

# PEGGY GUGGENHEIM COLLECTION

*IMAGINE. New Imagery in Italian Art 1960-1969*

Curator: Luca Massimo Barbero

23 April – 19 September 2016

Peggy Guggenheim Collection

#ImaginePGC

From 23 April to 19 September 2016 the Peggy Guggenheim Collection presents *IMAGINE. New Imagery in Italian Art 1960-1969*, curated by Luca Massimo Barbero. A new interpretation of Italian art in the 1960s: the birth of new imagery.

In Italy during the 1960s, at the height of the economic boom, artistic experimentation flourished at an unprecedented pace and intensity. The goal was to create a new vocabulary of signs and images capable of interpreting the vitality of contemporary culture and society. *IMAGINE. New Imagery in Italian Art 1960-1969* offers a fresh perspective on the richness of Italian art production in those years. The theme, the *leitmotif*, of the exhibition is how the figured image, transient and transformed, departing from the monochrome, served to construct a new language of representation in a little known phase of Italian art history.

The exhibition, in a tightly curated sequence of galleries, lays out the multiple lines of research of a number of Italian artists who, emerging from the zeroing of the neo-avant-garde, reconstituted a new world of images, figures, and narrative. With no claim to definitiveness, *IMAGINE. New Imagery in Italian Art 1960-1969* sets out to supersede, from the vantage point of today, the so-called 'orthodoxies' of the time, freeing visual research from adherence to movements or subordination to category. Acting like a short-circuit, the exhibition enriches established definitions and currents, analyzing and evidencing through a high density sampling of works the re-emergence of the figure in a radical and germinal way, whether in paint or photography. An intense sequence of emblematic works captures the vitality of that brief period of time, a mere nine years, and uncovers, by diversity and assonance, in an unceasing process of exchange and dialogue, that melting-pot of visual art, in a process of 'becoming', which gave rise to the schools and movements of future avant-gardes.

The exhibition unfolds by contrasts and leaps, "stumbles caused by dissonances and revelations" (Barbero). Each room distills an aspect of artistic research of the time. It opens with a section dedicated to the erasing and obliteration of reality that came out of the effervescent cultural climate of Rome in 1960—the *Filters* and *Metals* of Lo Savio, the *Monochromes* of Schifano, the *Screens* of Mauri in dialogue with Angeli's powerful *sfumato* images of politics and heraldry. This is followed by the birth of a new typology of image which, as if in reaction to international trends, looked to the past and above all to the daily awareness of art in the collective consciousness of Italians. Works by Fioroni (*Detail from the Birth of Venus*, 1965) and Festa (*Nostalgia of the Infinite [Obelisk]*, 1963, *La Grande Odalisque*, 1964) transform the history of art into a new mythology. Two rooms of paintings by Schifano typify this "metaphysics of the quotidian", hinging on the black and white dazzle of his monumental *Winter Through the Museum* (1965), together with some startling, little-known works such as *I Do Not Love Nature* (1964), and *Central Park East* (1964), which deal with Schifano's feelings about landscape at the time of an intense sojourn in New York. In contrast and reaction to such lyrical images, one enters the universe of Gnoli, with a room filled with his distinctive close-ups, such as *Two Sleepers* (1966) and

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*White Bed* (1968). A central position in the exhibition is taken by works in which the painter's intervention co-exists with photography, a medium increasingly pervasive in the avant-gardes of these years. From this springs a component of ambiguity and interpretative liberty whereby the image stands for imagination, thought, and metaphor for circumstances elsewhere. Cinema and mass media in the work of Schifano and Rotella (*Can I?* 1963-65) clash with the profound and "classically modern" conceptual imagery of Paolini (*Poussin Pointing to the Old Masters as Fundamental Exemplar*, 1968) or with objects, implying performance and interaction, such as Pistoletto's *Globe* (1966-1968). Image becomes object, superceding mere representation: thus, in the remaining rooms, the works of Pascali are suspended between play and a new contemporary bestiary, as ironic as it is theatrical (*The Beheading of the Rhinoceros*, 1966). Pistoletto's images of 1964, suspended in plexiglas (*Electric Wire Hung from the Wall [Plexiglas]*, *Ladder leaning against a Wall [Plexiglas]*) transport the visitor to a new space colonized by art, questioning the relation of figure and object. These and the metaphorical abundance of Kounellis's creations (*White Rose*, 1967) conclude this première investigation of the new interpretative potential of the image.

An exhaustive catalogue, with several essays and studies, published by Marsilio Editori, Venice, in separate English and Italian editions, provides historical context, establishing the autonomy and difference of this evolution in Italian art with respect to American Pop Art.

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