting counterpart in Meyer's travel diary entitled *Mahlerische Reise in die italienische Schweiz* (*Picturesque journey to Italian Switzerland*), published in Zurich in 1793 and illustrated with engravings by Meyer and Hess. In their depictions, Hess and Meyer eschew sublime panoramic views in favour of idyllic landscapes.



Gordon McCouch (1885–1956)

Restaurant in Ponte Tresa, 1939

Etching

Determined, the American Gordon McCouch left the United States in 1911 and emigrated to Europe to become an artist. After meeting the artists of the *Blaue Reiter* in Germany, he spent time in Venice during the First World War before moving to Switzerland and subsequently to Ascona in 1917. The vibrant cultural life in Ascona also gave McCouch new impulses for his art. This is evidenced by his membership of Mariane von Werefkin's group *Der Grosse Bär*, of which he was one of the founding members. A recurring theme in his work was his chosen home, Ticino, the alleys of Ascona or, as here, the Ticino Grotto.



Giovanni Bianconi (1891–1981)

The Joke, around 1910–1981

Woodcut

Like Gordon McCouch, Giovanni Bianconi, who was born in Minusio, dedicated his artistic work to life in Ticino. He completed his training at the *Stuttgarter Akademie*, where he also studied German Expressionism. Back home Bianconi, who worked as a drawing teacher, soon came into contact with other Ticino artists, including Daniele Buzzi and Aldo Patocchi. In this woodcut, Bianconi takes up the theme of the Ticino trattoria and the communal life of the region by depicting a table of merry men laughing heartily. The artist, who was also a poet and an ethnologist, had close ties with the rural world of Ticino, which he repeatedly depicted in woodcuts. Giovanni's brother Piero was also active in cultural life and is considered an important Ticino writer and art historian.



Hermann Fietz (18691–1931)

Madonna del Sasso, Locarno, 1918

Red chalk drawing

As a young man, Hermann Fietz completed an apprenticeship in the architectural office of Professor Alfred Bluntschli. Early on, he accompanied Johann Rudolf Rahn, professor of art history at the University of Zurich and at the Polytechnikum in Zurich, to Ticino to record important buildings for his *Statistics of Swiss Art Monuments*. Rahn is regarded as the founding figure of monument conservation and research in Switzerland. Fietz later became the cantonal master builder of Zurich. As is clear from his sketchbooks, Fietz continued to visit Ticino in later years, drawing houses, churches and alleys. This drawing of the pilgrimage church Madonna del Sasso near Locarno demonstrates his skill as a draughtsman. Fietz's chosen perspective often appears in photographs to this day, as it allows one to capture the nature surrounding the church including Lake Orta.



Hermann Scherer (1893–1927)

Castel San Pietro, um 1924–1926

Woodcut

Hermann Scherer was an important representative of Swiss Expressionism. His connection with Ticino began with the Basel artists' group *Rot-Blau*, which Scherer founded together with Albert Müller and Paul Camenisch on New Year's Eve 1924/25 in Obino near Mendrisio. The decisive factor was their meeting with Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, whom the artists greatly admired. From then on, Müller, Camenisch and Scherer were united not only by their expressionist approach to painting but also by their friendship. Although the group was oriented towards artistic events in Basel, the friends spent a lot of time in Ticino. Before the rift between Scherer and Müller, Scherer often visited Coldrerio. The group also met at the home of Paul Camenisch, who rented an apartment in Villa Loverciano near Castel San Pietro, the subject of this woodcut.

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