

Galerie Canesso

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30 YEARS

The Man Who Rewrote the History of Blue Jeans, Maurizio Canesso, Celebrates 30 Years of Italian Art Sales with a Multi-Million Collection Lent by his Clients.

Galerie Canesso, a leading dealer in Italian Art in Paris & Milan celebrates its 30th anniversary with a dazzling exhibition of works lent by private collection clients

Galerie Canesso celebrates its first three decades with an exhibition showcasing exceptional artworks sold by the Gallery over the last thirty years. Clients include many leading art museums in Europe and the USA. The Exhibition takes place at the Galerie Canesso, starting May 15th in Paris (6pm-9pm) and May 23rd in Milan (3pm-8pm) and ending in both cities on May 28th

For decades, Maurizio Canesso has been regarded as one of the most prominent dealers in Italian art, specializing in the Renaissance to Baroque periods and including foreign artists who resided, found inspiration or spent significant time in Italy.

His work in this field has led him to collaborate with the most esteemed private collections and world-renowned museums, embedding his reputation as one of the foremost figures in the art market today. One of his exhibitions has rewritten the history of denim blue jeans, pushing back its provenance by centuries thanks to some great Old Master Painting detective work. Now, for six weeks in May and June you will be able to see the best of the best from the best collectors of Renaissance to Baroque Italian Art and experience the expertise that the Galerie Canesso has at its disposal, as part of its 30th birthday celebration.

The Artistic Genius of Blue Jeans:

One of the exhibitions for which Galerie Canesso is rightly famous is one that cast new light on the history of blue jeans – an unusual subject one may think for a gallery specialising in Italian Old Masters. So the blue jeans fabric was in fact not created by Levi Strauss. A number of Italian Old Master paintings feature it as a fabric worn by the poor and humble. This extends the history of the fabric by a few hundred years. Italian Old Masters leading the charge for a truer history of blue jeans.



Master of the Blue Jeans, (Active in Lombardy during the second half of the 17th century), *Woman Begging with Two Children*, oil on canvas. 152 x 117 cm, late 17th century, Galerie Canesso, Paris

A group of ten late 17th century paintings, all distinguished by the depiction of jeans – the universal fabric still used worldwide today – prompted an unprecedented exhibition project by the Galerie Canesso in 2010.

Inaugurated at the Paris gallery and subsequently transferred to New York, the rediscovery of these paintings and their relationship with jeans, already at such an early time, transformed the established knowledge regarding this fabric, dyed indigo, and its presumed Genoese origin.

The exhibition met with widespread success, sparking considerable interest and curiosity not only in the world of design but also among textile experts, and ultimately in the fields of art and collecting. Susan Moore dedicated an article to the exhibition in the “Collecting” section of the *Financial Times*, titled *Jean Genius. Fascinating paintings by an enigmatic artist resurface after a century of obscurity*, thus contributing to spreading the significant message that denim was not invented by Levi Strauss!

The painting has a provenance that ties it to Lombardy from the early 19th century, way before entering the prestigious Luigi Koelliker collection in Milan in 2002, where it was housed until it was acquired by Maurizio Canesso. True detective work ensued to track down the other paintings belonging to the group – except for the two already in public collections, such as *A Meal with a Woman and Two Children*, which entered the Museum of Fine Arts in Ghent in 1905, and the *Mother Sewing with Two Children* from the Cariplo Foundation in Milan. Although they are realistic works, this triptych of characters is presented in a monumental manner, retaining all their dignity despite the theme of poverty. The painting, which depicts a woman wearing a denim apron, worn, faded, and frayed at the edges like our modern jeans, gave the group its name.

The Galerie Canesso’s clients come from all over the world, including private collectors from Italy, Belgium, France, and the United States. Canesso has also established privileged relationships with numerous international institutions, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the National Gallery in Ottawa, the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, the Kunsthaus in Zurich, the Capodimonte Museum in Naples, the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, the Gallerie dell’Accademia in Venice, the Louvre Museum (Paris and Abu Dhabi) and numerous others in France, including the Fabre Museum in Montpellier, the Museum of Fine Arts in Orleans Orléans, and the Museum of Grenoble. It is a measure of the respect in which the Galerie Canesso is held that some of these prestigious clients have lent paintings acquired through Galerie Canesso back to the Galerie for its 30th Anniversary exhibition.



The Galerie's owner and director, Maurizio Canesso (above), has a particular passion not only for the painting of his native region Lombardy, but for Venetian painters from the 14th to 18th centuries. His family roots were originally from Venice.

In his early twenties Canesso made his first investment in the art world, acquiring a painting by Pier Francesco Mazzucchelli, known as "Il Morazzone" (1573- 1626), which he promptly resold. During this period, he had the opportunity to meet and get involved with prominent figures in the field of art and culture, including art historian Giovanni Testori (1923-1993) and literary scholar Dante Isella (1922-2007), an erudite collector with a penchant for the 17th century, who soon became his first client.

At the age of 22, Canesso acquired an unfinished painting by Carlo Portelli (circa 1508- 1574), which was purchased for the Uffizi - where it is still displayed - by its director Luciano Berti (1922-2010).

Canesso's impressive talent caught the attention of Piero Corsini, who decided to support him in his journey, marking the beginning of a new phase in his career. This not only marked the start of a new adventure for Canesso but also solidified his relationships with institutions and museums.

Between 1983 and 1988, Canesso undertook numerous trips around the world – to the United States, Latin America, France, Italy, Germany – participating in auctions and personally inspecting artworks

at private collections, in order to accurately describe them over the phone to Corsini; at that time the internet and mobile phones were inexistent.

In 1988, Maurizio Canesso, still working alongside Corsini, embarked on a new path towards independence. He relocated to Paris, on rue Saint-Dominique, where he established his residence with his family and decided to start his own business. In the years leading up to the opening of his first gallery, Canesso devoted himself to honing his skills. Through interactions with art historians and industry experts, he deepened his knowledge of the masters of the past, thus building his universe around Old Master painting, the subject of his continuous research and study. With discretion and patience, he consistently worked to shape his future around the passion that drives him, a passion he could almost tangibly feel.

Feeling ready, in 1994, he inaugurated his first gallery, an upstairs space without shop windows, aiming to preserve the purity of the contemplative art experience, avoiding urban interferences that could disturb the visitors' gaze. "The work of art suspends time," Pierre Bonnard once asserted. Finally free to express his taste and share his knowledge, Canesso embarked on a continuous discovery of new works and experiences in the world of Old Masters. Discovery, study, promotion, and sharing became integral parts of his daily routine. His foresight has taught him the importance of patience when faced with an artistic gem. "It is essential to appreciate and value a painting before considering parting with it," explains Canesso. "Balancing the desire to share with the need for a measured management of artworks is one of the great challenges of the profession," he continues.

In 2010, Canesso expanded his presence by opening a gallery in Lugano, while in 2021, he inaugurated a new space in the heart of Milan's historic Brera district, entrusting its direction to Ginevra Agliardi. "After years spent away from Italy, it is a great pleasure to return to my native region, which has always been the focus of my artistic interests," said Canesso.

Exhibition Highlights

Showcased in Paris and Milan

Galerie Canesso on May 15th in Paris (6pm-9pm) and May 23rd in Milan (3pm-8pm)

Maurizio Canesso has cultivated strong friendships with the majority of his clients, which now allows him, on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of his gallery, to present during this exhibition the artworks he has sold to them and which they are pleased to lend him for the event. Between 1994 and 2024, approximately a thousand paintings have passed through his hands destined for museums and private collectors. Naturally, not all of these works can be displayed, considering the limited size of the gallery. Therefore, a careful selection has been made to express the essence of the art of the ancient masters, to which Canesso passionately dedicates his commitment and thorough work. The gallery continues, alongside participation in major professional events such as TEFAF, the Biennale di Firenze, and Italics, with an exhibition programme at its two spaces – in Paris and Milan – in an effort to continuously promote Italian art.

Maurizio Canesso reveals that an uncommon client has over time become one of his most loyal collectors of Baroque paintings. The client's first acquisition, intuitive and spontaneous, was an important and rare *Saint John the Baptist* by Tazio da Varallo, acquired in 2000. A year later, the client shared: "The exhibition that inspired me to build a collection worthy of its name was the one I just saw at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, *The Genius of Rome 1592-1623*." Since then, numerous purchases followed, some driven by the heart and others more considered, such as Bernardo Strozzi's *Musicians with Wind Instruments*, also present for the gallery's thirtieth anniversary. Study trips have strengthened the bond between collector and dealer: from the Sacro Monte of

Varallo in the footsteps of Tazio da Varallo, to Genoa, following the traces of Bernardo Strozzi, and later to Naples. The time had come to personally explore the Italy he so cherished.

“The *Saint John the Baptist* by Tazio was exhibited in New York and, sold shortly thereafter, has never been presented in the Canesso gallery in Paris, just like Bernardo Strozzi’s *The Musicians with Wind Instruments*. That is why Canesso is particularly delighted to be able to showcase them to a wide audience today.”

The iconography of Saint John the Baptist, a young ascetic preaching in the Judaeian wilderness, perfectly expresses the tense and exalted style of the Lombard Caravaggesque artist, present in Rome since 1600. Tazio portrays a figure in action, as evidenced by the expressive hands and gaze, the illuminated strands of hair swirling around his head, the precise and energetic rendering of features, with an eye for immediate realism, vibrant in execution.

The masterpiece by the Genoese artist Bernardo Strozzi is particularly inspired in its use of colour as an expressive medium, thanks to broad, summary brushstrokes that make this joyful concert of wind instruments remarkably brilliant in its execution.



Antonio d'Enrico, called Tazio da Varallo (Riale d'Alagna, 1575 or 1580?-Varallo Sesia, 1632/1633), *Saint John the Baptist in the Wilderness*, oil on canvas, 159 x 112 cm, Between 1616 et 1620, Private collection



Bernardo Strozzi, (Genoa 1581/1582-Venice, 1644), *The Musicians with Wind Instruments*, oil on canvas, 115 x 156 cm, circa 1630-1635, Private collection



Evaristo Baschenis (Bergamo, 1617-1677), *Still Life with Musical Instruments*, oil on canvas. 79 x 98 cm, circa 1665-1670, Private collection. On display at Galleria Canesso, Milan

In 2022, Galerie Canesso in Paris inaugurated the first exhibition in France dedicated to the Bergamasque artist Evaristo Baschenis, renowned for his affinity with musical instruments, which he portrays as suspended and silent moments in time. This prestigious exhibition was made possible through collaboration with the Accademia Carrara in Bergamo and the Teatro alla Scala Museum in Milan. The collection of the artist's masterpieces has generated significant interest from the world of Baroque music – both instrument makers, who draw inspiration from the paintings so precise in their representation to create their own pieces, and musicians, music historians, and enthusiasts.

During this event, a specific musical score was identified in one of the paintings that will be exhibited in the Milan gallery. The score, clearly visible on the spinet, was identified as a madrigal by the Flemish composer Roland de Lassus (Orlando di Lasso, Mons, 1532-Munich, 1594) with texts by Petrarch (1304-1374), a composition dedicated to his beloved Laura, celebrating the moral qualities of the young woman, and her divine beauty. This discovery is particularly significant, as together with the painting from the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Brussels, it is the only work by Baschenis to feature a legible and interpretable score.

The catalogue published on the occasion of the exhibition offers a unique opportunity to deepen knowledge of Baschenis's oeuvre, whose output outside of Italy is limited; in fact, French public collections do not include any of his works.



Alessandro Magnasco (Genoa, 1667-1749), *Homage to Pluto*, oil on canvas, 87 x 117 cm, Circa 1735-1740, Private collection

The Homage to Pluto and the *Jewish Funeral* (Paris, Museum of Jewish Art and History, inv. D.2010.03.001; on deposit at the Louvre Museum) were likely conceived as complementary works. These two masterpieces by the artist both originate from the prestigious Genoese collection assembled by a distinguished financier, Orazio Bagnasco (1927-1999), a man of refined culture and passionate

about the history of Italian cuisine; he possessed an extensive library related to the latter. In the late 1990s, Maurizio Canesso had the opportunity to acquire his collection of paintings, then located in Lugano. It is from this collection that the wonderful composition *The Musicians with Wind Instruments* by Bernardo Strozzi, presented in the exhibition, also comes.

A nonconformist painter, Alessandro Magnasco had never benefited from a monographic exhibition in France before Galerie Canesso organized one at its premises in 2016, in collaboration with the Musei di Strada Nuova - Palazzo Bianco in Genoa. Among the exhibited works was prominently featured the *Homage to Pluto*, which presents in a dark setting a cemetery populated by bare trees and pagan tombs in the shape of pyramids.

In the centre, a statue of Pluto, king of the underworld, looms. Around the altar, goat-legged satyrs of all ages play the tambourine and Pan pipes. A young faun, in the foreground, plays a shell while a female satyr and a young woman, symmetrically arranged in front of the altar, blow long transverse flutes. The composition, perfectly balanced by the symmetry of the figurative elements, is animated by a strong dynamism of forms traced with rapid brushstrokes, the true signature of his mature style. More than to the mythological genre, this composition – due to the allusive dimension of the dark and satanic presences – approaches representations linked to the theme of witchcraft that the Genoese artist created towards the end of his life.



Gaspare Traversi, (Naples, 1722-Rome, 1770), *The Card Game*, oil on canvas, 48 x 62 cm, circa 1750, Carla and Francesco Valerio Collection, Geneva



Giuseppe Bonito (Castellammare, di Stabia, 1707- Naples, 1789), *The Painter's Studio*, oil on canvas, 168 x 235 cm, circa 1738-1740, Carla and Francesco Valerio Collection, Geneva

In the current exhibition, several Neapolitan paintings originate from a prestigious collection, that of Carla and Francesco Valerio, with whom the Galerie Canesso has established a relationship since the 1990s. Francesco Valerio, who left Naples to pursue an international career, remained a passionate advocate of the art of his hometown, which he collected with dedication. The collection, located in Geneva, has led to numerous exhibitions and publications.

The oil painting *The Card Game* by the Rococo painter Gaspare Traversi depicts two young boys from the Neapolitan society of his time, immersed in a chiaroscuro atmosphere reminiscent of the naturalistic painting of the early 17th century, absorbed in a game of cards. Both are portrayed in the foreground: the street boy, illuminated, lowers his cards to triumphantly show – as indicated by his smile – the Ace of Coins, the winning card!

The rediscovery in France of this masterpiece by Giuseppe Bonito – future court painter to the king of Naples and subsequently director of the Academy of Fine Arts – representing *The Painter's Studio*, bears vibrant witness to the social status of the artist in Naples in the mid-18th century. This large format, in which the numerous figures are portrayed almost life-size, transports us into a both creative and worldly universe, where young apprentices, each intent on drawing, mingle with important patrons of the artist. The identity of these noble gentlemen observing the artist at work, and who one imagines exchanging opinions on the composition taking shape, has not been revealed by the artist's biographer De Dominici (1742-1745) who describes the painting, but we hope that one day it will find resolution.

Below is a selection of paintings Galerie Canesso has sold to Museums in the past decades.

- Luca Cambiaso (Moneglia, 1527 – Madrid, 1585), *Venus and Adonis*, Louvre Museum, Paris
<https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010067425>

- Gioacchino Assereto (Genoa, 1600-1650), *Joas saved from Athalia's persecution*, Louvre Museum, Paris
<https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010391683>

- Charlotte Eustache Sophie de Fuligny Damas, marquise de Grollier (Paris, 1741 – Épinay-sur-Seine, 1828), *Still Life with a Vase of Flowers, Melon, Peaches, and Grapes*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/888924>

- Pompeo Batoni (Lucca, 1708 – Rome, 1787), *Vulcan at his forge*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
<https://www.gallery.ca/magazine/in-the-spotlight/pompeo-batoni-italy-1708-1787>

- Vittore Ghislandi, detto Fra' Galgario (Bergamo, 1655-1743), *Portrait of a Young Gentleman*, Accademia Carrara, Bergamo
<https://www.lacarrara.it/notizia/un-capolavoro-di-fra-galgario-entra-nelle-collezioni-di-accademia-carrara-di-bergamo-grazie-alla-direzione-regionale-musei-lombardia-e-al-mibact/>

- Paris Bordon (c. 1527-1530), *Rest on the flight into Egypt with Saint Catherine and angels*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/81173/>

- Camillo Mainardi (1544/1549-1608), *'Amore Castigato' (Mars flogs Love pursued by a Fury)*, Gallerie degli Uffizi, Firenze
<https://www.canesso.art/artworkdetail/779972/0/the-chastisement-of-love-mars-whipping>
<https://www.uffizi.it/en/news/uffizi-galleries-2022>

- Giulia Lama (1681-1747), *Samson et Dalila*, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venezia
<https://www.latribunedelart.com/un-tableau-de-giulia-lama-acquis-pour-venise?lang=fr>
<https://www.artribune.com/arti-visive/arte-moderna/2023/07/mostra-galleria-accademia-veneziana-nuove-acquisizioni/>

- Leonello Spada (1576 - 1622), *La Lamentation sur le Christ mort*, Musée Fabre, Montpellier
https://www.museefabre.fr/recherche/musee%3AMUS_BIEN%3A15396?is_recherch_page=1&search=spada¤tPage=1

- Pompeo Batoni (Lucca, 1708 – Rome, 1787), *Bacchus and Cerere*, musée des Beaux-Arts d'Orléans
https://www.larep.fr/orleans-45000/loisirs/trois-bonnes-raisons-de-decouvrir-le-nouveau-parcours-xviii-du-musee-des-beaux-arts-d-orleans_12861284/
<https://www.latribunedelart.com/deux-batoni-pour-orleans-7255-7255?lang=fr>

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