

Grand dame of Italian art feted

Rome show commemorates Palma Bucarelli

(ANSA) - Rome, August 5 - The capital's National Gallery of Modern Art (**GNAM**) is celebrating the grand dame of 20th-century Italian art, critic Palma Bucarelli. Bucarelli, who was **GNAM** superintendent for 34 years, turned the museum into an international attraction and helped popularize contemporary trends in Italy and abroad. The exhibition commemorates the centenary of her birth with over 150 display items.

The main attractions will be Italian 20th-century painting and sculpture masterpieces but the exhibition will also feature everyday mementoes of Bucarelli's life, including photographs, music and evening dresses. Discussing Bucarelli's achievements, the exhibit's curator Mariastella Margozzi highlighted her support for Italian art. "She managed to select the best Italian art of the post-war period and bring it to public attention abroad, through collective exhibitions supported by the Foreign Ministry around the world," said Margozzi. But as well as taking Italian art abroad, she also fuelled an interest in foreign art in Italy. "She introduced the Italian public to the new, abstract informal art by highly prestigious European and American artists," said Margozzi. The curator cited exhibitions on Pablo Picasso (1953), Piet Mondrian (1956) and Jackson Pollock (1958) as particularly popular events organized by Bucarelli.

Bucarelli - who was once described as being "as famous as a movie star and as talked about as a politician" - was renowned for her love of controversy.

One move that created particular outrage was her decision to showcase some of the 90 tin cans in a 1961 series by Piero Manzoni, 'Artist's Shit'.

The cans, which purportedly contained Manzoni's excrement, even triggered a debate in the Italian parliament at the time - but the fact that can number 19 recently sold for 80,000 dollars are a sign of Bucarelli's accurate instinct.

Despite some of her divisive decisions, Bucarelli acquired a number of now priceless works for the **GNAM**, including masterpieces by Gustav Klimt and Vincent Van Gogh.

She also built up one of the best collections of Italian modern classics in the world, largely due to her networking skills and lasting friendships, which brought donations of works by names such as Lucio Fontana and Alberto Burri. **GNAM** Director Maria Vittoria Marini Clarelli said one of Bucarelli's most lasting achievements had been positioning the **GNAM** within an international network of museums that recognized the important of modernity. "She had a museum-centric vision of the contemporary art system, a view that placed the museum at the core of art," she said. Palma Bucarelli: Il Museo Come Avanguardia (Palma Bucarelli: The Museum as Avant-Garde) runs at the **GNAM** until November 1.

photo: Bucarelli with sculptor Giacomo Manzu