

PRESS RELEASE

<b>EXHIBITION</b>	<b>ALBERTO BURRI CELLOTEX 1991</b>
<b>CURATOR</b>	Ida Gianelli
<b>PRESS OFFICE</b>	Massimo Melotti
<b>CATALOGUE</b>	Fabbri Editori
<b>INAUGURATION</b>	Tuesday 1st October 1991 7.0 pm (Press meeting 6.0 pm)
<b>PERIOD</b>	2 October - 1 December 1991
<b>OPENING HOURS</b>	10.0 a.m. to 7.0 p.m. closed on Mondays
<b>ADDRESS</b>	Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Piazza del Castello 10098 Rivoli TO

**ALBERTO BURRI CELLOTEX 1991**

**SATURDAY 28 SEPTEMBER**

7.0 p.m.

Inauguration of the exhibition preview reserved for representatives of FAI (Italian Fund for the Environment) and for accredited journalists (journalists intending to participate should contact the Press Office).

**SUNDAY 29 SEPTEMBER**

From 10.0 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Visit reserved for the press.

**MONDAY 30 SEPTEMBER**

The museum is closed on Mondays

**TUESDAY 1 OCTOBER**

7.0 p.m.

Official inauguration

**DURATION OF THE EXHIBITION**

**From 2 October to 1 December 1991**



REGIONE PIEMONTE BANCA CRT FIAT GRUPPO GFT  
**CASTELLO DI RIVOLI**

FAI - Fondo per l'Ambiente Italiano (Italian Fund for the Environment)  
National foundation for the protection, conservation and management of assets of historical, artistic and naturalistic interest.

On Saturday, September 28, the delegates of FAI, the Italian Fund for the Environment, in Turin for their annual convention, will be invited to visit the Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea.

The FAI, Italian Fund for the Environment, is a non profit-making institution. It is a private Foundation, recognized by a Decree from the Head of State. It works throughout Italy in the interests of all those who care about the cultural heritage, acquiring assets of historical, artistic and naturalistic value through donation, inheritance, right-of-use or purchase, and ensuring their future through careful conservation policies. Historic houses and castles, collections of art, libraries, monumental gardens, a Roman-Longobard monastery, as well as San Fruttuoso, the famous town in Liguria, are all part of the FAI patrimony, together with property of naturalistic interest representing some of the most significant aspects of the Italian landscape.

On this occasion, which is intended to draw attention to FAI's activity, the Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea will open its rooms for a preview visit of the exhibition "ALBERTO BURRI CELLOTEX 1991", reserved for the FAI and accredited journalists.

**ALBERTO BURRI CELLOTEX 1991**

Alongside its typical museum function of exhibiting works which have already become part of the history of art, the Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea also acts as an observatory of the most recent happenings, destined to make a profound mark on the search for new forms of expression.

The exhibition "Alberto Burri Cellotex 1991" is a milestone in this respect: both for the understanding of the artist's creative evolution, and as a critical moment in contemporary art.

The Castello di Rivoli is a privileged observatory. Here, Alberto Burri's latest production is presented: twenty large works (250 x 360 cm.).

The material used is Cellotex, a wood-based chip-board used for industrial production, with a smooth surface the colour of very light wood. It can be painted, but it is also possible to cut the material and to remove parts of it. In place of the harmony of tone which dominated his previous compositions, and despite the miscellaneous material used, here, in the uniformity of the Cellotex and of the acrylic colours, it is rather the harmony of timbre which dominates, whereas the construction of the planes is reminiscent of that he used in his "Sacchi", or of works going back even earlier. In the long epic of Burri's painting, it is as though the material had been persuaded to drop all its organic characteristics, to "sublime" in pure colour-matter.

**ALBERTO BURRI**

## A biographical note

Alberto Burri was born at Città di Castello, near Perugia in 1915 (12th March). He graduated in medicine in 1940 and, having been called up as a medical officer in the war, was taken prisoner by the Allies in Tunisia in 1943. He was sent to a camp for prisoners of war at Hereford in Texas, where he started to paint landscapes with strong, fiery colours. The writer Giuseppe Berto was in the camp with Burri and recalls his first forays into painting: "It was the key turning point of his life, this accident which pushed him down a road he had never thought of going down previously... The legend about Burri which went around the camp at Hereford was that he was a doctor who had become disgusted with humanity and decided that human beings no longer deserved his attentions, and had therefore decided to do something else other than being a doctor". In 1946 Burri returned to Italy and stayed in Rome in the house of a cousin of his mother's, the musician Annibale Bucci, and here he decided definitely to devote himself to painting. In the immediate post-war years Italian art was in a state of great ferment and controversy and the visual arts dominated artistic debate - in particular the often fierce opposition between figurative and abstract approaches. Although Burri followed the arguments with keen interest, and understood the cultural positions at stake, he did not himself take part in the controversy. He worked in self-imposed isolation as an auto-didact. He exhibited as early

as 1947 - at the Margherita gallery in Rome, as part of a show organized by two poets, Libero De Libero and Leonardo Sinisgalli. In 1948, he opted definitely for the abstract path - and a radical abstraction which at that time had no equal and no precedent in Italy. He tried to exploit the independent expressive potential contained in materials. Apart from his painting, where the chromatic range was often restricted to black and white, Burri used non-artistic materials (materials which the common sense of taste of the time saw as even "anti-aesthetic") such as tar and mould. This shift onto terrain which was outside any accepted tradition and outside the reach of any approved art theory made Burri something of an outsider in the world of Italian art. For a long time, the critics ignored him; only writers, as we have seen, saw the intensely poetic freshness of his work. Recognition first came from abroad, where the memory of the experimentation put into practice by the avant-garde earlier in the century was more alive. In 1950 the French journal "Cahiers d'Art" noted his work. In 1949 (with his famous work "S Z 1"), Burri started to use sacking, and he devoted himself to the use of this material especially from 1950 on. The sacking did not become a complement to painting, but rather substituted it - as a fragment of reality, a challenge to representative logic. These works marked one of the most forward positions of artistic exploration in that period.

The sacking, with its tears, its holes and its obvious mends, has been interpreted as an existential metaphor. This is a legitimate approach but a partial and limiting one which does not fully grasp the radical newness and the break which this kind of poetics represents - the attempt to go completely beyond painting without abandoning the format of the picture frame or the practice of painting.

In 1951, together with Giuseppe Capogrossi, Mario Ballocco and Ettore Colla, Burri founded the "Gruppo Origine" (Origin Group) which aimed to totally re-found art's language. This was the only

occasion in which Burri joined a group, and he subsequently returned to his solitary and retiring life. Interest in his work continued to be aroused among international critics and in 1953 he took part (the only Italian) in a collective exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and in 1955 at the New York Museum of Modern Art. Burri's first official recognition in Italy came at the XXVth Venice Biennale in 1952. It was not, however, the interest of the critics, but that of an artist, Pericle Fazzini, which brought forth this invitation - to take part in the Drawing Section of the exhibition. One of the two works he exhibited - "Study for a tear" - was bought by Lucio Fontana.

In his home country, Burri was still a controversial figure. The most notorious demonstration of this came in 1959 when a "Sacking", which the National Gallery of Modern Art at Rome had exhibited as proof that Italian institutions too knew how to welcome the new in art, sparked off a parliamentary question from the Communist Party (at that time a fierce defender of socialist realism).

From 1955 on Burri started to intervene more directly on the surfaces of his materials, applying fire to wood and to sheets of plastic. He ceased to make any distinction between organic and man-made materials. In 1958 he exhibited "Ferri" (Irons), which consists of non-artistic materials which bring together all the aesthetic values of painting. The critic James J. Sweeney, who was then director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, presented this work at the XXIXth Venice Biennale. However, by this time, Italian opinion (and not even just that most closely associated with the avant-garde) had come to discover "Burri now finally considered a Master". Important essays appeared by various critics, from Francesco Arcangeli to Giulio Carlo Argan - who presented Burri's first retrospective, at Brussels in 1959, and the room dedicated to his work at the XXXth Venice Biennale in 1960 - to Maurizio Calvesi (who wrote an essay in "Quadrum" in 1959), and Enrico Crispolti who wrote the catalogues to two large

anthological shows at Rome in 1961 and at L'Aquila in 1962. The first monograph on Burri came out in 1963, edited by Cesare Brandi.

Exhibitions at all the major European and American museums followed, as did prizes for painting and for drawing. In the 1960s, he returned to the use of fire on plastic as the basic for experiments which enabled him to obtain some new formal solutions. He moved on from transparent sheets to coloured ones - violent red, or black - still marked with fire; and then to sheets stretched on frames and worked with white acrylic painting. In the 1970s he created the series of "Cretti" (Cracks, Crevices) - made of earth mixed with zinc whitewash and acrylic glues. When this material dries it creates cracks and crevices in a pattern which the artist has predetermined, though only partially. In the 1980s Burri devoted himself mainly to large works conceived for "thematic" cycles. He presented a set of ten large paintings entitled "Il Viaggio" (The Voyage) at Città di Castello in 1980. In the same year he held an exhibition of "Orti" (Vegetable gardens) at Florence at Orsanmichele composed of nine Cellotexes and one monumental sculpture.

In 1981 the permanent exhibition was opened at Città di Castello (in the renaissance Palazzo Albizzini) of the collection Burri had donated to the town where he was born. This is made up of 209 works, completed between 1949 and 1967 and including sculptures, paintings, drawings and stage-decoration, and is an extraordinary anthology chosen and arranged by the artist himself.

Burri's work continued to be exhibited in collective and personal shows in the major international museums, such as the Staatsgalerie Moderner Kunst at Munich, the Galerie im Taxispalais at Innsbruck, the Museum Moderner Kunst at Vienna, the Palm Springs Desert Museum in California, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. In 1984 at Milan (Palazzo Citterio) Burri inaugurated a large-scale anthology comprising over two hundred pieces (sculpture, painting, tempera and prints) entitled "Brera 2".



In the last few years, Burri has been working a good deal with Cellotex - a wood chipboard used in industry; this has a smooth surface of a very light wood colour, and this makes it a medium which allows both paint-like techniques and direct working on the material itself. Recent works are mostly painted and large. "Sestante" (Sextant) and "Annottarsi" (Making dark, or also obscuring oneself) are examples which are notable for their vivid chromatic richness and a skillful construction of different planes of colour. In place of the tonal harmonies that dominated the previous compositions, here the uniformity of Cellotex and acrylic colour provide instead harmonies of timbre. In the long odyssey of Burri's painting, it is as if the material had to deposit all its organic character and become sublimated in pure colour-material.

In 1959 the Palazzo Albizzini Foundation bought a complex of industrial warehouses which up until the 1970s had been used for the drying of tobacco. The highly distinctive architecture of these unusually large drying sheds - painted black all over on Burri's instructions - has now been transformed into a gigantic sculpture which forms the ideal container for the big series of paintings like "Il Viaggio", "Sestante", "Annottarsi" and "Non ama il Nero" (Doesn't like Black) or for the sculptures "Grande Ferro Sestante" (Large Iron Sextant), "Grande Ferro K" (Large Iron K), "Ferro U" (Iron U). These and other works have been donated by the artist to the town of Città di Castello to complement the first collection held at Palazzo Albizzini.