

Gianfranco Baruchello

Primo alfabeto

11.01.2024

17.02.2024

MASSIMODECARLO is delighted to announce *Primo alfabeto*, an exhibition that exceptionally brings together the works created by Gianfranco Baruchello between 1959 and 1962. Curated by Carla Subrizi and Maria Alicata, *Primo alfabeto* presents a series of works that centre around the concept of the alphabet. The exhibition includes paintings, objects, and drawings, displaying both the formal and conceptual aspects of Baruchello's already distinctive artistic exploration.

«During this period, Baruchello endeavours to establish a unique personal alphabet, one he deems «provisional». The conceptualisation of this alphabet in the late 1950s and early 1960s draws specific connections with contemporary artists such as Jasper Johns, Piero Manzoni, and Jannis Kounellis. However, what truly distinguishes Baruchello's alphabet is its reference to the body and the emotional sphere.

The alphabet, according to Baruchello, starts with the body, and, in his view, the mental is also situated within the brain's hypothalamus, a region controlling desire, the irrational, and states less controlled by reason. This anatomical perspective identifies areas between the physical and the psychic, between the organic and the inorganic, between the individual and the collective – «a function of the one in the other», as expressed by Baruchello. This terrain is traversed by figures that will become the key terms in his alphabet: fear, error energy, unfulfilled need, hostile entity, entropy noise, memory of the past, those who will come, border zones between the certain and the uncertain. The alphabet takes shape from affective situations, where affection is conceived as an inversion leading from the rational and the abstraction of language to the body's sensations - registering, referencing, withholding, and rejecting».

Baruchello's alphabet, continues Carla Subrizi, President of the Baruchello Foundation and Director of the Specialisation School in Historical Artistic Heritage at the Sapienza University of Rome, «aims to traverse the terrain of hypothesis, ambiguity of meaning, and exploration beyond established categories, not with the intention of rejecting them, but because everything must undergo verification. For Baruchello, the term personal does not denote an

individualised system to believe in, but rather signifies a completely arbitrary sphere of research based on hypotheses that are never absolute or considered final. End and beginning constantly swap positions, as do cause and effect, meaning and meaninglessness. His interest lies in exploring the nothingness of meaning, delving into the borderline or as-yet-unknown territories. To pursue this direction, he strives to understand and experience the function of the useless (he did this as early as 1946, just out of university), the uncertain, the unfulfilled. All that is predetermined and employed masks the «potential» to convey meaning and endure indefinitely, transforming into a reference or cornerstone for communication, relationships, self-awareness, and comprehension of the world.

The genesis and, above all, the formation of the alphabet was slow and very laborious, and it was not until 1962 that the process reached a significant stage». In 1962, Baruchello experienced a pivotal year, characterised by notable encounters with influential artists such as Brancusi and Marcel Duchamp. These encounters would go on to exert a profound influence on his artistic trajectory.

The artist utilises personally crafted objects and innovative images to compose his alphabet, depicting, as described by Carla Subrizi, «states of anxiety, error, anguish, needs and desire, disorders of the vague, developing a vocabulary that refers to nothing other than a grammar of feelings experienced, perceived, and created. He employs Latin, inventing compound words to name these images. In contrast, oil paints are eschewed in favour of industrial enamels and materials, rustproof varnishes (minium), synthetic resins and solvents, defining his technique and working method in pursuit of «a world of information and perceptions rejected by the watertight compartments of today's culture».

The conceptualisation of an alphabet, the imperative nature of its construction, is what he deems essential for redefining the parameters of his personal language - not merely as a pre-existing system with established terms and constructions.

The exhibition *Primo alfabeto* unfolds as a captivating narrative chronicling the genesis and

evolution of a "provisional" alphabet, marking a significant milestone in Baruchello's artistic journey. The showcased works beckon visitors to venture into the liminal spaces of an autonomous and independent language, providing a glimpse into his distinctive approach to art. Baruchello's alphabet transcends mere formalism; it is a dynamic grammar in perpetual flux - a synthesis of emotions and perceptions that defies the logic of conventional communication.

Primo alfabeto stands as a unique opportunity to immerse oneself in the profound realms of Gianfranco Baruchello's innovative and visionary thought.

Gianfranco Baruchello

Gianfranco Baruchello (Livorno, 1924 - Rome, 2023) lived and worked in Rome and Paris.

In his long artistic research he has experienced and crossed the main tendencies of the Post-World War II, from Pop Art to Conceptual Art. Since the late 1950s, he has used different media: painting, film, installation, objects, sculpture and performance practice. His first solo exhibition was in 1963, at the La Tartaruga Gallery in Rome: big paintings and small objects focused on the idea of formulating a first alphabet of images he calls Need, Hostility, Fear, Error, Desire. In 1962 he was featured in the landmark exhibition *The New Realists* at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York with the work *Awareness II*, and in the same year, he was invited to the exhibition *Collages et Objets* at the Galerie du Cercle in Paris.

In 1964, on the occasion of the exhibition at the Cordier & Ekstrom Gallery in New York, he exhibited works that presented a significant point of arrival in his research: fragmentation, dissemination on canvas of images reduced to minimal elements and conceptual decentralisation of space. From 1960 he began to produce short films, including *Il grado zero del paesaggio* (1963), *Verifica incerta* (1964-1965). Baruchello brought the very idea of fragmentation and montage to his experimentation with painting, sculpture and moving images.

In the same years, he produced artist's books such as *La quindicesima riga* (lines of text taken from hundreds of books) and *Avventure nell'armadio di plexiglass* (Adventures in a Plexiglas wardrobe). In 1962 he met Marcel Duchamp, to whom he dedicated the book *Why Duchamp*, published by McPherson, New York in 1985.

In 1973, he started *Agricola Cornelia S.p.A.*, an experiment between art and agriculture, which engaged him for eight years. In 1998, he set up the Baruchello Foundation with Carla Subrizi. He has participated several times in the Venice Biennale (1976-80, 1988-90, 1993, 2013) and documenta in Kassel (1977, 2012).

From 2011 a series of retrospectives were held in Italy and abroad: Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome, 2011; Deichtorhallen Sammlung Falckenberg, Hamburg, 2014; ZKM, Karlsruhe, 2014; Triennale, Milan, 2015; Raven Row, London, 2017; Villa Arson, Nice 2018; Mart, Rovereto, 2018. In 2020 he published *Psicoenciclopedia possibile*, promoted by the Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani, a monumental work that challenges the very concept of encyclopaedia.

Baruchello's works are part of museum collections around the world, including: Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna and MAXXI (Rome), Mart (Rovereto), Madre (Naples), MoMA and Guggenheim Museum (New York), Hirshhorn Museum (Washington), Philadelphia Museum of Art (Philadelphia), MACBA (Barcelona), Lenbachhaus (Munich), Deichtorhallen Hamburg (Hamburg), ZKM (Karlsruhe), Centre Pompidou (Paris).