



museo di arte moderna e contemporanea di trento e rovereto

The word in art

20th-century avant-garde research. From Futurism to the present day seen through Mart's collections

At Mart Rovereto, from 10th November 2007 to 6th April 2008
The Word will be the protagonist of the major end-of-year exhibition.

Written, drawn, declaimed, thought, cancelled, the word has played a fundamental role in the experimentation of the historical avant-garde movements, and its presence has accompanied every significant change in the artistic poetics of the 20th century. From Futurism to Dadaism and Surrealism to Fluxus and the contemporary scene, the relationship between word and image has given life to the boldest expressive forms, making an original innovative contribution both to painting and to the more traditional forms of written, poetic, literary and artistic text. With alternating fortune, now rare, now dominant, writing has appeared throughout 20th-century art, and even today the ambiguity of its relationship with the image is as never before at the centre of interest for young artists.

The word in art. 20th-century avant-garde. From Futurism to the present day seen through Mart's collections, as is the tradition with the museum's major exhibitions, explores this important relationship, opening up fresh avenues of enquiry into artistic work of the 20th century. Thanks to the presence of paintings of the highest quality, drawings, posters, manuscripts, literary works, collages and large installations, with over 800 works on show, many of which from Mart's own holdings, but also from leading international museums and collections, the exhibition provides an overview of 20th century art from a new critical stance, based not on "fine painting" so much as on "the sublime hybrid of the cross-fertilisation of the languages of art". The exhibition is divided into 11 sections, in line with a thematic and chronological itinerary, planned to enable further investigation and transverse comparisons with the panorama of contemporary art generally. Following a "prologue" focusing on the first avant-garde movements of the 20th century, the exhibition presents a rich documentation of all of 20th-century art, ending with the latest experiments which find in the relationship between word and the visual arts a fertile terrain for new approaches and interpretations of the contemporary aesthetic experience.

The **project for the exhibition** is the result of the work of a curatorial committee, coordinated by Giorgio Zanchetti. The catalogue, published by Skira, contains contributions from Gabriella Belli, Achille Bonito Oliva, Giorgio Zanchetti, Roberto Antolini, Silvia Bignami, Nicoletta Boschiero, Domenico Cammarota, Davide Colombo, Silvia Conta, Daniela Ferrari, Melania Gazzotti, Andreas Hapkemeyer, Antonello Negri, Aleksandra Obuchova, Julia Trolp and Federico Zanoner.

THE EXHIBITION

Futurism

The exhibition opens with the first, important “literary experiments” of **Futurism**. From the celebrated *parole in libertà* (“free words”) arising from the nocturnal poetic explosions of **Filippo Tommaso Marinetti**, **Francesco Cangiullo** and **Giacomo Balla** to the lyrical sounds of **Fortunato Depero’s** *onomalingua* and the pictorial compositions cross-fertilised with collages by **Gino Severini**, **Ardengo Soffici** and **Carlo Carrà**. Also on show will be a 1910 painting by **Umberto Boccioni**, *Gli uomini*, an early example of the artist’s combination of painting and writing.

Dada and Surrealism

The inventions of Futurism in later years interweave with the linguistic and poetic **Dadaist** research of **Raul Hausman**, **Francis Picabia** and **Tristan Tzara**, and with the *ready-mades* and *livres-objet* of **Marcel Duchamp** and **Man Ray**. **Kurt Schwitters** is represented by a series of *collages*, in which paper comes into contact with the materials of the everyday to obtain a plastic, almost sculptural effect in the work. The Surrealist movement is present in the exhibition with some works by **Andrè Masson**, **Maurice Henry**, and with two drawings by **René Magritte**.

The Russian Avant-garde

In the 1920s, the form and composition of the word played an important role in the USSR, making use of the extraordinary work done with the Constructivist avant-garde in typographical propaganda. It is books and posters above all that became the medium most used for this experimentation. Among the most significant examples, it is worth recalling the artistic work contained in the texts of **Vladimir Mayakowsky**, of which 13 examples are on show in the exhibition, comprising magazines and books.

The form of the word

It is in these historical avant-garde movements that we need to find the roots of the investigation into the relationship between work and image which became firmly established in the second half of the 20th century. For the artists of **concrete poetry**, working in the 1950s, this investigation highlights the composition and visual possibilities offered by typographical characters, as is evident in the works of **Carlo Belloli**, **Eugen Gomringer**, **Augusto** and **Haroldo de Campos**, **Heinz Gappmayr**, **Arrigo Lora-Totino**.

Revolution in words

For the representatives of **visual poetry**, active from 1963 onwards and linked by their adhesion to the neo-avant-garde literary movement “Gruppo 63”, the use of verbal and iconic elements originating from the mass media, conveys messages of political and social portent: works by **Ketty La Rocca**, **Lucia Marcucci**, **Eugenio Miccini**, **Nanni Balestrini**, **Lamberto Pignotti**, **Sarenco**, **Ugo Carrega**, **Martino Oberto** will be displayed, together with a photograph by **Jochen Gerz** of 1990.

Words at play

Very different in nature are the operations associated with the world of mass communications by the artists of **New Dada**, of **Pop Art** and of **Nouveau Réalisme**, and of the experience in Italy of such as **Mimmo Rotella** and **Mario Schifano**. Plus, from the 1980s, the contribution made by **Jean Michel Basquiat**.

From their explorations of the universe of logos and evergreen symbols in the history of world-wide consumerism – from the “combine paintings” of **Robert Rauschenberg** to **Warhol’s** series of Campbell Soups and **Arman’s** *trash assemblages* – arises what has been defined the *social criticism* reflecting on the false morality of contemporary man. The American artists were less ideologically committed, while the European ones were more politicised.

Word and action

The transnational artistic phenomenon of **Fluxus** (1961) confirms the interdisciplinary nature of the languages of art, which finds its maximum expression in the assemblage of materials and words, things and signs, able to intercept the experience of daily life in its incessant flow. Many results emerge from such a broad field of investigation: from the musical cross-fertilisations of **John Cage** and **Giuseppe Chiari** to the subtle irony of the phrases painted by **Ben Vautier** and on to the accumulations of materials by **Dieter Roth** and the strongly politically connoted work of **Joseph Beuys**.

Two works by the German artist are of particular interest: two blackboard made for his performance at Perugia in 1980, in the presence of Alberto Burri. The whole creation of the works can be followed at the exhibition thanks to a video documenting the event.

Calligraphy

Of particular interest is the section in which word, writing and painting combine in a pure manifestation of the artist’s gesture, as in the works of **Cy Twombly**, in which the sign, writing and *graffito* are loaded with pictorial suggestions, and in those of **Gastone Novelli**, who possessed an innate sensibility for emotional painting-writing, guided by the rhythm of chromatic poetic connotations.

Word and thought

In **Conceptual art**, ever since the 1960s, the dialectic relationship with writing has played a fundamental role: art is no longer specific materiality but principally idea and thought. The creative action appropriates the practice of language, finding a full expression in the elaboration of ideas or in the enunciation of a method. Tautology, or the enunciation of “absolute truths”, by **Joseph Kosuth** and the expressive rigour of **Lawrence Weiner** compare with the irony of **Piero Manzoni**, with the poetic and political zeroing of **Vincenzo Agnetti**, and with the *calembours* of **Bruce Naumann**, as well as with the classification of signs and words by **Alighiero Boetti** and with the *Picture/Readings* of **Barbara Kruger**.

The room containing the three works of **Giulio Paolini** “Dove”, “Lo spazio” and “Qui” constitute a site-specific realisation. This space, planned in 1967, will for the first time be arranged by the artist in accordance with the original project. This section also includes a mural work by **Robert Barry** and a neon text by **Maurizio Nannucci**.

Narration

The international artistic movement of the 1970s, “narrative art”, combined photography and text, recording fragments of everyday life that actually happened or were merely imagined. The historic representatives of this current, such as **Bill Beckley** and **Franco Vaccari**, are compared in the exhibition with contemporary artists such as **Sophie Calle**. This last – who has represented France at the 2007 edition of the Biennale di Venezia – uses texts and photographs to recount experiences of her own or of others, playing with reality and the imagination.

The word denied

The idea of the word denied – absent although inferred, or illegible – constitutes a thread that runs throughout the varied setting of verbal and visual artistic work of the late 20th century.

The strong symbolic charge of the book has led to the result that many artists have chosen it to communicate the absence of possible narratives. The *Enciclopedia Treccani cancellata* by **Emilio Isgrò** will be for the first time reassembled since its presentation in 1970. This container *par excellence* of human knowledge is meticulously cancelled out in every part by Isgrò, with the exception of just a few words, which leap to the attention of the reader, suggesting personal interpretations.

For his part, **Bruno Munari** produced the *Libro illeggibile n° 12*, (1951), one of his first. Created personally, the volume is made of paper of varying colour and thickness, cut by Munari, then glued and stitched, but it contains no written words.

Also present are nine *Scritture illeggibili di popoli sconosciuti*, of 1975: imaginary ideograms executed on computer printouts, and created by imitating the graphic signs of Arabic and Chinese writing.

The bond between image and word seem all the stronger in **contemporary artistic research**.

The cross-fertilisation of genres expands in a transverse manner and affects every process of experimentation in today’s avant-garde movements, without barriers, just as occurred in the first half of the last century. The exhibition documents this rich chapter with a series of significant works, placing a multitude of very different artists’ experiences at the centre of the overview of the contemporary scene. For all of these artists, however, the word constitutes not a casual exercise, but a fundamental element of their very poetics: from **Shirin Neshat**, **Ghada Amer**, **Thomas Hirschhorn**, **Raymond Pettibon** and **Moshekwa Langa**, who use writing to highlight cultural and political problems; **Tacita Dean** who makes use of a poetic approach to evoke the dimension of memory and past; **Tracey Emin** disturbs the observer by using a shocking text to provoke emotions. On show too are three volumes of *Encyclopaedia Utopia*, 1990, by **Nedko Solakov**, Golden Lion at the 2007 edition of the Biennale di Venezia, in which texts, drawings and photographs are ordered in accordance with an imaginary cataloguing process, combining fantasy and personal experiences.

Many of the works on show set up a dialogue with the exhibition spaces, as in the case of the 2005 work of **Jenny Holzer** and that of **Joe Amrhein** of 2002, or invite the visitor to interact with them, as in the case of the large installation produced for the Mart in 2006 by **Douglas Gordon** or the words “piercing” the screen by **Jan Mančuška**. Likewise the plays on words of **Kay Rosen**, and the ironic decalogue of the two Austrian artists, **Fischli & Weiss**, *How to work better*, 1991-2007.

This particular work will appear in different zones of the Mart not destined for exhibitions: from the cafeteria to the lavatories, the garage and the offices. It constitutes a decalogue of “recommendations for working better” with the objective of suggesting an ambiguity between exhibition and working functions within a museum.

The word also appeals to and fascinated the latest generations of artists. Using different approaches and methods, the word is the source of inspiration and protagonist of the work of **Stefano Arienti, Micol Assaël, Monica Bonvicini, Alessandra Cassinelli, Michael Elmgreen & Ingar Dragset, Paolo Gonzato, Scott King, Salvatore Licitra, Marzia Migliora, Sabrina Mezzaqui, Ottonella Mocellin, Sandrine Nicoletta, Nicola Pellegrini, Luca Quartana, Gaston Ramirez, Albrecht Schäfer, David Shringley, Vibeke Tandberg, Enzo Umbaca.**

The word in art is an exhibition tying in with the emergence of renewed interest on the part of many European museums into the study of the relationship between art and writing.

In this respect, the Mart can boast of having been the first to have been chosen, back in the mid-1990s, as venue to preserve and showcase some of the most important collections in this sector.

The aim of the exhibition is thus to promote awareness of an extraordinary chapter in artistic creativity of the 20th century.

The word in art has been made possible thanks to the loans and donations of works and archives dedicated to verbal and visual research preserved in the Mart's Archivio del '900 (20th-Century Archive), in the permanent collections and in its specialised library. These last works have arrived at the museum thanks to the generous long-term loans from Paolo Della Grazia's Archivio di Nuova Scrittura, from the Carlo Palli collection in Prato, from the Panza di Biumo collection, from the Bellora di Anna Spagna collection in Milan, from the Archivio Tullia Denza archive in Brescia, from the Fondo Sandretti of 20th-century Russian art, from the VAF-Stiftung and from the Sonnabend collection. There are other equally important loans from private collections, such as the group of works from the Calmarini collection, and from Italian and international museums.

The exhibition has been realised in collaboration with the Museion – Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea Bolzano

THE WORD IN ART. 20TH-CENTURY AVANT-GARDE. FROM FUTURISM TO THE PRESENT DAY SEEN THROUGH MART'S COLLECTIONS

Mart Rovereto - 10th November 2007 al 6th April 2008

Academic committee: Giorgio Zanchetti, *coordinator*, Gabriella Belli, Achille Bonito Oliva, Andreas Hapkemeyer, Nicoletta Boschiero, Paola Pettenella, Melania Gazzotti, Daniela Ferrari, Julia Trolp.

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Opening times

Tues. – Sun. 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.

Fri. 10 a.m. - 9 p.m.

Closed Monday

Tickets

full: euro 8

concessionary: euro 5

free up to the age of 14

school reduction: euro 1 per pupil

family ticket (valid for all members of
a single family): euro 20

Friends of the museum: free

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