

Press Release

Eyewear as a mirror of the times, from its origins to the present

**WITH “THE LENS OF TIME – THE HISTORY OF EYEWEAR IN ITALY”
EXHIBIT, ANFAO CELEBRATES THE HISTORY OF EYEWEAR IN
ART, DESIGN AND INNOVATION**

7 May – 30 July 2025, Palazzo Flangini, Venezia

Milano, 29 April 2025 – Produced and sponsored by **ANFAO**, the **Italian Optical Goods Manufacturers’ Association**, curated by **Fondazione Museo dell’Occhiale** and in partnership with **Fondazione di Venezia** and **Fondazione M9 – Museo del ’900**, “**The Lens of Time – The History of Eyewear in Italy**” exhibit unfolds in the elegant setting of **Palazzo Flangini** in Venezia. A journey that spans seven centuries, where the focus is on eyewear, an object that reflects evolution, creativity and identity. The exhibit tells the story of an accessory that has become a trendy object like none other, **from its origins in the 13th century to the modern designs of today**, through a visual journey that interweaves culture, fashion, technology, science and innovation.

Unique, one-of-a-kind pieces, quaint objects, interactive technologies, art installations, historic images, and vintage posters. This is the rich heritage that will welcome visitors along the immersive exhibit pathway that includes **150 original pieces** drawn from three prestigious collections – the **Eyewear Museum** of Pieve di Cadore, the **Vascellari Family collection** by Venetian optician **Roberto Vascellari**, and the **Art of Seeing by Lucio Stramare** – that enhance appreciation of the artisan craftsmanship and innovation that have made Italy a global resource for the eyewear industry.

Reserved for the press and institutions, the inauguration will take place on Wednesday 7th May at 11.30 am. In addition to participation by **ANFAO President Lorraine Berton** and **Vice President Nicola Belli**, keen supporters of this show, along with **Fondazione di Venezia President Vincenzo Marinese**, who kindly allowed use of Palazzo Flangini, the event will feature art historian **Jacopo Veneziani** who will guide the public on a fascinating journey of discovery through a special “vision of the art”. Hosted by actress and presenter **Martina Colombari**, it will be an opportunity to explore the symbolic, cultural and creative value of eyewear in society.

The exhibit is sponsored by the **Ministry of Enterprises and Made in Italy** and is part of the official calendar of the **National Made in Italy Day**. Against the backdrop of the **Venezia Architecture Biennale 2025**, it offers an exceptional opportunity to discover the connections between design, technology, fashion and sustainability, through the eyes of one of the most iconic objects in our history.

THE LENS OF TIME – the exhibit

Curated by **Daniela Zambelli**, Director of **Fondazione Museo dell'Occhiale**, and art historian **Alessandra Cusinato**, the exhibit is a journey through time between history and design.

The history of eyewear: a journey from its Medieval origins up to the Industrial Revolution. This section explores the evolution of materials and shapes, uncovering unexpected innovations, such as Venetian sunglasses from the 18th century and the 19th-century lorgnette fashion trend.

Contemporary design: eyewear played a starring role in pop culture and Italian fashion in the 20th century, driven by the cinema, avant-garde, stylists and experimentation with shapes. The present and future portray eyewear as a wearable technological device.

The journey advances through **12 narrative stages**, each represented by a thematic panel that enhances the visit with curiosities and surprising details:

- **The Origins** – From ancient “reading stones” to the first spectacles of the 13th century, the exhibition opens with the story of the earliest visual instruments and the frescoes by Tommaso da Modena that document the use of spectacles among religious figures and scholars.
- **The Renaissance** – The era of humanism brought with it new techniques for producing lenses and frames, made using materials such as silver, ivory, and tortoiseshell, and new shapes, like “arched glasses” or “renaissance hat” glasses.
- **Between the 1600s and 1700s** – Technical innovations lead to the introduction of bifocal lenses and side temples. Eyewear adapts to the growing needs of the bourgeoisie and production increases in Italy as well as in France, Germany and England.
- **Sunglasses** – Venice is a pioneer in the use of colored protective lenses. In the eighteenth century, Venetian glasses with green lenses become a symbol of elegance and protection for the aristocracy.
- **Fashion in the 1800s** – The lorgnette triumphs at salons and theaters. Eyewear becomes a fashion accessory, favored by men and women of good society, often embellished with luxury materials and worn with fans, canes or charms.
- **From Venice to the Cadore** – Birth of the industrial age: the first Italian eyewear factory opens in Calalzo di Cadore. Frames become lighter and pince-nez are developed.
- **1920s–1940s** – Eyewear evolves thanks to experimentation with plastic and celluloid materials. Historic companies like Lozza and Safilo are established in the Cadore area. In Torino, they experiment with smoked glass lenses for sunglasses. Styles become slimmer and more refined, and gain popularity through the cinema.
- **Cat-Eye Frames (1940s-1950s)** – Hollywood glamour explodes: glasses become feminine and sophisticated, with elongated and creative shapes, embellished with rhinestones and inserts. Iconic show-stopper, Peggy Guggenheim.
- **Stars of the 1960s** – Eyewear embodies the spirit of **La Dolce Vita**: maxi shapes, Optical Art and glitter coexist in unforgettable styles worn by Audrey Hepburn, Brigitte Bardot and Marcello Mastroianni.
- **Experimentation: the 1970s** – Vibrant colors, oversized shapes and unexpected materials visually narrate a new freedom of expression. Enter **MIDO**, the international eyewear exhibition. Eyewear goes *avant-garde*.
- **The 1980s: Italy and fashion** – The great Italian stylists (Versace, Valentino, Ferré) design collections that make eyewear a symbol of luxury. Shapes are bold and accessories become style statements.

- **The essence of style: the 1990s** – Italian manufacturing excels at technical innovation. Designers play with high-tech materials and geometric shapes. Eyewear is now an object of lifestyle and personal identity.

An immersive experience and sustainability

The show will also be complemented by **two virtual installations**: a journey through the **Eyewear Museum of Pieve di Cadore** accessible through viewers or QR code, that allow visitors to explore a unique collection of more than 6,000 historic pieces, and an **interactive totem** to virtually “try on” the most iconic eyewear, taking and sharing vintage selfies.

The exhibit will conclude with **two contemporary works of art** created for the show by artist **Maurizio Paccagnella**: the first piece is dedicated to the transparency of Venetian glass and the mountains of Cadore, where the Italian eyewear industry has its roots, and was created by reusing waste materials from the production of eyeglass frames. The second piece crystallizes the history of eyewear, summarizing in a single image the evolution of vision over time, in keeping with “**The Lens of Time**” show concept.

Useful information

Inauguration: 7 May 2025 at 11:30 am, by invitation only.

Open to the public: from 3 pm on 7 May to 5 pm on 30 July 2025.

Hours: Monday - Sunday from 11 am to 5 pm.

Admission: free

Address: Palazzo Flangini - Cannaregio, Calle Flangini 252 – Venice

ANFAO – Italian Association of Optical Goods Manufacturers

Established in 1954, ANFAO represents more than 130 Italian businesses active in the eyewear sector. The association is a member of Confindustria and operates with targeted objectives – first and foremost, to create a robust, profitable synergy among the member companies in the eyewear sector. In a climate of complete collaboration, ANFAO is committed to representing industry interests in interactions with Italian and international institutions, actively contributing to strengthening its competitiveness and promoting the value of Made in Italy worldwide, which has consistently been a symbol of quality, innovation and style. The association promotes the development of the Italian optical industry by supporting innovation, sustainability, and internationalization. ANFAO also promotes MIDO, the leading international eyewear trade show.

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