

Vincenzo Agnetti - Tomaso Binga | *una macchina è una macchina* (a machine is a machine)

12 March 2024 – 15 July 2024

Texts in the catalogue by Giuseppe Garrera and Ilaria Gianni

PRESS RELEASE

On **Tuesday 12 March at 6pm**, the exhibition programme of the Erica Ravenna Gallery continues with a two-person exhibition dedicated to **Vincenzo Agnetti** and **Tomaso Binga**. This is a dialogue between two artists who, ever since the 1960s, have favoured the use of the word as an expressive medium of that process of transformation, by means of which thoughts, experiences and life itself can become artistic operations.

Around 30 works, **most of which have never been publicly exhibited**, focus on the many points of contact between these two artists who share many elements of their aesthetic approach, which includes **the use of poetry, performative practices and the conception of art as an operation of synthesis and fusion**.

The 1960s and 1970s were years of experimentation, which saw the advent of extra-artistic materials and new technologies that inspired and influenced research into new expressive languages and new approaches in the sphere of art. Among the many mechanical supports and technological means adopted at this time, the **typewriter** was a device that numerous artists used in order to create their works. The well-known essay *The Art of Typewriting*, authored and compiled by Ruth and Marvin Sackner in 2015, is an extensive overview that mentions the work of Tomaso Binga – an artist who has regularly collaborated with the Erica Ravenna Gallery for many years – specifically in the form of his *Dattilocodici* (Typecodes) made on an **Olivetti Lettera 32** typewriter. A typing error caused by pushing two keys at the same time generated a sign that, elaborated by the compositional decisions of the artist, gave rise to original images in a cryptic linguistic code.

Vincenzo Agnetti does not appear in the Sackners' essay, although his artistic activity is analogous to that of Binga. In 1968, at the *Cenobio-Visualità* Gallery in Milan, the artist exhibited his work *La macchina drogata* (The drugged machine): an **Olivetti Divisumma 14** electromechanical calculator, the numbers of which he had replaced with letters of the alphabet and punctuation symbols. The public was invited to interact with this strange mechanical instrument, thereby producing collaborative and performative actions that Agnetti dubbed "static theatre". The original letter entitled *Del teatro statico* (Of static theatre), which reflects upon the metalinguistic function of language, the demystification of information and the artist's relationship with consumer society, will also be on display in the exhibition.

The exhibition represents the continuation of the gallery's interest in comparing the work of Agnetti and Binga, an ongoing process inaugurated **for the first time** on the occasion of the collective *Fare uno, dalla parola al segno un dialogo possibile* (Making one, from the word to the sign - a possible dialogue) in March 2023, which was followed by the project of **miart 23**. A poem that Vincenzo Agnetti dedicated to Tomaso Binga in 1977, and that has recently been rediscovered, also provides us with ample proof that this comparison is significant and relevant.

Through **Tomaso Binga's *Dattilocodici*** and the productions of **Vincenzo Agnetti's "drugged machine"**, the exhibition reflects on the ways in which the works of these two artists effectively anticipated what is happening today in the realm of new technologies, artificial intelligence and new media. The latter have, in fact, started to produce works of art through ongoing creative interactions between humans and machines, which are increasingly being seen as autonomous and "alive".

ERICARAVENNA

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Tomaso Binga (Salerno 1931), the art-name of Bianca Pucciarelli Menna, is an artist, poet and performer who lives and works in Rome. In 1971 Binga began her artistic and poetic experimentation centred around verbal-visual writing. In the first phase of her career, she worked with “desemantized” writing, a seemingly dysfunctional and non-communicative use of the graphic sign, holding her first exhibition in 1974 at the “Obelisco Gallery” in Rome. In the same year, she began to present her performative actions: the first of which was *Parole da distruggere, parole da conservare* (Words to Destroy, Words to Preserve). In the following years she dedicated herself to many cultural activities and she participated in several noteworthy exhibitions. In 1976 she completed a series of works that would remain a cornerstone of her artistic research, including *Scrittura Vivente* (Living Writing), featuring letters of the alphabet formed with her own body, and her famous wallpapers. Also in 1976 she was invited to take part in the exhibition organised by Mirella Bentivoglio entitled *Tra linguaggio e immagine* (Between Language and Image). This was followed in 1978 by *Materializzazione del linguaggio* (Materialization of Language). She continued her activities by participating in several exhibitions and cultural initiatives, including the 16th São Paulo Biennial in Brazil (1981), the 11th Rome Quadriennale (1986), *Fondazione Prada* (2017), *Frigoriferi Milanesi* (2019), *Museion* in Bolzano (2019), *Centre d'Art Contemporain* in Geneva (2020) and, most recently, the 2022 Venice Biennale. Her works are on display in museum collections in Italy and around the world.

Vincenzo Agnetti (Milan, 1926 - 1981), an alumnus of the Brera Academy in Milan, began his career in the late 1950s informally as a painter and as a critic, essayist and theorist. In 1957, he worked with the “Azimuth Gallery” and with the magazine of the same name, alongside Manzoni, Castellani, Bonalumi, Boriani, Anceschi and De Vecchi. From 1960 he began to reject the practice of painting, increasingly identifying art with absence, and working with an extremely radical, ‘cold’ and sometimes cryptic conceptual approach. In 1962 he published *Obsoleto*, in which he deliberately made the text in the final pages illegible. He conducted a similar operation at the end of the decade with *Libro dimenticato a memoria* (Book Forgotten by Heart), completely cutting all the blocks of text out of the pages, and with *Pagina dimenticata a memoria* (Page Forgotten by Heart), in which the text stands out as a negative image on the black page. He then spent several years travelling and experimenting outside the field of painting, until he returned to Italy in 1967 and became an advocate of artistic practice as a pure analysis of concepts. His investigation of the object in relation to its physical and mental image and his artistic research on the languages of communication are of fundamental importance. In 1975, Agnetti opened a studio in Manhattan, initiated a collaboration with Ronald Feldman and formed friendships with several other artists, notably with Arakawa. He took part in the Venice Biennale from 1974 to 1978, the Rome Quadriennale, Documenta 5 in 1972 and the São Paulo Biennial in 1973. Agnetti died in Milan in 1981.

INFORMATION SHEET

“Vincenzo Agnetti - Tomaso Binga | a machine is a machine”

Erica Ravenna Gallery

Via della Reginella, 3 - Via di Sant’Ambrogio, 26 – 00186 Rome

7th March – 15th July 2024

Inauguration:

Tuesday 12th March 2024 at 6 pm

Opening hours:

Monday to Friday 10.30am – 1.30pm / 3.30pm – 7.30pm; Saturday 10.30am – 1.30pm

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