

ROB TUFNELL

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PONTE DEL CAVALLETTO
1105A SAN MARCO, VENEZIA

CANZONISSIMA!
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Rob Tufnell presents 14 unique, collaged record sleeves made in the mid 1950s. They were created by an unknown member of the Italian expatriate community in the Melbourne suburb of Carlton to adorn a series of 78 rpm, 10" records of music recorded in Italy but pressed onto vinyl in Australia.

Widespread adult literacy in 19th century industrialised societies created a boom in cheap printed publications and ephemera and with that, the birth of scrapbooks and collage. This undervalued form of folk art informed first Dada, then Surrealism and then Pop. However, unlike scrapbooks, most art historical manifestations of collage were ambivalent towards their subjects. Richard Hamilton's iconic 'Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?' (1956) is an ironic riposte to the post-war economic explosion of consumerism. By contrast these concurrent, collaged record sleeves are a heartfelt celebration of popular culture and social mobility and yet have an air of melancholy, mourning what was left behind.

Between 1947 and 1960 over 200,000 Italians migrated to Australia encouraged by successive Italian governments unable to employ them. These collages of advertisements and press cuttings embody this mid twentieth century katabasis. Eschewing the wholesome produce of the Classical world (honey, milk, wine, cereal crops and sacrificial sheep) these modern travellers to the underworld offered instead a wide selection of aperitifs and digestifs (Rabarbaro Zucca, Aperol, Gancia, Martini and Sarti), Fiats and Lambrettas, Tot washing powder (produced by explosives manufacturer BPD) and Irène Galter and Sophia Loren amongst numerous Cinecittà Studio actresses. On arrival they discovered Australian staples: Greenseas Tuna, Swallows Ariell biscuits and Taubmans house paints. Other clippings adorning the record sleeves are American standards (much of which would have arrived via the South Pacific a decade earlier): Coca Cola, Colgate, Walt Disney, Kellogg's sugar frosted flakes, James Cagney, Marilyn Monroe, Betty Page, a plethora of forgotten cigarette brands, syndicated newspaper cartoons, nascent colour televisions and affordable 35mm cameras.

These collages record an important moment in Australia's social history but of wider significance the moment when passenger boats were superseded by aeroplanes and when amateur colour photography and televisions rendered the exotic ordinary.

Exhibition open Saturdays 14.00 – 19.00 and by appointment
For further information and images please contact mail@robtufnell.com