



CENTRO STUDI  
DI CIVILTÀ E SPIRITUALITÀ  
COMPARATE  
*fondazione* ONLUS  
GIORGIO CINI

Archivio  
Luigi Pericle

## Utopia, Art, and Spirituality

Research Scholarship 2025, Venice/Ascona



@Luigi Pericle

We are pleased to announce the second postgraduate research fellowship in collaboration between the [Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities](#) of the Cini Foundation of Venice (Italy) and the [Archivio Luigi Pericle](#) of Ascona (Switzerland). The successful applicant of the “**Utopia, Art and Spirituality**” grant will have the opportunity to spend **two months at the Cini Foundation** and **two months at the Hotel Ascona - Archivio Luigi Pericle**. The fellowship offers 4 months accommodation in Venice and Ascona (2 for each institution) and a grant of 1.200 euro (gross amount).

The selected candidate:

- ◇ is a **PhD student or postdoctoral researcher**, with a background in history of religions, socio-anthropology of religions, or history of art;
- ◇ will work on the relationship between religion and art in Central Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with special focus on the **intellectual, religious, and political movements connected to Theosophy, Monte Verità, Archivio Luigi Pericle, and Eranos**;
- ◇ will have access to the libraries and archives of the Cini Foundation and Archivio Luigi Pericle. Furthermore, she/he will visit and have access to Monte Verità Foundation, the Municipal Museum of Modern Art of Ascona, the San Materno Theatre, the Eranos Foundation, the Marguerite Arp Foundation, the Remo Rossi Foundation, and the Hermann Hesse Museum among other places, and Research Centre of the Swiss Theosophical Society.
- ◇ will produce a **scientific article** based on the research carried during this fellowship.

How to apply:

- ◇ Send a **curriculum vitae** and a **research project** (around 1,500 words not including bibliography), specifying aims, time scale, and if possible, materials and documents to be consulted to [civilta.comparate@cini.it](mailto:civilta.comparate@cini.it)
- ◇ **Deadline 28<sup>th</sup> of February**
- ◇ Both positive and negative results will be communicated by the 15<sup>th</sup> of March.

The scientific committee:

- ◇ Francesco Piraino (Cini Foundation / Università di Bologna)
- ◇ Andrea and Greta Biasca-Caroni (Archivio Luigi Pericle)
- ◇ Andreas Kilcher (ETH Zurich)
- ◇ Pascal Rousseau (Université Paris 1 Panthéon)
- ◇ Claudia Tobin (Cambridge University/Royal Drawing School)

# The institutions of this network

## **. Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilizations and Spiritualities, Cini Foundation - Venice, Italy**

In keeping with its own history and tradition, the Giorgio Cini Foundation has created a Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities. The new Centre has evolved naturally from the previous Venice and the East Institute, which was founded in 1958 with the principal aim of promoting the study of the civilisations of India and the Far East. The Centre focuses on the study of different cultures, religions and spiritualities from a comparative perspective. This comparison is intended as an instrument for promoting dialogue between civilisations, in order to discuss ideas, but also political, theoretical and aesthetic experiences.

Among the projects we intend to develop are: – Mysticism, esotericism, spirituality and popular religion are elusive concepts, which, as Michel De Certeau states, “haunt” the epistemology of the contemporary social sciences. We welcome interdisciplinary works on these concepts, connecting philosophical reflections, social sciences and theologies. Scholars are invited to work in the library of the Centre, which hosts a rich collection on Orientalism, colonial literature, exotericism, and comparative religions. – The boundaries between science and religion are often blurred. Some historians, Orientalists and psychoanalysts of the 20th century, such as Mircea Eliade, Henry Corbin, and Carl Gustav Jung, have been called “religionist”; they have, in fact, mixed conceptions and experiences of the sacred together with historical and scientific descriptions. A current within the new religious movements and the New Age culture, called “Quantum Mysticism”, has been adopting the narratives of the natural sciences. Completely different is the “ontological turn” described by contemporary anthropology, which opens up to the possibility of other realities and dimensions. We invite scholars to explore the boundaries between science, culture and religion. – The relationship with the Other. Almost every religion faces otherness, and problematises the border between “us” and “them”. The border could be cultural, ethnic, linguistic, or linked to sexual orientation and gender identity. We ask scholars to discuss religious boundaries. How is the Other perceived? Who is the infidel? How do these borders move according to the political and social context? – Between New and Old Age. The social sciences have tried to describe changes in religious practices in contemporary societies by employing new categories, such as “religious modernity”, “bricolage”, “post-secular”, and “New Age”. The risk is to fall into presentism, ascribing all the characteristics of religious phenomena to the so-called modern turn. We therefore propose to investigate the relationships between old and new trends within religious phenomena. – Phenomenology of the religious body: perceptions, emotions, sensations and construction of the body. We invite scholars to describe and understand the intertwining of body, perception, understanding and culture. – Projects dedicated to the study and valorisation of the Tiziano Terzani Archive, donated by the family to the Giorgio Cini Foundation, containing personal documents and photographs.

The Library of the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities has several collections specialised in Eastern culture with an emphasis on the great spiritual traditions both in the East and the West. Among these stand out those of Alain Daniélou, Tiziano Terzani, and Giovanni Vacca. Furthermore, thanks to the Daniélou Bequest, the Centre preserves an enormous collection of manuscript copies of sacred musicological treatises from Indian traditions and books useful for the study of traditional philosophy. The library is equally specialised in journals dedicated to the comparative study of cultures, which the Cini Foundation is committed to updating every year. The Beijing Imperial Library microfilm archive is a further very valuable resource in the collections.

## **. Archivio Luigi Pericle, Ascona, Switzerland**

Luigi Pericle (Basel, 1916 – Ascona, 2001), illustrator, writer, scholar of Theosophy and of esoteric doctrines, and above all painter, was an artist completely outside the canons, and artistic currents of the 20th century. Of Italian origin (his father was from the Marches region), after his early figurative phase,

at the age of about 40 he destroyed all his previous works to set out on a new path towards *informel* abstractism and new experimental techniques. He exhibited in museums in Switzerland and the United Kingdom, and in leading galleries in the 1960s together with great artists of the time such as Karel Appel, Georg Baselitz, Joseph Beuys, Jean Dubuffet, Sam Francis, Alberto Giacometti, Asger Jorn, Henri Michaux, Pablo Picasso, Jean-Paul Riopelle and Antoni Tàpies. At the peak of his career, after 1965, he decided to withdraw from the art system, to give up society life and to devote himself solely to artistic research and to esoteric studies, retiring to his house in Ascona, on Monte Verità. In voluntary hermitage, he died at the beginning of the new millennium, but for recent years now his work has been rediscovered enthusiastically by critics and by the general public.

Having fallen into oblivion, his work was unexpectedly rediscovered in December 2016 after the purchase of his house on Monte Verità, which proved to be a vast treasure trove of paintings and drawings. The figure of Pericle and the hidden patrimony that he left in silence have now become the subject of rediscovery, study and valorization. The non-profit association that bears his name was founded in 2019, followed by a series of exhibitions and cultural initiatives in institutions around the world – from the Querini Stampalia Foundation for the Venice Biennale (2019), to the MASI in Lugano (2021) and the Estorick Collection of London (2022) – as well as participation in collective thematic exhibitions such as *Gribouillage/Scarabocchio da Leonardo da Vinci a Cy Twombly* at the French Academy in Rome (2022) and the Beaux-Arts of Paris (2023). In March 2024, the monographic exhibition *Luigi Pericle. D'un monde à l'autre* (15 March – 18 August 2024) opened at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in collaboration with the Musée National de l'Automobile of Mulhouse, France. The association has established partnerships with the Ca' Foscari University of Venice, the University of Bergamo, the Royal Drawing School and the Warburg Institute, and intends to offer students and researchers the opportunity to explore the art and the philosophy of Luigi Pericle and the local cultural scene of the time, a unique combination of art and spirituality.

At the Archivio Luigi Pericle, the recipient of the scholarship will be able to study the thousands of works executed by the artist on canvas, masonite and paper, and also to access his library, packed with texts that bear witness to his many interests and wide-ranging knowledge. Pericle knew Italian, German, English, French, Greek (he read Homer in the Greek), and studied Chinese, Japanese and other languages. The library contains the volumes read by Pericle to deepen his knowledge of theosophy, anthroposophy, astrology, Egyptology, ufology, Oriental philosophies, integral yoga, homeopathy, esoterism, Zen, Buddhism and alchemy; as well as journals and various other texts on Oriental and Indian religions and medicines, for a total of over 1,500 volumes. The Archive houses more than 14,000 original documents, divided by genre and content: 70 notebooks with over 4,000 pages of manuscript notes, sketches, schemata, and glossaries; 1,500 plates of manuscript horoscopes; 800 letters, either original or facsimile reproductions, which record the artist's correspondence with scholars, gallery-owners, directors, spiritual masters, art historians and critics, including Hans Hess, Herbert Read, Hans Richter, the New York publisher Macmillan and the London art gallery Arthur Tooth & Sons; 50 manuscripts, including poetry collections and two copies (one manuscript and the other typescript, both original) of his unpublished novel *Bis Ans Ende Der Zeiten* (Until the End of Time), completed in 1996, as well as copies of the only chapter published, entitled *Amduat*; over 200 manuscript texts on various subjects, including diaries, notes, sketches, poems, short stories and reflections, catalogued by type. A special section of the Archive is devoted to his comic strips, original cartoons, and copies of the illustrations contained in his most famous book, *Max the Marmot*.

### **. Swiss Theosophical Society**

The Theosophical Society (T.S.) was founded in New York on 17 November 1875 and declared a Moral Entity in Madras (India) on 3 April 1905. Among its founders were H.P. Blavatsky (1831-1891) and H.S. Olcott (1832-1907), who were its pioneers. The Theosophical Society is a non-political and non-religious international association, united in the principle of human brotherhood. Apart from this fundamental principle, the members of the Theosophical Society have no obligatory credo or faith: the association is based on the fundamental right to free research and the consequent respect for all ideas. The Research Centre of the Swiss Theosophical Society has its home at the Hotel Ascona, where

it holds regular meetings and seminars. The Centre has a theosophical library that is open for consultation and hosts weekly meetings of the *Fraternitas* study group of Ascona every Tuesday. The aim of the Centre is to promote the study of theosophy, comparative spirituality, art and their expressions, as well as their role in culture.

### **. Monte Verità Foundation, Ascona, Switzerland**

Monte Verità is a place of extraordinary cultural significance. Born from the vestiges of the plan for the lay theosophical convent *Fraternitas* (1889) developed by Alfredo Pioda (1848-1909), Franz Hartmann (1838-1912) and Constance Wachtmeister (1838-1910) – the last close collaborators of H.P. Blavatsky (1831-1891) – from 1900 it became home to a Utopian community. During the course of the twentieth century few other places hosted such a large number of innovative figures; among them, for example, Rudolf von Laban, a leading figure in modern dance and one of the main exponents of “free dance”. Artists, writers, philosophers, dancers, all attracted by the desire to find like-minded people with whom they could share a path of artistic and spiritual research. The history and personalities who inhabited this place come alive in the various buildings that make up the museum complex: the Casa Anatta Museum, which houses Harald Szeemann’s historic exhibition “Monte Verità. Le mammelle della verità”; the Casa Selma air-light hut, built in 1904 by the first settlers, where visitors can see a film on the history of Monte Verità; the House of the Russians (Casa dei russi), now the seat of temporary exhibitions, whose name pays tribute to the presence of numerous Russian students at Monte Verità after 1910; the Elisarion Pavilion, which houses Elisar von Kupffer’s work *Il chiaro mondo dei beati* (1920-1939).

### **. Ascona Museum of Modern Art, Switzerland**

The collection was born in 1922, when many of the artists who had come to Ascona decided to donate their work with the aim of creating the Ascona Museum of Modern Art. Among the most important works are those of Alexej von Jawlensky, Cuno Amiet and Paul Klee, gifts made to the Russian painter Marianne von Werefkin, as well as some of her works. The collection was gradually expanded over the following years. Particularly well represented is the work of Der Grosse Bär, the group formed in 1924 by Werefkin herself, with the Germans Walter Helbig and Otto Niemeyer-Holstein, the Swiss Albert Kohler and Ernst Frick, the Dutch artist Otto van Rees and the American Gordon Mallet McCouch. The collection also contains important works by Marcel Janco, Arthur Segal, César Domela and Hermann Hesse.

Among more recent acquisitions are various works by Luigi Pericle, Julius Bissier, Ben Nicholson and Italo Valenti, a tempera painting by Marino Marini, a polychrome head by Hermann Haller; and several important collections, like those of Carl Weidemeyer Bes, Charlotte Bara and Anna Iduna Zehnder. The museum houses the collection of the Marianne Werefkin Foundation, which with around 90 paintings and 170 sketchbooks is the most important of this remarkable artist, a key figure of the avantgarde linked to the Blue Rider group (Der Blaue Reiter). Always in search of spiritualistic and theosophical ideals, which she had already begun to seek in the 1880s when she was still studying with Ilya Repin, Werefkin opened the way to a new aesthetics, now known above all thanks to the abstract works of Kandinsky and Klee.

### **. Botanical Gardens of the Brissago Islands, Switzerland**

The two Brissago islands, on Lake Maggiore opposite the gulf of Ascona, are home to the only island botanical gardens in Switzerland, rich in subtropical species from all over the world. At the centre of the larger of the islands stands Villa Emden, the elegant neo-classical residence built in the 1930s by Max Emden. The Roman baths, the orangerie and the dock also date to the same period. The islands were owned by Baroness Antoniette di Saint-Léger (1856-1948), who had saved them from neglect and turned them into a home open to artists: famous painters, sculptors, composers and writers frequented the islands regularly until 1927. It is to her that we owe the foundation of the Botanical Gardens, which opened to the public on 2 April 1950. Antoinette Saint-Léger was a great friend of theosophers such as the lawyer Francesco Balli, the mayor of Locarno, the artist Filippo Franzoni and the sculptor Paolo Troubetzkoy, who came to theosophy thanks to his mother Ada Troubetzkoy (née

Winans). Séances and concerts were held here, and the Baroness also possessed an extensive library and a rich collection of art works and objects. She was visited on the island by the painter Daniele Ranzoni and the Irish writer James Joyce, who found inspiration here for *Ulysses*, especially the Sirens and Circe episodes. Later Antoinette also frequented the painters Gordon McCouch and Marianne Werefkin, among others.

#### **. Casorella Museum, Locarno, Switzerland**

The Museo Casorella undertakes the task of enhancing the artistic heritage of Locarno, which counts about 4,500 works, including paintings, sculptures, and prints. Together with a series of sculptures, reliefs, canvases and tapestries by Jean Arp, the museum houses works by important 20th-century artists such as Joseph Albers, Willi Baumeister, Michel Berkelaers, Camille Bryen, Sonia Delaunay, Piero Dorazio, Viking Eggeling, Max Ernst, Fritz Glarner, Walter Helbig, Johannes Itten, Marcel Janco, Lajos Kassák, Paul Klee, Alberto Magnelli, Piet Mondrian, Meret Oppenheim, Francis Picabia, Hans Richter, Arthur Segal, Sophie Täuber, Theo van Doesburg, Victor Vasarely and Alexej von Jawlensky.

The museum also houses a series of paintings by Filippo Franzoni (1857-1911), the renowned artist from Locarno who frequented Monte Verità, studied theosophy and became a follower of spiritism. Around the turn of the 20th century, the works of this fine artist paved the way to modernism in the Ticino canton, too, thanks largely to a series of memorable landscapes. Displayed in the museum garden are works by Max Bill (1908-1994). A full-fledged sculpture garden, illustrating the results of the formal research based on rigorous geometrical principles adopted by the artist, a Swiss architect and designer who had studied at the Bauhaus in Dessau with teachers such as Josef Albers (he, too, a frequent visitor to Monte Verità), Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee.

#### **. San Materno Theatre, Ascona, Switzerland**

A brief stay by the dancer Isadora Duncan and Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, founder of the eurhythmics method now taught in many dance schools all over the world, gave origin to the history of artistic experimentation at Monte Verità that developed with the summer school run by Rudolf von Laban. The mime dancer Charlotte Bara (1900-1987), who frequented the Monte Verità circle, had the present-day San Materno Theatre built in Ascona by Carl Weidemeyer (1928). A small masterpiece of architecture, the theatre became known not only for Gothic-Egyptian sacred dance but also for the numerous mime and theatre productions, concerts and conferences. Bara had it built on the site of an old Romanesque church, because she loved to dance in the space of the ancient apse. The San Materno Theatre is the first and best-known work in Ascona by the architect Weidemeyer, an unusually versatile artist who acted as an important link between Mitteleuropean and Mediterranean culture. Commissioned for Charlotte Bara by her father Paul Bachrach, the building was intended to a “temple for artistic expression in the spirit of the dance school” and is the first modern chamber theatre in Switzerland.

#### **. Eranos Foundation, Ascona, Switzerland**

At the end of the 1920s, at Ascona-Moscia on the shore of Lake Maggiore, Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn (1881-1962) first developed her plan to create a “place of encounter and experience”, a “free space for the spirit” in which Oriental and Western philosophies could come together and enter into dialogue. The Eranos conferences began in 1933, and from the start the activities were planned and coordinated by Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn, assisted by the so-called “Eranos Circle” (*Eranos-Kreis*) or “Eranos Community” (*Eranos-Gemeinschaft*): a small group of scholars who, at least in the first twenty years, were inspired by the extraordinary figure of C.G. Jung (1865-1961). For many years the Eranos conferences were the only opportunity for scholars animated by spiritual interests, unfettered by their fields of specialization, to meet and discuss their ideas. The only conference venue in Europe active during the Second World War, Eranos was far ahead of its time in its focus on interdisciplinary study, making a remarkable contribution to the intellectual history of Europe.

At Eranos, which has gathered together some of the most influential thinkers of the 20th and 21st centuries, various figures belonging to the world of art have also had the opportunity to meet and

discuss their ideas: Sir Herbert Read (1893-1968) – who appreciated and supported the work of Luigi Pericle – who was a speaker at many Tagungen from 1952 to 1964 on the theme of art and creativity; in 1968 the Dutch artist Paul Citroen (1896-1983), who focused his attention on the role of the painter in relation to art; and in 1971, René Huyghe (1906-1997), who spoke about the evolution of the artist in Rembrandt, Vermeer and Delacroix.

### **. Marguerite Arp Foundation, Locarno, Switzerland**

Jean Arp (1886-1966), who in 1911 had published *Runes and bizarre writings*, would be an assiduous frequenter of the circle of theosophers at Monte Verità. In his art Dadaism turned into Surrealism, to the extent that he stated: “The law of chance, which embraces all laws but which is ultimately unfathomable like the first cause from which all life arises, can only be experienced through complete devotion to the unconscious.” Arp studied Jakob Böhme, Meister Eckhart and Lao Tse, he was interested in Oriental mysticism and frequented theosophers and esotericists like René Adolphe Schwaller de Lubicz (1887-1961), who also taught Miró.

In February 1959 Jean Arp and Marguerite Hagenbach purchased an estate in Locarno-Solduno called Ronco dei Fiori: covering an area of one acre, it was formed of an old Ticino house, a large garden and a vineyard. After renovation work, the couple moved to the house in May 1960. On the first floor Arp set up his studio, although he also had a sculpture workshop in Locarno, in the complex created by Remo Rossi, where he made his last sculptural works. Over time the beautiful garden was enriched with the sculptures executed by Arp in Ticino, and in 1965 he announced his intention to create “a sort of gallery” at Ronco dei Fiori to display at least part of the collection of works built up with his wife Marguerite. The plan was then formalized in the statute of the Foundation, and around fifty years later, in the summer of 2014, became reality with the creation of an art deposit and an exhibition space. The art archive of the Marguerite Arp Foundation, located in the atelier, houses a remarkable collection of documents, photos, rare editions and specialist texts on Jean Arp, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, Marguerite Hagenbach and the avantgardes of the 20th century.

The library of Jean Arp and Marguerite Arp-Hagenbach, owned by the Foundation, contains around 7,000 titles, and includes the first editions of the poetic works of Jean Arp, as well as numerous rare works and collections of important modern art journals that provide a highly specialized viewpoint on 20th-century art. The Marguerite Arp Foundation also houses an important archive of poetry and prose texts by Jean Arp, collections of the correspondence of Arp, Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Marguerite Hagenbach with artists, gallery-owners and collectors, as well as notebooks, photos and other documents.

### **. Remo Rossi Foundation, Locarno, Switzerland**

The sculptor Remo Rossi (1909-1982) was among the best-known representatives of the local tradition, but also and above all a leading exponent of the most modern international art currents. Thanks to his role on the Federal Commission for Fine Arts (after becoming a member in 1948, he served as vice-president from 1954 and president from 1969 to 1979), and his position as Commissioner for Switzerland at the Venice Biennale (from 1962 to 1972), Rossi was able to meet and establish friendships with many exponents of the new art scene. During his long time with the Federal Commission, he worked to foster the work of young artists and to assist them through special grants.

The birth of the ateliers in Saleggi, Locarno, came about thanks to his friendship with Jean Arp, for whom he wished to provide a space to work. The idea was to form a small art community in which sculptors, painters, engravers, ceramists and artists of all types could carry out their work in peace. The complex of ateliers thus offered many artists the chance to work in a suitable environment, when necessary using the material and the contribution of the assistants employed by Remo Rossi. The atelier project attracted artists to the Locarno area, and also brought about wider knowledge of their works. When Marguerite and Jean Arp donated an important collection of works to the city of Locarno, plans began for a new Municipal Museum of Modern Art, which opened on 10 April 1965 at the Castello Visconteo.

### **. Hermann Hesse Museum, Montagnola, Switzerland**

The Hermann Hesse Museum was established in the rooms of the Torre Camuzzi, in Montagnola, Switzerland in 1997. This ancient tower is part of the picturesque Casa Camuzzi where Hermann Hesse lived between 1919 and 1931. From his apartment, he had a marvellous view overlooking the lake of Lugano.

A permanent exhibition brings back to life Hesse's 40 years in Montagnola. The many personal belongings, photos, books and watercolour paintings show not only the writer, but also Hesse as a private person. The focus on certain themes, such as India or the writing of 'The Glass Bead Game', provide the opportunity to follow the writer's creative process. The Hermann Hesse Museum in Montagnola offers a variety of activities. Temporary exhibitions, lectures, concerts, films, walking-tours, and weekly readings in two languages make the Museum a lively meeting point for visitors from all over the world.