Florence, June 11, 2018

**THE ELEGANCE OF SPEED**

FROM JUNE 11 TO SEPTEMBER 16, THE HISTORY OF THE AUTOMOBILE IN FLORENCE AND TUSCANY THROUGH NEVER-BEFORE-SEEN PHOTOS FROM THE ARCHIVIO FOTO LOCCHI

*Nuvolari è bruno di colore,
Nuvolari ha la maschera tagliente
Nuvolari ha la bocca sempre chiusa,
di morire non gli importa niente...*

Lucio Dalla sings of the legendary driver, at a time when Italy was still home to the *Mille Miglia*, surrounded by the enthusiastic crowds that, too, had to pay their death toll.

Long before, Marinetti and his contemporaries had expressed “that the world’s splendour has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed. A racing motor-car, its frame adored with great pipes, like snakes with explosive breath… a roaring motor-car which looks as through running on shrapnel is more beautiful than the *Victory of Samothrace*.” From the male-driven age of the Manifesto of Futurism, the automobile soon changed gender, adding elegance to speed. After all, the concept was definitively sanctioned by the expression *Women and cars*, and all that surrounded it.

“**The Elegance of Speed**,” the exhibition that brings together photos from the **Archivio Foto Locchi** in the rooms at **Palazzo Pitti** thanks to **Eike D. Schmidt, director of the Uffizi Galleries**, highlights the most beautiful street races in Tuscany, the Concorsi d’Eleganza in the Boboli Gardens, the courage, the feminine charm, the deafening rumble, the pungent smell of gas, the screech of tires as they rounded the curves, the success of Italian fashion and Florence between 1934 and 1965.

The exhibition, directed by **Alessandra Griffo** and curated by **Alessandro Bruni**, **Erika Ghilardi** and **Matteo Parigi Bini**, retraces the important moments in this Tuscan undertaking; as **Eike Schmidt** explains, “*It’s natural, looking at the photographs of the first bolides, observing their design and evolution, with the curves of their shells that grew progressively softer and slender, to think of what was happening in the world of contemporary sculpture and of its aesthetic interaction with the automobile industry. But which field took after the other? It’s difficult to say, especially in the Futurist period, how indebted Boccioni and his Unique Forms of Continuity in Space (1913) were toward the most sophisticated automobiles produced in those years, like the Itala 35/45 HP – the one used in the Peking to Paris race in 1907 – or the incredibly elegant Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost.*”

Divided into three sections, the exhibition goes beyond the appreciation of the automobile in strictly technical, aerodynamic and structural terms, evokes a period of great changes in the city’s roads and in the history of Florence

The **first section** is dedicated to the races that sped across the soft curves of the Tuscan landscape, marking the history of automobile racing. A network of competitions was established in Tuscany (Circuito del Mugello, Coppa della Consuma, Circuito delle Cascine, Circuito di Firenze, Firenze-Fiesole), igniting a passion for speed and the mastery of race car drivers. A stretch of the Firenze-Mare highway became the stage for world records, with legendary speed tests. In June 1935, Tazio Nuvolari, behind the wheel of a dual-engine Alfa Romeo prepared by Enzo Ferrari, exceeded 300 km/h, and for the flying start, he reached an incredible 323.175 km/h, beating the record achieved just a few months before by Hans Stuck on board a powerful Typ B (later renamed the Typ Lucca), who was assisted by technicians at the future AUDI.

The drivers, which are highlighted in the exhibition with precious mementos like helmets and uniforms, together with a miniature bolide that Ferrari prepared for his son Piero in the workshops in Maranello, are at the centre of the **second section**, which tells of **men that were in love with speed** and the mechanic horses that in the 20th century had no need for breaks, at least not when Mantua native Nuvolari was behind the wheel, the fastest man in Italy. Alongside him are the elegant Giannino Marzotto, who drove wearing a dress shirt, jacket and tie, and the Thai Prince Bira, who in addition to the Formula 1, participated in four Olympics as a yachtsman. Then there’s the aristocrat Felice Trossi raced cars and yachts without ever losing his “brilliant and detached self-confidence,” and the fearless, superstitious Ascari, who died the day he left the helmet he always wore at home.

The history of these drivers, as well as the noble Maria Teresa de Filippis, known as *Pilotino*, who abandoned racing when the colleague that replaced her died in the race, is a wholly unique history of the 20th century, with changing costumes, places, fashions and faces of the enthusiasts.

The **third section** is dedicated, naturally, to style, that of the **automobiles** themselves.The Concorsi d’Eleganza were a unique moment in the history of automobiles aimed at the elite classes. They served first as displays of elegance but which later became a place to present new cars and products.

Florence was the city where Barsanti and Matteucci created the first internal combustion engine, patenting it in 1853, where the second automobile in Italy (1894) took to the streets and, in 1901, where the Giro d'Italia Automobilistico passed through. Here, in 1948, in the **Boboli Gardens** behind Palazzo Pitti, the first “**Concorso d’Eleganza**” for automobiles was held.

Only a few years had passed since the end of World War II, and the newly-founded Italian Republic was seeking the best of its heritage in order to reinvent itself with a fresh start. Florence, with its culture and beauty, a crossroads for an important international *entourage*, was the ideal place. The automobile, just like clothing, was a status symbol: the most beautiful cars in the world were on display in the Boboli Gardens, an emblematic place in Florentine history, precisely in the same years that the excellence of Italian fashion was being established inside Palazzo Pitti. The photos taken in the streets throughout the centre of the most exclusive models of the era by reporters from Foto Locchi portray this original display of splendours that each highlighted one another reciprocally.

To accompany the exhibition, **Gruppo Editoriale** has produced a volume with 90 photos from the **Archivio Foto Locchi** on display in the show and original texts edited by Alessandro Bruni and Piero Campani, featuring an introduction by Eike Schimdt.

Palazzo Pitti, Andito degli Angiolini, Piazza de’ Pitti 1, 50125 Florence

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From Tuesday to Sunday, 8.45am-6.50pm

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