

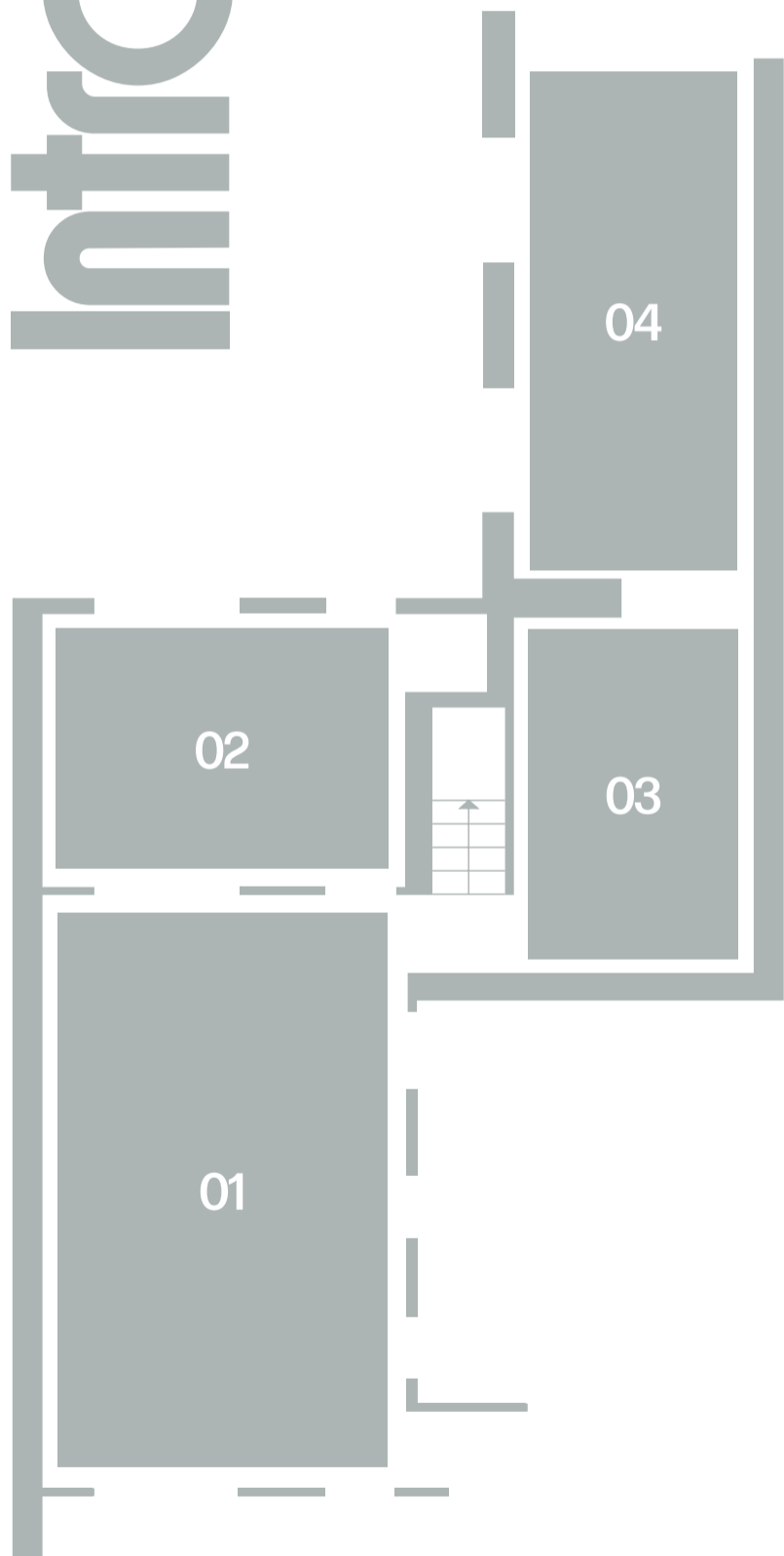


The Mountain Style  
of the Italian Woman  
1922-1945

Curated by  
Grazia d'Annunzio, Elena Pala,  
Emanuela Scarpellini

Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò  
New York University  
November 20th, 2025 - March 13th, 2026

# Introduction



Between 1922 and 1945, Italy endured the tragedy of Benito Mussolini's fascist dictatorship. Once in power, Mussolini turned the liberal State into a totalitarian regime through the so-called "fascist laws", which denied all freedom of expression, information and association. Mussolini aimed to bring about an anthropological revolution to create a new Italian man (and woman), the fascist Italian ready to give his life for Mussolini's Italy. Mussolini would later ask Italians to sacrifice their lives on the altar of his imperial ambitions in a crescendo that culminated in Italy's participation in World War II and the drama of civil war.

In this totalitarian context, two female archetypes coexisted. The first was the "crisis-woman", cosmopolitan, urban and demographically in the minority. The other, in the majority, was the "mother woman": patriotic, rural, prosperous, strong and prolific.

Two models of womanhood that clashed, but did not collide because they were proposed to two female worlds that were not only socially and culturally distinct, but also uncommunicative. The regime pursued a family-oriented society, but at the same time did not want to make enemies of modernity or the social groups that cultivated it.

Visitors to this exhibition will encounter the first female archetype. She was a cultivated, middle-class woman, often portrayed in the so called "white telephone" films, and captured in this exhibition in her free time in the winter alpine scenery of the Dolomites. She was an Italian woman who could afford to keep up with fashion, learn about new trends, buy glossy magazines, play sports and spend her free time in the mountains, despite the turmoil of the era.

Stefano Albertini  
*Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò at New York University*  
 Roberto Chiarini  
*Centro Studi Rsi (Salò, Italy)*  
 Alessandro Luparini  
*Fondazione Casa di Oriani (Ravenna, Italy)*  
 Emanuela Scarpellini  
*MIC - Università degli Studi di Milano (Italy)*



01



02



03



04

- 01 Dressing "Fashionably" on the Ski Slopes
- 02 The Elegance of Fur
- 03 Cortina d'Ampezzo, the "Queen of the Dolomites"
- 04 Female Readings at high Altitude + Autarchic Textiles

# Dressing “Fashionably” On the Ski Slopes

Defying the Fascist regime’s call for wartime austerity, the stylish Italian woman champions the ski slopes as a space for sartorial expression.

As winter approaches, she eagerly seeks the *ensemble de ski* best suited to her figure and aspirations.

The exhibition’s opening gallery showcases a range of images and illustrations of ski garments very much *en vogue* in the 1930s and 1940s.

While seemingly simple in construction, these pieces reveal a sophisticated understanding of line and form, elevated by subtle yet striking details. Designers of fashion sketches draw inspiration not only from Italian traditions, but also from the cinematic fantasies of the era, particularly the glamorous international divas gracing the screens of the Venice Film Festival, a venue founded in 1932.

The importance of image is reinforced by the era’s glossy magazines. Their pages are filled with advice, encouraging women to adopt a regime of pre-skiing exercises, the first step – as those arbiters of style declared, being a daily ritual practiced within the privacy of one’s own room – for a very public performance of chic.



Clockwise, from top left

Actress Vera Carmi, stage name of Virginia Doglioli, in an ivory waterproof jacket with red trim by Voga-Torino, early 1940s

Grey ski gabardine trousers and colourful checked wool blouse by Voga-Torino, early 1940s

Merino wool jacket with diagonal check pattern by Viscardi, early 1940s

Black pony and red reindeer skin handbag, and brown gloves by Voga-Torino, early 1940s

Leopard-print slippers lined with white sheepskin by Voga Torino, early 1940s

Brown pony skin shoes with cork soles and wool socks by Voga-Torino, early 1940s

Sheepskin shoes with snake-trimmed soles by Voga-Torino, early 1940s



MODELLI DI "DONNA"

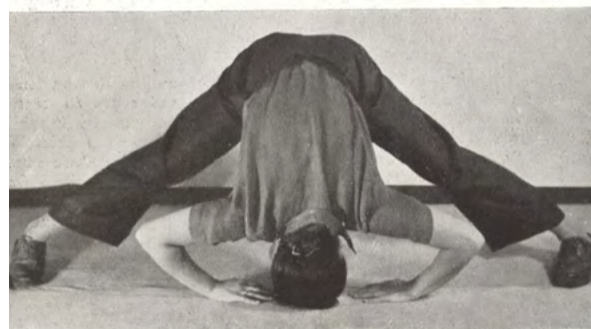
Sketches of women ski apparels, 1930s

From left to right

Brown corduroy ski suit with a bolero jacket; orange and brown knitted sweater matching with gloves and a little beret

Green waterproof heavy knitted jacket, white turtleneck wool sweater

Grey suede small bolero jacket and trousers. Bright red pullover matching with scarf and gloves



A good equipment is not enough to make a good skier: women's magazines feature columns on pre-ski exercises to practice at home, 1930s

Bourgeois women are advised to spend a "good quarter of an hour" every morning doing exercises with their boots on to get used to heavy footwear.

As journalist Sandra recommends, in the glossy monthly magazine *La donna*, a regular training would make a day in the snow "a real pleasure rather than back-breaking work."

# The Elegance of Fur

Fur, a perennial signifier of luxury and status, holds particular significance for the Italian *donna borghese* during this period.

Whether strolling through the urban piazza or ascending to the fashionable mountain resort, she embraces the tactile and visual opulence of fur, selecting from a range of models that spoke volumes about her social standing.

The most coveted pelts – sable, blue or silver fox, mink, *kolinsky* and Persian lamb – represent the pinnacle of sartorial refinement, a testament to both wealth and taste.

Yet, the dictates of the Fascist "self-sufficient" program, known as *autarchia*, introduce a fascinating counterpoint. The promotion of domestically sourced materials leads to the rise of more humble furs – rabbit, cat and lamb – cloaked in fanciful names designed to obscure their origins.

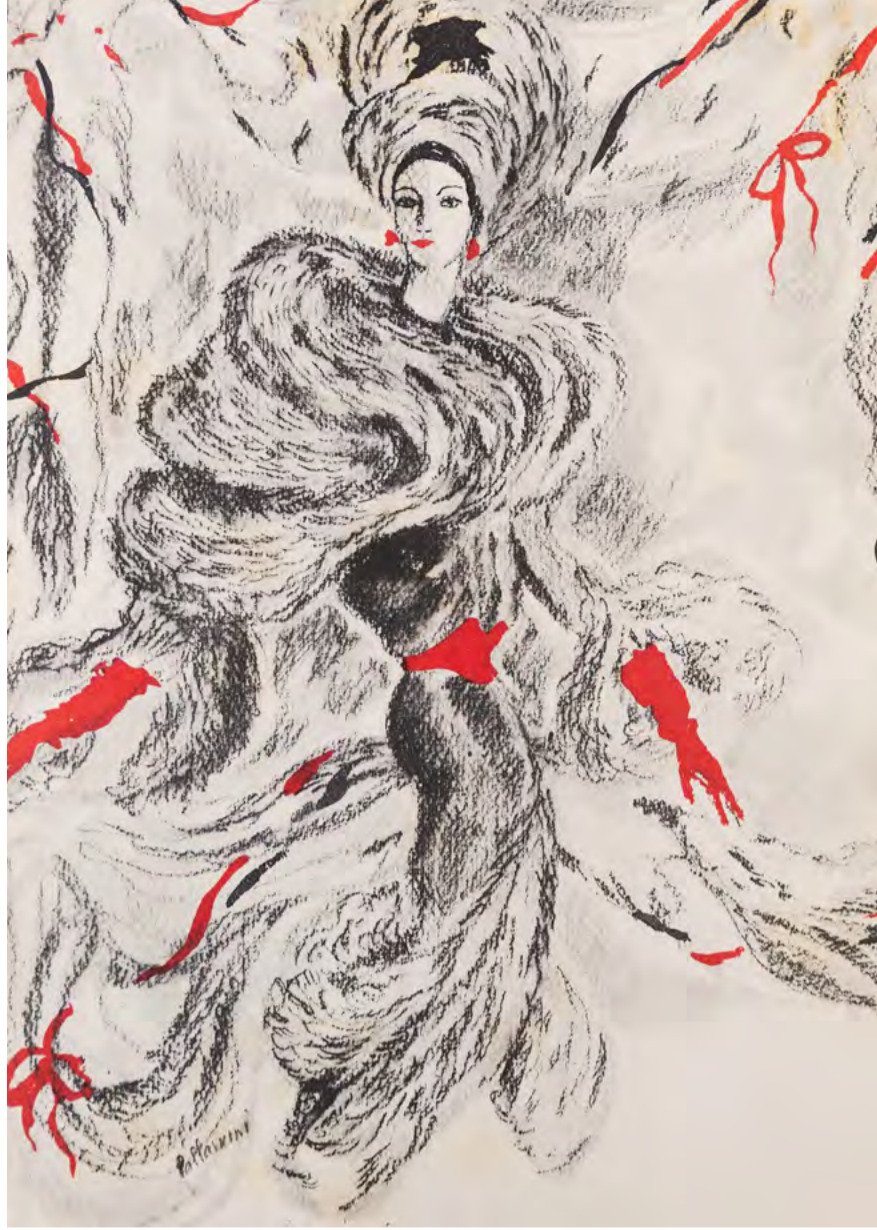
The skill of Italian furriers ensures that appearances remain impeccable.

Through innovative dyeing and processing techniques, they masterfully replicate the look of rarer furs, blurring the lines between authenticity and artifice.

From top to bottom

Sketch of an amazing silver fox trim for a very slim-fitting black cape with wide collar and complemented by an impressive fur hat.  
All by Schettini, 1944

Sketch of a mink cape accessorized with a velvet-knotted muff and a fur and red velvet turban.  
All by Schettini, 1944



It is 1944, just a year before the end of World War II. Despite the scarcity of raw materials, food stamp cards and a daily routine punctuated by bombings, fur designers are studying new creative endeavours.



Clockwise from top left

Fur lined grey cape embellished with long lapels and cuffs closed by elastic comma-shaped dormouse; checked double breasted waistcoat jacket and bias-cut skirt. All by Ferrario, 1944

Wood-brown hat, double-breasted coat pleated in the back and fastened with martingale straps. It is lined with checked brown and gray fabric matching jacket and skirt. All by Ferrario, 1944

Four fur lined cloaks. From left to right: light pink outer fabric, beaver-type rabbit fur lining and beaver collar; hazelnut-grey outer fabric, grey rabbit fur lining and cream short haired fur full-length lapels forming pockets; dark grey-brown striped and squared outer loden, dark brown fur lining; havanna-coloured outer fabric with tabby cat fur lining. All by Tizzoni, 1944

# Cortina d'Ampezzo, the "Queen of the Dolomites"

Cortina d'Ampezzo, famously dubbed the "Queen of the Dolomites," emerges as a key site in the unfolding chapter of Italian fashion and tourism during the interwar period.

While initially the preserve of an aristocratic elite, the allure of alpine leisure gradually extends to encompass a flourishing middle class.

The Fascist regime, ever attuned to the power of propaganda and social control, swiftly recognizes the potential inherent in this burgeoning tourist economy. Oversight of this carefully curated image falls primarily to ENIT, the *Ente Nazionale per le Industrie Turistiche*, which plays a crucial role in shaping Italy's national brand and promoting its vision of a modern, stylish society.

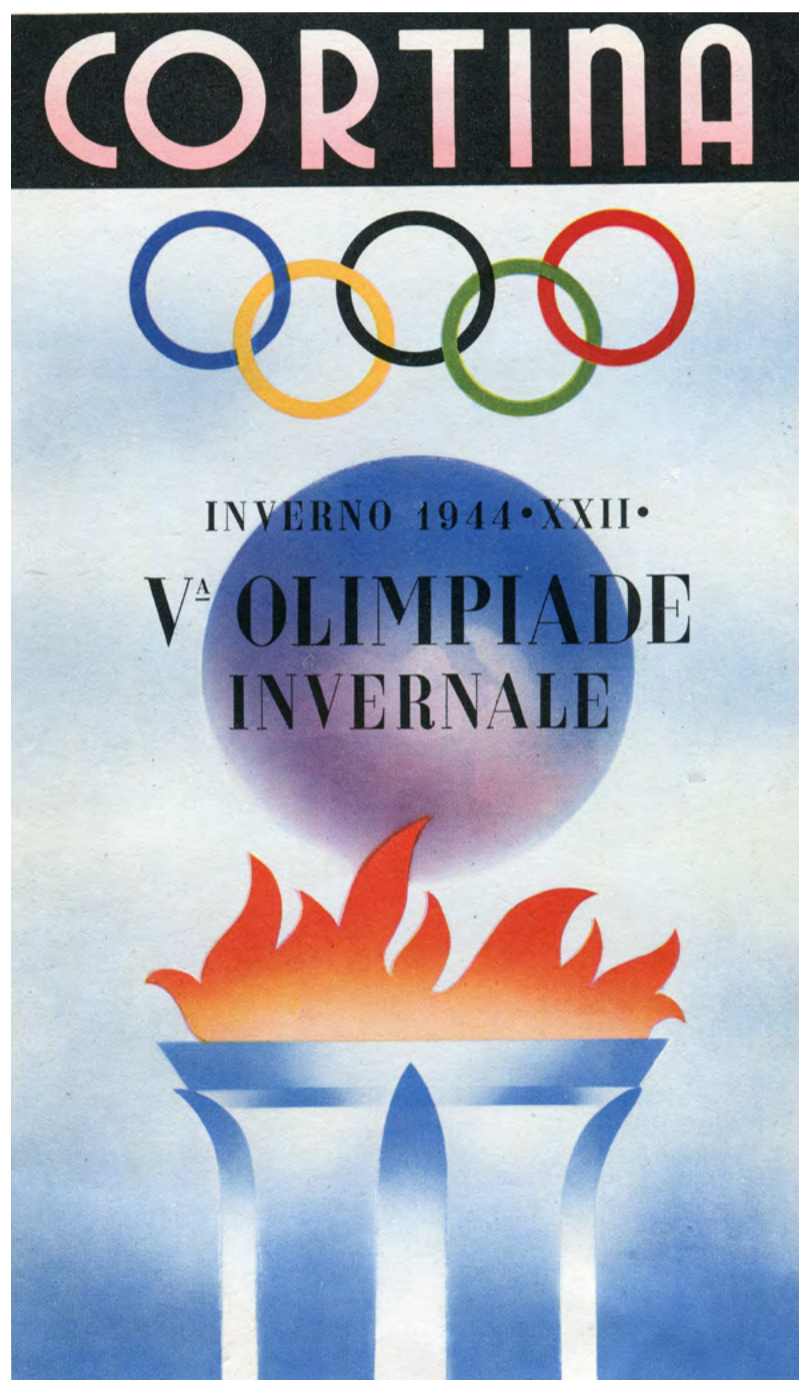
Throughout the 1930s, Cortina cements its status as a favored alpine retreat for the Italian *borghesia*. The resort pulsates with a vibrant social energy, its calendar is punctuated by glittering galas and elegant *tè danzanti*, dancing teas.

These sophisticated gatherings transform Cortina into a microcosm of Italian high society. Notable among these establishments are the

Miramonti Majestic, the Cristallo and the Savoia palatial hotels that epitomize the era's blend of luxury, modernity and alpine charm.

On February 1, 1941, Cortina hosts the World Ski Championships. The town transforms and updates its sports facilities while the flags of the twelve participating countries fluttered in the "Ampezzo valley".

The town briefly seems cut off from the "travail tormenting the world" - the travail of World War II -, which would eventually lead to the cancellation of these games from the official history of the Winter World Championships, as well as the project to host the 1944 Winter Olympics. At last, Cortina would be the site of the Winter Olympic Games in 1956, and will be again, 70 years later, in February 2026.



Cortina. Inverno 1944-XXII -  
Vª Olimpiade Invernale, 1943

Brochure, 10 x 20 cm  
Centro Studi Rsi, Scalo



Advertising the Dolomites on glossy paper, 1930s

*Cortina. Rivista dell'Azienda autonoma di soggiorno e turismo, January 1939, cover*  
 Centro Studi Rsi, Salò

In *Cortina's* January 1939 issue, the illustrator Carlo de Zulian argues that “advertising art possesses a particular resonance.

Its purpose is not creating art for art’s sake, but to captivate and clearly communicate with vibrant simplicity.”

He terms this ethos “the exaltation of form.”

This is especially relevant to tourism in Fascist Italy, where propaganda aims to regiment society. In fact, Mussolini’s ambition strives towards the creation of a new Italian identity and, by extension, a reimagined Italy.

Advertising and tourism tap into the creative talent of the era’s leading illustrators such as Marcello Dudovich, Franz Lenhart and Aldo Raimondi who render Italy’s most picturesque landscapes accessible to an international audience.

De Zulian notes that their artworks “resonate across borders, igniting curiosity and driving a steady influx of foreign visitors, from the dramatic Dolomites to the sunlit coasts of Sicily.”

A standout theme in this visual narrative is “the Dolomitic landscape, an endless source of inspiration known for its striking beauty and almost mystical appeal.”

This iconic setting earns global recognition, leading De Zulian to coin the term “the advertising art of the Dolomites.”



Michele Ortino, *Cortina m. 1224 Dolomiti*, ca. 1937

Poster, 70 x 100 cm  
 Museo Nazionale Collezione Salce,  
 Direzione Regionale dei Musei Veneto,  
 by permission of the Ministry of Culture

# Female Readings at High Altitude

common in wartime defenses, is repurposed for raincoats. In a climate of widespread poverty, clothing becomes a testament to the art of making do, a powerful expression of both necessity and creativity.

The Italian woman seeking to navigate the currents of fashion found inspiration and guidance in a wide array of magazines *Eva*, *Amica*, *Grazia*, *Lidel*, *La Donna* and *Vita Femminile* catered to a diverse readership, each offering its own perspective on style and the evolving role of women in Italian society.

Among these publications, *Bellezza* magazine distinguishes itself through its sophisticated design and intellectual rigor, attracting the talents of influential figures such as the architect and designer Giò Ponti.

*Bellezza's* cultivated readers were aware of the seasons' trends informed about the activities of the *Ente Nazionale della Moda* (National Fashion Authority) – and – most important – are able to understand the significance of the triangular label with the stylized *ENM* logo put on every garments, which certify its truly Italian origin and style.

Yet, while the glossy pages of *Bellezza* present an upper class vision of Italian style, the sartorial realities for the vast majority of women are far more pragmatic. Faced with economic hardship and wartime scarcity, ingenuity and resourcefulness become paramount. The art of *riparazioni*, *riciclo* and *riuso* – repairing, recycling and repurposing – defines the wardrobes of most.

Sweaters and cardigans are fashioned from purchased or salvaged wool, spun with care from the very fibers of cushions.

The most treasured dresses are ingeniously cut from the linen sheets. Silk parachutes are reimagined as elegant garments.

The rubberized fabric of barrage balloons,



Covers of women's magazines, 1920s-1930s

*Grazia*,  
Un'amica al vostro fianco,  
December 1933  
Centro Studi Rsi, Salò

*Vita femminile*,  
January 1926  
Centro Studi Rsi, Salò

*La donna. Rivista mensile di varietà femminile*,  
January 1934  
Fondazione Casa di Oriani,  
Ravenna

*Le grandi firme*,  
6 January 1938  
Centro Studi Rsi, Salò

# Autarchic Textiles



Filippo Tommaso Marinetti,  
*Il Poema del vestito di latte.*  
*Parole in libertà futuriste*, Milano, Ufficio  
Propaganda della Snia Viscosa, 1937

Among Snia Viscosa's successful booklets promoting "new textiles", *Il Poema del vestito di latte* (The Poem of the Milk Dress) is an exceptional one.

An homage to Lanital, a fiber made with a milk protein, this brochure is written in 1937 by the founder of Futurist movement Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and printed by the renowned Milanese Officine Grafiche Esperia.

As Italy moves towards a policy of economic self-sufficiency under the Fascist regime, textiles become a battleground in the pursuit of *autarchia*.

As propaganda declared, these "textiles of autarchy" represent a triumph of Italian ingenuity, a means of liberating the nation from its dependence on foreign imports, which, in the prevailing political climate, are seen as a form of "political servitude."

This drive towards self-reliance spurs experimentation with unconventional materials. Native plants such as hemp and broom are investigated as potential replacements for imported cotton, while wool is even derived from milk, resulting in the creation of Lanital.

For hosiery and undergarments, particularly stockings, rayon and artificial silk become increasingly prevalent.

By 1925 Italy is - after the United States - the world's second largest producer of rayon, a testament to the nation's embrace of innovative, domestically produced textiles.

The regime strategically amplifies the visibility of national textile production through carefully orchestrated public events.

In 1937 Rome hosts the *Mostra del Tessile Nazionale* (National Textile Exhibition), a showcase of Italian innovation and craftsmanship.

Further afield, in 1939, Lanital, Rayon and Sniafiocco (made from wood pulp) are presented as symbols of Italian ingenuity at the New York World's Fair, where these fibers are met with admiration and served as ambassadors for a modern, self-reliant Italy.

16-page booklet, autographed on the cover,  
graphics and illustrations by Bruno Munari,  
24.4 x 34 cm  
Centro Studi Rsi, Salò

# DOLOMITES SKIRAMA

## The Mountain Style of the Italian Woman

### 1922–1945

Curated by  
Grazia d'Annunzio, Elena Pala, Emanuela Scarpellini

November 21th - March 13th 2025  
Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimó at New York University  
24 West 12th Street, New York, N.Y. 10011

Opening November 20th at 6.00 pm

Organization



Centro  
Studi  
Rsi

Part of



With contribution of

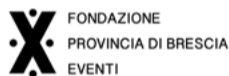


Regione  
Lombardia

In collaboration with



With the support of



Graphic Design  
Stra Studio

Exhibition Design  
Elena Pala with Ilario Furloni

Having obtained all necessary rights for the iconographic material, the curators invite any individuals with related claims to contact them.

Lenders  
Fondazione Casa di Oriani, Ravenna  
Centro Studi Rsi, Salò  
Museo Nazionale Collezione Salce Direzione Regionale dei Musei Veneto

Video Credit  
Istituto Luce, Roma

The curators extend their sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to this project, especially Domenico De Maio, Raffaella Paniè, Cristina Clerici, Maria Teresa Squillaci, Emma Tondo, Livia Draghi, Isabella Balestri and Fanny Monange (Fondazione Milano Cortina 2026), Elena e Enzo Cibaldi, Mario Valzelli, Alessandro Luparini and Mirko Bonanni.

Technical Sponsor



COMMUNICATION FACTORY  
WWW.VPP.IT



ESTRAL

Logistics Partners

