ALMINE RECH

Easy Irony
Irony in Italian art of the 20th and 21st centuries

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The imaginative power of Bruno Munari, the irreverence of Piero Manzoni, the paradox of Gino De Dominicis. The political commitment of Piero Gilardi and Michelangelo Pistoletto, the challenge to female stereotypes of Tomaso Binga and Mirella Bentivoglio, and the nonsense of Adriano Spatola and Giulia Niccolai. The use of irony to reveal the contradictions of the present in Maurizio Cattelan, Paola Pivi and Francesco Vezzoli, or to expose the unwritten rules of the art system in Chiara Fumai and Italo Zuffi, and the humor of Eva & Franco Mattes, expressed through memesthetics.

From February 6 to September 7, 2025, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Galleria d'Arte Moderna di Bologna, MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna, part of the Settore Musei Civici Bologna, presents the major group exhibition 'L'ironia nell'arte italiana tra XX e XXI secolo', curated by Lorenzo Balbi and Caterina Molteni.

With Gruppo Hera as the main sponsor, the exhibition is supported by TRUST for Contemporary Art and is part of ART CITY Bologna 2025, the program of exhibitions, events and initiatives promoted by the Municipality of Bologna in collaboration with BolognaFiere, coinciding with Arte Fiera.

Designed for the spaces of the Sala delle Ciminiere, with over 100 works and archival documents by more than 70 artists, the exhibition covers a period of about seventy years, from the 1950s to the present day, with the aim of tracing the history of Italian art through the theme of irony.

Since ancient times, beginning with Socrates, irony has been associated with the "art of questioning": a unique tool that can give us a clearer and more disenchanted vision of reality, revealing its anomalies and contradictions. Through humorous games, parody and witty banter, irony also becomes an antidote, a funny alternative that can protect people from what ails them.

A common thread running through decades of Italian artistic production, irony emerges as a recurring aesthetic and critical strategy capable of referring to a deep meaning without openly expressing it. This device, used for centuries to unmask false certainties and propose new representations, has found particularly fertile ground in the Italian context, and artists of different generations have used its destabilizing power to question established paradigms. The weight of the Italian artistic tradition, a reactionary society strongly influenced by the Church and the Fascist past, the success of the Commedia all'italiana and the more recent, popular "cinepanettoni" films, the rise of Berlusconism and with it an aggressive consumer society: these are just some of the «institutions» to be undermined and challenged.

The title of the exhibition, ironic in itself, reminds us of the apparent simplicity of this phenomenon, while at the same time revealing its intrinsic complexity. A contradiction that becomes a play in itself, inviting the audience to question the nature of language and its commonplaces and, at the same time, the ways in which these influence our observation and how we read the world around us.

From the 1950s to the present day, with Surrealism and Metaphysical painting as important precedents, 'Facile Ironia' traces the history of art in our country through irony as a critical and imaginative tool. The exhibition is organized around major themes that help to illustrate the different variants of irony and its transhistorical nature: irony as paradox and its relationship to play, irony as the practice of nonsense, irony as a feminist weapon in the critique of patriarchy and the Italian social order, and its role in political mobilization and as a form of institutional critique. Finally, a touch of black humor hovers over the museum spaces, running through several sections of the exhibition: an energy that seems to be the opposite of cheerfulness, leading us to face the contradictions of existence in a cynical and irreverent way.

Gino De Dominicis' *Mozzarella in carrozza* welcomes the visitor, translating the well-known Italian dish into reality and spelling out the first linguistic short-circuit in the exhibition: paradox. The exhibition captures this ironic strategy in Italian art of the 20th and 21st centuries through a series of emblematic works, from the surreal images of Giorgio De Chirico and the conceptual works of Piero Manzoni to the *finte sculture* (fake sculptures) of Pino Pascali, from the works of Francesco Vezzoli and Paola Pivi to the installations of Maurizio Cattelan, Roberto Cuoghi and Lara Favaretto, and Roberto Fassone's collection of books.

The exhibition continues with an exploration of play and its contribution to the subversion of rules, with artists who have drawn inspiration from the world of childhood to expose the incoherence of the adult world and society. Here the parable of time crosses the works of Alberto Savinio and Enrico Baj, Bruno Munari's *Sculture da viaggio (travel sculptures)* and Carla Accardi's "useless" furniture, Aldo Mondino's pictorial research, as well as younger artists such as Riccardo Baruzzi, Valerio Nicolai, Guendalina Cerruti and Federico Tosi.

The journey continues with an analysis of irony as an act of disobedience and a feminist critique of patriarchal society and its values, introducing Tomaso Binga and her Carta da parato (wallpaper), a historical "environment" presented in 1978 at the Galleria d'Arte Moderna in Bologna as part of the exhibition 'Metafisica del quotidiano'. The experiences of Neapolitan collectives such as Gruppo XX and Donne/Immagine/Creatività are also presented, in particular Rosa Panaro's contribution to the process of their creation and recognition. Ketty La Rocca's pseudo-advertising images, Mirella Bentivoglio's visual poetry, and Cinzia Ruggeri's wedding dress are joined by the research of Monica Bonvicini and Chiara Fumai and their view of contemporary society, and by younger generation artists such as Benni Bosetto.

Many works and artists populate the section dedicated to irony as a tool for political mobilization, where individuality is blurred in a multitude demanding its rights. Among them we find the photographic documentation of the actions of Michelangelo Pistoletto's Lo Zoo collective, the foam animation used by Piero Gilardi during the demonstration of May 1, 2015, evidence of a long militancy, the comics of the Metropolitan Indians movement signed by Pablo Echaurren, and the collage work of Nanni Balestrini.

Artists have also mocked the art system through ironic forms of institutional critique, including Giuseppe Chiari with his laconic statements on art, Emilio Prini and Salvo. Italo Zuffi and Piero Golia have proposed a lucid observation of the rituals and power mechanisms existing in the art system, while Eva & Franco Mattes, in their recent research, have playfully reflected on the idea of originality in a work of art in today's world.

The exhibition closes with a collection of works focused on irony as nonsense, with Italian poets and writers who initiated a research on phonetics based on the playful and liberating potential of the word. These experiments, which emphasize the loss of meaning of language and words, were carried out by authors such as Arrigo Lora Totino, Giulia Niccolai, Adriano Spatola and Patrizia Vicinelli.

The exhibition design itself, created by Filippo Bisagni, reads the architecture of MAMbo in an ironic key, evoking "Rossi's Ghost" – a structure lost during the renovation of the Sala delle Ciminiere by Aldo Rossi – and assigning each section a two-color scheme that spatially reinforces its thematic references.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue of the same name, published by Società Editrice Allemandi, with texts by the curators Lorenzo Balbi and Caterina Molteni, the exhibition designer Filippo Bisagni and guests Jacopo Galimberti, Allison Grimaldi Donahue, Caterina Molteni, Loredana Parmesani, Cesare Pietroiusti, Francesco Poli, Valentina Tanni and Elvira Vannini, who were invited to explore the various sections of the exhibition.