ALMINE RECH

From Cindy Sherman to Francesco Vezzoli 80 contemporary artists

Mar 7 — May 4, 2025 | Palazzo Reale, Milan, Italy

From 7 March to 4 May 2025, the exhibition 'From Cindy Sherman to Francesco Vezzoli: 80 contemporary artists' opens at Palazzo Reale in Milan, with over 140 works by 80 internationally renowned contemporary artists.

Promoted by the Municipality of Milan - Culture, Palazzo Reale and the Giuseppe Iannaccone Foundation, with the executive production of Arthemisia, the exhibition is curated by Daniele Fenaroli with the scientific advice of Vincenzo de Bellis, and represents a unique opportunity to explore contemporary themes through the point of view of some of the most internationally renowned artists.

The exhibition explores contemporary art through an analysis of identity, the body, sexuality and marginality, highlighting the work of a wide range of artists. Artists such as Wangechi Mutu, Raqib Shaw, and Luigi Ontani address issues of cultural identity and belonging, often mixing tradition and modernity in their works. Others such as Roberto Cuoghi and Tammy Nguyen investigate concepts of metamorphosis, while Hayv Kahraman and Hiba Schahbaz reflect on diaspora and the body as a space of memory. Imran Qureshi and Kiki Smith, on the other hand, explore the human condition through symbolism and visceral imagery.

The second part of the exhibition includes artists such as Tracy Emin and Lisa Yuskavage, who deal with female sexuality and vulnerability, while Shadi Ghadirian reflects on cultural restrictions and gender tensions in the Islamic world. Others such as Muntean/Rosenblum, Martin Maloney and Katja Seib use popular iconography to explore visual language and narrative. Artists such as Francis Alÿs, Pietro Roccasalva and Andro Wekua deal with themes of travel and transformation, while Giangiacomo Rossetti and Karen Kilimnik reflect on the concept of space and reality. The exhibition continues with Hernan Bas, Nicole Eisenman and Paola Pivi, who create a dialogue on the body, desire and fluidity, and concludes with Adrian Paci, Marinella Senatore, Massimo Bartolini and Hannah Quinlan, who explore collective experiences and the evolution of social roles.

"The exhibition invites visitors to embark on a journey through the multiple expressions of contemporary art, capable of interrogating our society and our time with ever new looks,' says Culture Councillor Tommaso Sacchi. The works on display explore crucial themes such as identity, the body, collective memory, and the relationship between reality and the imaginary, restoring an artistic panorama that reflects and interprets the complexity of the present. Thanks to the extraordinary selection of works and artists invited, Palazzo Reale confirms itself as a place of confrontation and discovery, enriching the Milan Art Week programme with this new project."

The set of works on display in each room evokes a motif, a trend or a central theme in contemporary artistic production: reflection on the body, gender identity, civil rights, the search for all forms of freedom, but also themes such as solitude, introspection, the investigation of group and social dynamics, the breaking down of cultural archetypes, and even the terrain that makes the natural world collide - sometimes creating openings, sometimes closures - with the artificial world, often the result of human intervention.

These themes and motifs, which chase one another constantly throughout the exhibition, are held together by the dual real-imaginary register that runs through the entire exhibition: a journey between dream and reality in which allegory, mythology and legend on the one hand and history, politics and society on the other confront and intertwine.

"It is wonderful to look at the history of art and see," says Giuseppe Iannaccone, President of the Giuseppe Iannaccone Foundation, "how artists have always explored the feelings, emotions, pleasures and torments of human beings. One era follows another, artists adapt to the social and economic factors of the changing scene, inventing new forms of poetry; but the human heart remains the same and I can see a common essence, a shared poetic component, in every period of art."

Each of the eleven sections of which the exhibition is composed tells a unique story: each room is like a stage in a journey that leads the visitor through the many facets of contemporary art, highlighting unexpected connections between different visions and perspectives, while exploring central themes such as reflection on the body, gender identity, multiculturalism, and the relationship between innovation and tradition.

These themes are constantly interwoven within the exhibition itinerary, constituting a journey between dream and reality in which allegory, mythology, legend on the one hand, and history, politics, society on the other, continually confront each other, offering a multiple vision of the human condition. Each work thus becomes a piece of a larger mosaic, a contribution to a continuous dialogue between past and present, between the particular and the universal.
[...]

Francesco Vezzoli plays with the public image and its deconstruction. *Love: Anna Magnani loved Roberto Rossellini* (2002), *Suddenly Last Summer* (2006) and *La Signora Bruschino* (2006) are perfect examples of an artistic research that draws as much from the history of art as from the world of cinema, television, fashion and politics.
[...]

The artists also take their cue from millenary traditions to explore themes such as cultural contamination, post-colonialism and diaspora, such as Tammy Nguyen, whose images invite reflection on the fluidity of cultural borders, or Hayv Kahraman, who addresses the plight of women in diaspora.
Hiba Schahbaz, uses gouache, watercolour and gold leaf to create intimate compositions that explore femininity and spirituality through Oriental tradition, and Imran Qureshi, with *Moderate Enlightenment* (2007) and *Where the Shadows are so Deep* (2016), with Persian-style miniatures, testifies to the actuality of violence.
[...]

In contrast, the paintings by Lisa Yuskavage and Chloe Wise combine references to animals with human figures in sensual and provocative compositions. In Yuskavage's *Small Walking the Dog* (2009), an everyday gesture such as walking the dog takes on an erotic and ambiguous connotation, while Wise in *Olivia with duck mask* (2023) adds an ironic and playful touch. The duck mask worn by the female figure is transformed into a surreal element that reflects on identity and metamorphosis, dialoguing within the room with Pierpaolo Campanini's painting *Senza titolo* (1993), which uses the same animal but within a more intimate and contemplative painting, capable of evoking a sense of mystery and expectation.