

GIACOMO BALLA. THE STYLE OF THE AVANT-GARDE

WORKS FROM THE BIAGIOTTI CIGNA COLLECTIONS

Curated by Beatrice Avanzi and Fabio Benzi

With the support of Laura Biagiotti

Mart, Rovereto, May 16 – October 18, 2026



For the first time in Italy, Mart presents one of the world's most significant monographic private collections: the complete body of works by Giacomo Balla from the Laura Biagiotti Collection and the Biagiotti Cigna Foundation. Featuring paintings, drawings, furnishings, objects, and garments, the exhibition presents 240 works in conversation with selected canvases and archival materials from the museum in Rovereto. The brilliantly colourful *Genio Futurista*—Balla's largest masterpiece—is also on view.

Through this project, Mart and Biagiotti celebrate a utopia brought to life. It is a journey to rediscover the visionary and infectious energy that ignited the dawn of Italian modernity.

Biagiotti and Mart: An Inspired Collaboration

"Laura immediately recognised this modern shift in the great artist and saw its resonance with her own creative journey. She also understood that his creative act was profoundly revolutionary: he was the first—and perhaps most intricate—artist to articulate this fusion of art and fashion, especially as he projected it onto the landscape of the historical avant-gardes."

Fabio Benzi

Exactly forty years ago, in 1986, fashion designer and entrepreneur **Laura Biagiotti** visited an exhibition at Rome's **Galleria Chimera**, featuring works by **Giacomo Balla** and his daughters, **Elica and Luce**. From that moment until her passing in 2017, Laura Biagiotti—together with her husband **Gianni Cigna**—dedicated herself to passionately acquiring and championing the works of Giacomo Balla, ultimately becoming his most important private collector.

The works acquired during that first decade—up to 1996, the year of her husband's death—now belong to the **Biagiotti Cigna Foundation**, preserving the integrity and legacy of enlightened collecting and generous patronage.

Memories and affections have been kept alive and celebrated through ongoing exhibitions and the acquisition of new works by Giacomo Balla from the Laura Biagiotti Collection. This philanthropic and patronage activity continues thanks to the dedication of her daughter, **Lavinia Biagiotti Cigna**, who now leads the family business.

The Balla works in the Biagiotti family's collection are overseen by the Foundation's artistic director, Professor **Fabio Benzi**, who, together with **Beatrice Avanzi**—head of exhibitions at Mart in Rovereto—curates the major *Giacomo Balla* exhibition. *The Style of the Avant-Garde*, from May 16 to October 18.

Exhibited in Italy in its entirety for the first time, the “Balla/Biagiotti” collection is being presented in Rovereto—a choice that is anything but accidental. This project is perfectly in line with Mart’s mission, reinforcing its **ongoing narrative** as Trentino’s premier venue for celebrating the legacy of the Futurist avant-garde.

Works from the **Laura Biagiotti Collection** and the **Biagiotti Cigna Foundation** engage with a heritage deeply rooted in the exploration of twentieth-century Italian history—especially **Futurism** and the work of **Fortunato Depero**, whose legacy inspired the museum’s very creation. Moreover, this collaboration highlights Mart’s ongoing commitment to fostering dialogue between **private and public collections** to promote significant cultural heritage.

Total Art

“We Futurists, Balla and Depero, seek to achieve this total fusion to reconstruct the universe by making it joyful—in other words, by recreating it in its entirety. We will give structure and substance to the invisible, the impalpable, the imponderable, the imperceptible. We will find abstract equivalents for every form and element in the universe, then combine them as our inspiration dictates, to create sculptural complexes that we will set in motion.”

Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe, 1915

Thanks to Laura Biagiotti’s vision, **the largest and most significant collection of Giacomo Balla’s works** was assembled—from his early Divisionist pieces to his abstract works, from sketches to furnishings, including major canvases and drawings. Laura Biagiotti was also the first to recognise the value of Balla’s **figurative works** from the 1930s, which had previously received little attention. A passionate scholar of the artist, deeply attentive to his creative process and respectful of his ideas, Biagiotti recognised in Balla a consistent **focus on fashion** and its role within **mass culture** and the **language of communication**.

While in 1915, together with his friend Depero, Balla theorised the renowned ***Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe***, his “***Antineutral Dress***” actually dates to the previous year.

A true **manifesto of Futurist fashion**, the **original manuscript** was acquired by Laura Biagiotti and is now on display alongside the *Reconstruction* manifesto, which belongs to the Mart collections.

Both of these theoretical cornerstones mark the transition of Futurism from a mere artistic movement to a true lifestyle, in pursuit of **total art**.

Aiming to break down the hierarchies between the arts, Balla soon extended his artistic repertoire—the wedges and vortices of “automobile speeds,” the abstract arabesques of “states of mind”—from painting to furniture and objects. Using these same forms, he applied his vision to furniture, decorative pieces, and fashion, transforming everyday life with his dynamic approach.

The Laura Biagiotti Collection also includes ***Genio Futurista*, Balla’s largest work to date**: a vibrantly coloured oil on tapestry canvas measuring roughly 4 meters wide and nearly 3 metres tall. Created in 1925, it was presented at the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris.

The exhibition also features objects, furniture, tapestries, lampshades, and studies for scarves, ties, hats, and embroidery—evidence of a creative output that engaged the artist



throughout his entire life. It was an endless creative laboratory that inspired the great European avant-gardes, such as the Bauhaus.

Curated by the Turin-based studio **Officina delle Idee**, the exhibition welcomes visitors with a striking introductory room adorned with colourful graphics and simple geometric shapes inspired by Balla's works. Amid oversized photographs, graphic art, captions, and wall texts, the **exhibition unfolds chronologically** across **five thematic sections**: *Divisionism, Futurism, Futurist Fashion, Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe, A New Modern Figuration*. Colourful, dynamic corners dedicated to total art punctuate the space, showcasing furniture and objects.

Biagiotti. Shaping the Future: Where Art Meets Fashion

"I inherited from my mother, Laura, a passion for Futurism and for Giacomo Balla—for vibrant colours, energising forms, and brilliant avant-garde insights. The Futurist reconstruction of the universe comes to life through creativity—not just technology—and suggests a new attitude: creative, dynamic, and optimistic. To shape the future, every single day."

Lavinia Biagiotti Cigna

For Biagiotti, the relationship between art and fashion is not merely a dialogue between two languages, but an original convergence of vision.

Since Laura Biagiotti's founding vision, fashion has been seen as a complex cultural form—one able to absorb and reinterpret the tensions of its age, translating them into signs, materials, and constructions. From inspiration to the preservation of artworks and monuments, art and fashion weave together dialogues, sensibilities, and visions within an open, fertile, and ever-evolving field of exploration.

The union of art and fashion has gradually established itself as one of the most significant expressions of contemporary culture, first finding radical form in Futurism. In the work of Giacomo Balla—and in the "Futurist reconstruction of the universe" conceived with Fortunato Depero—a vision takes shape in which aesthetics permeate all of life, foreshadowing currents that would shape art throughout the latter half of the twentieth century.

Within this context, fashion becomes an active force in a cultural project: Balla himself saw fashion as a creative and behavioural act—one capable of conveying energy, dynamism, and a forward-looking spirit. This is exemplified by his invention of the "modificante": a mobile, transformative device that adds a playful, vital new dimension to clothing.

The concept of "total art"—breaking down boundaries between the arts and bringing unity to how we experience them—runs genuinely through Biagiotti's story, not just as a reference but as something lived. So, putting together the Balla collections is first and foremost an act of thought, even more than one of preservation—a way to question the past and bring it alive in the present.

Within this context, patronage takes on the role of active responsibility: not only safeguarding heritage, but also generating new contexts, relationships, and possibilities for meaning. Far from being secondary, fashion stands out as one of its most effective tools—able to make what begins as artistic intuition both tangible and shareable. Like art, fashion is in constant motion and evolution, with each collection enriched by new ideas—and always maintaining a keen focus on the near future.

The Spring–Summer 2026 collection, *The Art of Fashion*, builds on this path as a true expression of ideas in motion. Inspired by the vibrant energy of Balla's butterfly, it uses metamorphosis as a symbol, turning the tension between lightness and structure, movement and permanence, into form.



From this perspective, shaping the future does not mean anticipating time, but inhabiting it with awareness. Fashion—memory and future, roots and wings—is called to become a universal language and a means of cultivating beauty and quality of life, contributing to an ethical reorientation in which aesthetics and sustainability converge anew.

The catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue, published by **Silvana Editoriale**, featuring a cohesive, remarkable selection of works from the Laura Biagiotti Collection and the Biagiotti Cigna Foundation. Brought together here, these works engage in a dialogue that reveals their profound coherence and vitality. For the occasion, the text that **Laura Biagiotti** wrote for the landmark 1996 exhibition at the Pushkin Museum in Moscow—where the collection was first unveiled—is being republished.

The volume also includes an in-depth essay on the history of Biagiotti's collecting and a piece on Giacomo Balla, both written by curator **Fabio Benzi**; an essay on Balla and Depero's *Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe* by **Federico Zanoner**, head of the Casa d'Arte Futurista Depero; introductory texts on the exhibition's sections at Mart by **Beatrice Avanzi**; and the usual bibliographic apparatus.



The Exhibition Path in the Wall Texts

Mart presents, for the first time in its entirety, the body of works by Giacomo Balla from the Laura Biagiotti Collection and the Biagiotti Cigna Foundation.

The exhibition brings this extraordinary collection (the largest body of Balla's works in existence today, totalling almost 250 pieces) into dialogue with selected works from the Mart's own collections. Indeed, the Mart has always championed the study of the Futurist avant-garde and, in particular, of Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero, whose bequests gave rise to the Museum.

The first group of works in the collection was acquired in 1986 by Laura Biagiotti and her husband Gianni Cigna directly from Balla's daughters, who soon became their friends. It was assigned by the family to the Fondazione Biagiotti Cigna following the death of Gianni Cigna in 1996.

Following her passion as a fashion designer, Laura Biagiotti focused her early acquisitions on avant-garde fashion, of which Giacomo Balla was both inventor and alchemist; an expression of the velocity of taste, which evolves rapidly in response to the ebbs and flows of the modern world, a perfect metaphor for both fashion and Futurism.

The collection is singular, almost unique in its structure. Centred on the personality of a single artist, it distils his thought process as it unfolded, tracing its stages, challenges and triumphs. A diary of experiences and studies that converse and clearly reveal the quest for new and extraordinary forms.

Laura Biagiotti has pursued a very personal quest. She has not created a collection consisting primarily of paintings, but a journey in which the works — hundreds of them — have been added like words in a sentence, and like sentences in a narrative. A puzzle, a circuit that reads and contains all the nuances of the artist's thought, continually expanding it with the missing pieces. The result is a complete portrait of the artist across all his phases: from minute sketches, to notes, right up to the largest work he ever created (Genio Futurista).

Divisionism

Giacomo Balla (Turin, 1871–Rome, 1958) develops an early interest in photography thanks to his father Giovanni, a chemist and photographer, and his friend Oreste Bertieri. Through Bertieri, he meets Giuseppe Pellizza da Volpedo, one of the leading figures of Divisionist painting.

When Balla moves to Rome in 1895, his photographic research and the Divisionist language – based on the scientific laws of optical perception and the decomposition of colours – are at the heart of his studies.

His early paintings focus on portraits and landscapes, characterised by original framings and the decomposition of light through the application of fine strands of colour.

In the early 20th century, he produces numerous portraits of his wife Elisa, often depicted en plein air, as in the pastels *Elisa nella campagna romana* (Elisa in the Roman countryside) and *La fidanzata al Pincio* (The Fiancée at the Pincio), a study for the painting of the same name, where the skilful rendering of light and shadow is achieved using a limited range of pastels.

The park of Villa Borghese, which Balla can see from his home, is his favourite setting for his studies of light. These views are sometimes in the form of triptychs, a legacy of the nineteenth-century Divisionist tradition, and feature lyrical and spiritualistic accents that reflect a Pan-inspired interpretation of nature. In *La siepe di Villa Borghese* (The hedge at Villa Borghese), the artist achieves results of radical experimentation, anticipating Futurist explorations and moving towards abstraction. Further evidence of his profound capacity for innovation is *Autospalla*, a self-portrait that isolates a part of the body with an unprecedented framing, giving rise to one of the most original works of the early 20th century.



Having become the leading figure of Roman Divisionism, Balla welcomes the young pupils Umberto Boccioni, Gino Severini and Mario Sironi into his studio; together with the master, they will become the leading figures of Futurism.

Futurism

In April 1910, Balla signs the Manifesto of the Futurist Painters, a declaration of artistic renewal against “every religion of the past”, based on the exaltation of the “radiant magnificence of the future”. The subsequent Technical Manifesto clarifies the characteristics of Futurist painting: it aims to “render and magnify” the “miracles of contemporary life”, representing the “dynamic sensation” arising from the ceaseless evolution of the metropolis.

For Balla, the analysis of light remains central; when associated with movement, it “destroys the materiality of bodies” and alters the perception of reality.

In 1912, the artist interprets this new poetics in a series of paintings where the analysis of dynamism is rendered through sequential imagery, inspired by the photographic experiments of Muybridge and Marey. During the same period, he develops the series *Compenetrazioni iridescenti* (Iridescent interpenetrations), in which he studies the radiation of light through sequences of triangles, rhombuses and lozenges, broken down into the colours of the rainbow. These works, now recognised as some of the earliest examples of geometric abstraction, pave the way for the full maturation of the Futurist language in the series *Velocità di automobili* (Speed of automobiles), culminating in the *Velocità astratte* (Abstract speeds) of 1913–1914. Here, movement is translated into compositions of intersecting lines, vortices, wedges and triangles, intended to convey the speed of mechanical vehicles and their interpenetration with the urban landscape.

In the following years, this exploration evolves into abstract forms that express moods and emotions on the canvas, often inspired by nature, as in *Linee di forza di paesaggio maiolicato* (Lines of force of a majolica landscape) (1917–1918).

Futurist fashion

In 1914, Balla extends his research to the field of fashion, signing the *Manifesto del vestito antineutrale* (Manifesto of the anti-neutral suit). The text is first published in French, under the title *Le vêtement masculin futuriste* (Futurist men's suit), on 20 May 1914, and subsequently in Italian with some modifications linked to the Futurists' interventionist ideology.

As early as 1912, during his stay with the Löwenstein family in Düsseldorf, Balla had created futuristic garments of his own invention for himself and his friends. He recognises at an early stage the revolutionary potential of fashion and its capacity to disseminate a new aesthetic within mass society.

The Laura Biagiotti Collection and the Biagiotti Cigna Foundation preserve the most significant body of Balla's creations on the theme of fashion: a rich repertoire of inventions, a veritable “explosion” of shapes and colours that transform clothes, bags, ties and scarves with “thrilling iridescence”. There are numerous studies for embroidery and fabric decorations, most of which remain at the design stage or are realised with the collaboration of his daughters, such as the waistcoat embroidered by Luce with abstract motifs derived from the name Balla. Also particularly significant is the presence of *modificanti* (modifiers): removable fabric accessories to “invent a new outfit at every moment”.

From the late 1910s onwards, these abstract-dynamic forms are accompanied by more figurative decorations, often inspired by nature, such as the imaginative, highly colourful *Futurfarfalle* (Futur-butterflies) or landscape fragments in more subdued colours (*Luce tra i pini* [Light through the pines], *Progetto per scialle in tulle per Benedetta Cappa Marinetti* [Design for a tulle shawl for Benedetta Cappa Marinetti]).





Futurist reconstruction of the universe

"We Futurists, Balla and Depero, seek to realize this total fusion in order to reconstruct the universe by making it more joyful, in other words by an integral re-creation."

This declaration opens the manifesto of the Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe, signed on 11 April 1915 by Giacomo Balla and a young Fortunato Depero, who had arrived in Rome from Rovereto in 1913. The meeting between the two artists is decisive not only for the transformation and renewal of the Futurist movement, but also because it marks a crucial moment in Depero's work. His explorations into going beyond the easel and the creation of "plastic-mobile complexes", theorised in the text *Complessità plastica. Gioco libero futurista* (Plastic complexity: free Futurist play (1914), anticipate some of the content of the Manifesto published the following year.

Balla and Depero share a desire to extend Futurist aesthetics to all spheres of life, from interior decoration to clothing, from theatre to cinema, blurring the boundaries between fine and applied arts, in accordance with a concept of "total art" that will influence the development of the avant-garde across Europe.

Balla applies the abstract forms of his painting to furnishings (tapestries, furniture, home accessories), clothing (waistcoats, ties, suits), interior designs (*Bal Tic Tac* in Rome, 1921), and theatrical performances (*Feu d'artifice*, 1916).

This aesthetic transformation of everyday reality finds its embodiment in the house the artist first designs in Via Nicolò Porpora, opening it to the public on Sunday afternoons, and later in Via Oslavia in Rome. As Francesco Cangiullo recalls, his home was a house-studio "all iridescent and sparkling with colour".

A new modern figuration

By the late 1920s, Balla has gradually moved away from Futurism towards a return to figuration; this, however, differs from the "return to order" movements of that period, as he once again chooses an original research path. This phase, often overlooked or misunderstood by critics, has only recently been the subject of careful re-evaluation.

The circumstances surrounding Balla's departure from Futurism are not entirely clear.

The first disagreements with Marinetti arise around 1931, when the movement's leader publishes the *Manifesto dell'arte sacra futurista* (Manifesto of futurist sacred art); Balla, a staunch anti-clericalist, is opposed to it. In March 1932, the artist takes part in a Futurist exhibition for the last time, at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome.

By the end of the previous decade, Balla has already been experimenting with realist painting in landscapes and portraits, whether private or commissioned. *Nel patio* (In the patio) (1926) is an example of this new style: the painting, which depicts his daughter Luce in the Moorish patio of Villa Ambron in Valle Giulia, is inspired by the glamour of fashion magazines and photographs of film stars. For the artist, these glossy images embody the modern imagination and thus represent a way of renewing the myth of Futurism's modernity, foreshadowing a pop culture aimed at a mass audience. In some paintings (*Luce estiva* [Summer light]) he goes as far as reproducing the halftone effect of news magazines by applying a metal mesh to the canvas.

Mart Rovereto

Corso Bettini, 43
38068 Rovereto (TN)
T.+39 0465 670820
T.+39 0464 438887
info@mart.trento.it
www.mart.trento.it

Opening hours

Tue, Wed, Thu, Sun: 10.00-18.00
Fri, Sat 10:00 am -7:30 pm
Closed on Mondays

Admission fees

General admission €15
Discount admission €10
Free entry for Mart Members, under 14s and people with disabilities

**Mart Rovereto Press Office and Communications**

press@mart.tn.it
Susanna Sara Mandice
T +39 0464 454124
M +39 334 6333148
Francesca Musolino
T +39 0464 454155
Silvia Guzzo
T +39 0464 454142
Ginevra Perruggini
T +39 0464 454167

Biagiotti Group Press Office

Claudia Avanzi – GM/PR
cavanzi@gmprconsulting.it
M +39 339 4443308

Valentina Virgili
v.virgili@laurabiagiotti.it
M +39 340 7899687
Violante Cappuccini
v.cappuccini@laurabiagiotti.it
M +39 344 2894092

Thank you to

Autonomous Province of Trento
City of Trento
City of Rovereto

With the support of

Altemasi by Cavit, Institutional Partner of the Museum
Cantina Vivallis, Institutional Partner of the Casa d'Arte Futurista Depero
Rotari, Institutional Partner of the Trento venues, Galleria Civica, and Palazzo delle Albere

In collaboration with

Trentino Marketing
Tourism Agency Rovereto, Vallagarina, and Monte Baldo

With the collaboration of

Laura Biagiotti