
PeRSONAe

The Latin word “personae” used to indicate the theatre actors’ masks. Subsequently, its meaning changed: first, it identified the interpreted character, then, over time, it came to signify the individual, the human being. This Exhibition Room hosts a series of artworks in which Humanity, Lives, and the Past are represented with modalities differing from the ones belonging to figurative Art, using elements such as metaphors and similes. Berlinde De Bruyckere’s powerful installation, in which metal and blankets hint at bones and skin, shelter and vulnerability, dialogues in open conflict with Cory Arcangel’s *Arcangel* and *Dreams*. Covering pool floating tubes with designer accessories and clothes, the Author highlights the superficiality of contemporary existence: the mask.

Life, instead, in its network of relationships, memories, and experiences, is at the core of two other artworks. On the one hand, Ettore Favini, with *Cantra*, creates a self-portrait born from the interweaving of threads of fabric, the growth rings of a tree so dear to him, and the years, both past and future. On the other, Eva and Franco Mattes create another kind of portrait through the analysis of metadata obtained from their electronic correspondence, aimed at reconstructing a web of interactions, connections, contacts, and exchanges, emphasizing how the line between public and private life is becoming increasingly blurred.

The relationship between public and private is the subject of interest in Lorenza Longhi’s and Cesare Pietroiusti’s artworks, as well. The former focuses on passersby’s glances with an artwork displaying a personal phone number, exhibited in the window of a hat shop facing a public street. With *Cento capi di vestiario*, the latter reflects the influence of marketing and advertisement on personal experiences, even when it relates to aspects of one’s intimacy, such as feeling attractive. These 65 photos are testimony of an experiment that will be partially reactivated during the Exhibition, directly involving visitors by asking them: “Which piece of clothing do you feel most attractive in?”

Cory Arcangel (Buffalo, 1978), *Arcangel*, 2015; *Dreams*, 2015

Cory Arcangel’s artistic research starts from the consciousness of living in a heavily digitalized, liquid, and ever-changing society. Here, the actual value of things is destined to be lost in a short time, to make space for new products-simulacra of value. In *Dreams* and *Arcangel*, both belonging to the *Screen-Agers* series (2011-2015), long plastic tubes used as floaties in swimming pools are dressed up in necklaces, electronic must-haves, designer clothes and presented as actual portraits. In the first case, we see the picture of a standard family, an ironic allusion to a broken American Dream, where the man has uniformed and adapted to the behavioral stereotypes of the contemporary consumeristic society. In the second one, we see a self-portrait created using the fashion line exemplified by the vibrant colors characterizing the Artist’s merchandising. By emphasizing the choice of exteriority, accessories, and clothes as identity symbols, the Artists speaks about “characters” interested in fashion and mundanity. Despite being aware of the present moment and of what is “modern”, they are frozen in time: ephemeral icons of contemporaneity, destined to be “surpassed”.

Berlinde De Bruyckere (Gand, 1964), *Slaapzaal IV*, 2000

The central fulcrum of the Artist’s poetics is the theme of vulnerability, expressed through lacerations, mutilations, and bruises, often characterizing her sculptures. The artworks’ superficial layers, either evoking the epidermis or a fabric, metaphorically allude to the protective mantle concealing the body and existence’s fragility. In the sculpture *Slaapzaal IV* – belonging to the Nineties’ *Slaapzaal* series, meaning *dormitory* – the layered hard parts of the bed’s metallic frame and the soft parts of the worn-out blankets are metaphors of the flesh and bones composing the body of Man, not only that of the Artist. Unlike the first sculptures of the series, *Slaapzaal IV* presents burns and cuts revealing the blankets’ pure wool. The bed, sheltering and harboring space, is nullified in its ability to provide warmth and comfort and desires to repellently represent a suffering human anatomy.

Ettore Favini (Cremona, 1974), *Cantra*, 2011-2013

The artwork, gaining its name from the tool used to establish the number of threads merging into a fabric’s texture, presents itself as an Artist’s self-portrait in an intimate and personal landscape. In fact, the installation’s size corresponds to Favini’s height, and the Artist revealed how the log to which the creel threads are connected is “part of a tree my parents planted in our family garden after their honeymoon. It was cut some years ago. In this case, we have a portion of life, with its texture, with what has happened so far, without the warp, because we do not know how long this life is going to last”. The growth rings relate to the threads, which are, in turn, connected to spools corresponding in number to the tree’s age, this way bonding time, memory, and landscape. The natural element of the plant intertwines with Man’s work: sculpting and building. The Artist’s personal history connects to a social dimension and becomes a metaphor for life and death’s universality.

Lorenza Longhi (Lecco, 1991), *Untitled (Valentina)*, 2019

Created with recycled materials, *Untitled (Valentina)* is a screen printing on fabric mounted on metal displaying the telephone number of the director of La Plage. This Parisian independent space hosted a solo show of the Artist in 2020. The artwork, created explicitly for the occasion, was exhibited in the window of a hat shop facing a passage near Place de la République, next to other shop windows. Such a choice is in accordance with the Artist’s usual practice of breaking the rigidity of spaces and the traditional exhibition modalities by fitting into the surrounding context. A personal phone number was made public in an area dedicated to shopping to explore and expand the notions of privacy and visibility. Furthermore, the artwork’s technique, “serial” in theory, is undermined through a matrix-free printing process, making each print unique, just like the portrayed phone number: a numerical combination attributable to one person only.

Eva e Franco Mattes (Brescia, 1976), *My Little Big Data*, 2019

The video *My Little Big Data* constitutes the visual translation of the analysis of over 70,000 personal emails sent between 2007 and 2017, recovered in collaboration with the Novi Sad’s Share Foundation with the intent to consciously reflect on how our personal data can be extracted, used, and exploited. In the Artist’s words: “All of our online actions leave an invisible trace buried in data. Taken together, these traces can reveal very intimate details about us, for instance, changes in our emotional states, interpersonal relationships, political views, or geographical location. Our personal information is constantly collected, organized, analyzed, and sold by a series of parties such as government agencies, bank institutions, or smartphone applications”, acquiring tools to influence our behavior. The Matteses highlight the inconsistency of the line separating public from private life by building a sort of self-portrait, starting from personal data that third parties can use without us necessarily and entirely realizing it.

Cesare Pietroiusti (Roma, 1955), *Cento capi di vestiario*, 1992

The photos composing this artwork are the documentation of an operation realized in the context of the *Edge 92* exhibition, held in Madrid and London in 1992. During this exhibition, the Artist asked one hundred people of both sexes and between the ages of 16 and 73 what piece of clothing, among those owned by each, they felt more attractive and sexy in. People who answered were asked their favorite clothes to be displayed for the exhibition’s duration and have them back at the end. The experiment was functional in revealing how people respond and interpret cultural stereotypes. Curiously, in many cases, the chosen clothes appeared to be utterly insignificant (featureless shirts or dresses) or worn out, far from the generalized idea of sexy garments spread by billboards and television. By asking the question in a personal way, linking it to the participants’ intimate experience, the Artist succeeded in bringing out how private events, memory, and individual history become relevant compared to broadly shared models of what is commonly referred to as “sexy”.