# Maurizio Cattelan Breath Ghosts Blind

# Pirelli HangarBicocca

ΕN

# Maurizio Cattelan Breath Ghosts Blind

15 July 2021 – 20 February 2022 Curated by Roberta Tenconi and Vicente Todolí

### **Cultural Mediation**

Cultural mediators are present in the exhibition spaces to answer questions from the public, give information and context elements that can deepen the fruition of the artworks. The dialogue between mediator and visitor should take place in compliance with social distancing policies and the norms on the protection of personal health.

#### **Public Program**

The Public Program is structured around three core themes, each recalling the three moments of the exhibition in the spaces of Pirelli HangarBicocca, construed through multiple frameworks and subjects: philosophy and the insights on collectivity and future, history and the interpretation of Italy and Milan's most recent past, art and the analysis of the role played by images in today's shared narrative. Each contributor has been asked to participate through reflections, references and thoughts that will be accessible in the in-depth section "Bubbles" on our website: pirellihangarbicocca.org

# **Maurizio Cattelan**

Maurizio Cattelan has become one of the most influential figures of the international cultural scene by catalyzing, with his iconic works, the debate on contemporary art over the last twenty years. His practice deals with uncomfortable and complex aspects of society, revealing deep contradictions through the use of multiple artistic idioms, from the ironic to the dramatic.

Born in 1960 in Padua—a city that in the 1970s became the center of the student revolt and left-wing political pressure—, Cattelan trained in a context marked by strong social tensions that would influence the genesis of his

> first works. The years of his studies were characterized by a hostile attitude toward institutions, first and foremost the school, and by various professions undertook to

> become economically inde-

pendent of his family. During

the second half of the 1980s,

he approached the world of

design as an autodidact and



Untitled, 2001 Wax, pigment, human hair, fabric, polyester resin 150 x 60 x 40 cm Photo Zeno Zotti created a series of objects with anthropomorphic features by assembling existing materials. This experience led him to dedicate himself to art. In 1989 Cattelan produced his first work, *Lessico familiare* [Family lexicon], a black-and-white photographic self-portrait in which he is depicted while forming a hand heart at chest height. The image is enclosed in a silver frame to emphasize the contradictions of the lower middle-class life.



Lullaby, 1994 Wooden pallet, rubble, plastic film 135 x 100 x 120 cm Installation view, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1994 His early works focus on the problematization of social functions and their psychological and emotional tensions, such as the sense of failure and the inability to create. Cattelan often contrives actions that question his role as an artist and his belonging to the art system: for example, for his participation in the "Aperto" section of the Venice Biennale in 1993, he decided to rent out the exhibition space allocated to him to an advertising firm. Questions on authorship and speculation on the art scene have always been distinguishing features of his practice, which often takes the form of provocative actions.

In the 1990s, Cattelan moved to New York, where he continued his exploration of the desecration of the art system. His practice reflected on his personal identity, sometimes probing Italy's more recent history and events that have left deep wounds in the collective memory. One of these was the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro in 1978, which Cattelan elaborated upon and represented with an enlarged newspaper page used as wallpaper inside the Daniel Buchholz Gallery in Cologne in 1994.

The starting point of Cattelan's creative process is first of all an image, a visual stimulus that draws on reality and offers a new perspective of everyday life. The artist then merges themes and references in a single, new and strongly resonant representation. Combining different genres-ranging from tragedy to comedy-he creates works such as the emblematic *Novecento* [Twentieth century], 1997, a taxidermied horse that hangs from the ceiling, seemingly succumbing to its own weight, as well as self-portraits that play on the idea of failure. like Charlie Don't Surf (1997), which suggests a hypothetical crucifixion of a young boy at his school desk; and Lullaby (1994), an installation composed of a block of rubble from the explosion of PAC - Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea in Milan caused by a Mafia terrorist attack. Symbolically transposing the feeling of loss, the work furthers Cattelan's reflection on the pain caused by a collective threat.

For Cattelan the public debate generated by his works is a fundamental part of the construction of their meaning, making both viewers and the media crucial players in the artistic process. He uses culturally and socially recognized symbols as tools of reflection: «Today, for me, art means showing things from a slightly different perspective, from another angle. What you do is not always interesting or relevant, but sometimes you are able to touch a nerve, to take something visible to all and show it in a light that awakens people, and prompts them to think or discuss it.»

During his career, Cattelan has employed linguistic codes that stem from the iconography of art history, such as the use of traditional materials like marble. or referencing symbolic elements that allude to the transience of life in classical genres. One of his most iconic works is La Nona Ora [The ninth hour], 1999, a wax sculpture of Pope John Paul II hit by a meteorite, in which the artist crystalizes the notions of sacredness and frailty in a single image. His cycle of hyper-realistic works continued with Untitled (2004), the controversial installation of three mannequins depicting children hanging from the branches of a tree in Piazza XXIV Maggio in Milan. Exhibited in the square for less than two days. Untitled triggered a public debate that highlighted the contradiction between the tacit acceptance of violence in contemporary society and the indignation provoked by its symbolic representation. The themes addressed in Cattelan's works involve, on one hand, existential issues and fundamental human concerns, such as death, love, evil, the sense of loss and absence, and, on the other, they query and challenge contemporary institutions and figures of authority and power: «I'm interested by mass fears and hysteria» Cattelan says. In other words, he often works on the collective and on shared experiences and feelings.

Cattelan is often associated with figures like Andy Warhol (1928–1987), for the use of mass culture images, or with Italian artists such as Alighiero Boetti (1940–1994) for his capacity to subvert defined orders and destabilize his viewers. However, the artist has always declared himself



La Nona Ora, 1999 Polyester resin, wax, pigment, human hair, fabric, clothing, accessories, stone, glass, carpet Variable dimensions Installation view, Palazzo Reale, Milan, 2010 Photo Zeno Zotti independent from any artistic or ideological movement, and has preserved his own artistic practice over thirty years of career. In 2011, Cattelan raised debate with his solo show "All" at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, in which he presented all his individual works as a single piece suspended from the ceiling of the building's central spiral. Over the years, in parallel with exhibitions, Cattelan has undertaken different activities, among which curating exhibitions and publishing projects like *Toilet Paper*, a magazine he co-founded that has become a cult and which explores visual culture from a completely new viewpoint.

# The Exhibition

Tourists, 1997

Environmental dimensions

Taxidermied pigeons

Installation view, 47th

Venice Biennale, 1997

Photo Attilio Maranzano

"Breath Ghosts Blind" has been conceived as a dramaturgy in three moments that unfolds in close relationship with the architecture of Pirelli HangarBicocca. The three acts find their counterparts in the monumental, adjacent spaces of the Piazza, the Navate, and the Cubo. Following one another, they articulate the exhibition layout like film frames or the acts of a theater performance.

Marking Cattelan's return to Milan after more than a decade, the exhibition presents a project the artist has been working on for a long time. The title encloses the names of the pieces on display: *Breath* (2021), a previously unseen marble sculpture that opens the exhibition; *Ghosts* (2021), a reconfiguration of an earlier work that transforms the space of the Navate; and *Blind* (2021),



a new monumental installation. The three artworks appear as moments of a symbolic representation of the cycle of life from birth to death, through emblematic references belonging to the collective imagination that call into question the current system of values and offer a deep reflection on the more disorienting aspects of daily life.

Following an ascensional path, the exhibition unfolds like a rarefied and silent setting in which the visitors' bodies become an integral part of the artist's narrative. Developed as a trilogy, it is also open to an allegorical interpretation, since the symbolism of the number three represents both the idea of unity and perfection, while also suggesting religious images, such as the Trinity or the Crucifixion.

## 1. Breath, 2021

The sculpture that opens the exhibition in the Piazza at Pirelli HangarBicocca hints at a silent dialogue. Created with a noble material—white Carrara marble—, the work depicts a human figure and a dog lying on the ground on one side, facing one another. Apparently unconscious, the person is in a fetal position. The posture of the bodies suggests a possible link between the two. However, the artist leaves the nature of this relationship uncertain: the viewer does not know whether this situation is the outcome of an accidental or preexisting encounter.

While the scene might be the result of a fortuitous event or of a circumstance that occurred shortly beforehand, the use of marble conveys a sense of sacredness and timelessness. Distinguished by its fine grain, Carrara marble is the quintessential material in ancient, Renaissance, and Neoclassical sculpture, used by Michelangelo, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, and Antonio Canova, among many others. Cattelan has used it in a number of works, such as ironic gravestones for dogs like *Piumino* and *Sparky* (1999), that celebrate the memory of a pet through the solemn nature of the material, and the monument to the Italian politician Bettino Craxi (*Untitled*, 2010), a direct reference to classical statuary.

*Gérard*, 1999 Plastic, clothing, shoes, blanket 82 x 66 x 87 cm Photo Attilio Maranzano The human figure in *Breath* might recall a homeless person who lives on the side of the street and on the fringes of society, whether by obligation or choice, a subject that Cattelan has investigated since the sec-



ond half of the 1990s, like in the mannequin made of rags of *Andreas e Mattia* (1996). The fact that the face of none of these figures is visible and that Cattelan often portrays himself in his works make the interpretation of these characters even more ambiguous and a possible projection of the artist.

The simulation of animal life is a recurrent element in Cattelan's practice and often evokes the idea and inevitability of death. In *Love Saves Life* (1995)



Untitled, 2007 (detail) Two taxidermied Labrador dogs and chick Variable dimensions Installation view, Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2008 Photo Zeno Zotti taxidermied donkey, dog, cat, and rooster are placed on top of one another—in reference to the Grimm's fairy tale on friendship, *The Town Musicians of Bremen*, a motif the artist repeats two years later in *Love Lasts Forever*, replacing the animals with their skeletons to indicate an indissoluble bond. Or in *Untitled* (2007), featuring a chick among two Labradors in an empty space, a composition that references the Nativity scene.

The symbolism associated with the dog has a central role among many cultures around the world, not only

for their well-known loyalty to humans but also, in mythology, as guides between the world of the living and that of the dead. For this reason, the animal is often associated with a twofold meaning: familiar-unknown, human-bestial, rationality-unconscious.

In *Breath*, Maurizio Cattelan associates for the first time a human figure and a dog in the same work. In the constant tension evident between them, the title itself refers to complementary and synergistic phases that flow into an organic unity. The two figures share a vital function: breathing. As suggested by their position, the generative moment symbolized by the action of breathing recalls the cycle of life in the observer. The concept is further developed by the artist in the other two works that compose the exhibition in Pirelli HangarBicocca. *Breath*, *Ghosts*, and *Blind* are like three acts of a *mise en scène* in which life and death, identity and otherness, irony and sorrow represent apparent contradictions of a complex reality.

## 2. Ghosts, 2021

Thousands of taxidermied pigeons are scattered along the Navate individually or in groups, arranged on the rafters that support the roof or dispersed in the gaps between the pillars and walls of the building. They "observe" from above the movements of the visitors looking at them. Impassive and eerily calm onlookers, pigeons are a habitual feature of the urban landscape and their presence in the exhibition space imparts a feeling of restlessness. Far from the visitors, the birds seem to loiter in the nooks and most anonymous places of the formerly industrial architecture of Pirelli HangarBicocca; suggesting a reversal between the inside and outside, they mark the confines of the museum and transform it into an urban environment that abounds with life.

The concept of overturning was already present in the first version of this work, which dates back to Maurizio Cattelan's participation in the Italian Pavilion curated by Germano Celant at the 47th Venice Biennale in 1997. For the installation—titled *Tourists* (1997)—the artist populated the pavilion of pigeons, set out on the air ducts and other architectural elements, along with their excrements, thus creating a feeling of disorientation. In 2011, for the 54th Venice Biennale, curated by Bice Curiger, he produced a new iteration of the installation—*Others*—, positioning around two thousand pigeons on the façade and inside of the Central Pavilion in the Giardini (formerly known as the Italian Pavilion).



Others, 2011 Taxidermied pigeons Environmental dimensions Installation view, 54th Venice Biennale, 2011 Photo Zeno Zotti Ever since the first version of the work, the presence of the birds in the rooms and exhibition spaces has stimulated a dialogue and a comparison with the other works shown, suggesting an analogy with the figure of the intruder in the art world linked to Cattelan himself. A variety of strategies are used to attest his alleged dissociation from the facts, contexts or actions that seem to mock and at the same time nourish the paradox of art. While the role of the artist is traditionally characterized by an aura of sacrality associated with the creative gesture, in his own work it is placed alongside that of the robber. In *Another Fucking Readymade* of 1996, for example, Cattelan legitimized an art heist, passing from a purely metaphorical to a literal level of robbery.

Cattelan ascribes the concepts of transmission and transit to the meaning of the pigeon, which was historically the bearer of information during wars or for transatlantic communications. Its image is also connected to that of the dove, a ubiquitous symbol in Christian iconography to represent the Holy Spirit. Traceable back to emblematic events in different eras and cults, the pigeon, therefore, embodies the notion of testimony.

Considered together, the pigeons also suggest an indistinct crowd, the colonizers of a space that they claim through the silent power of their presence, establishing a strong sense of community and belonging. Therefore, in a set of reversals the observers become the intruders in the room and are confronted with their own individuality. The distressing experience impressed by the work has, in its previous versions, been compared with the iconic final sequence of Alfred Hitchcock's 1963 film The Birds, in which the cawing of crows and squawking of seagulls is replaced by the unreal silence of the flock of pigeons. The landscape of the Navate may evoke other Hollywood images, among which the dismal atmospheres of the streets of Tim Burton's Gotham City, suggesting scenes of the margins of society.

Lastly, the title *Ghosts*, seems to refer to a process of disembodiment that is intrinsic to the work's exhibition history. Whereas with *Tourists* the relationship with the city of Venice and travel has a direct connection with the human figure, in *Others* Maurizio Cattelan dwells on the sense of community, evoking the relationship between identity and otherness. In contrast, *Ghosts* unveils a strong link with spectrality, conjuring up indistinct images of possible predecessors who inhabited that space. By expanding the perception of the architectural volume, *Ghosts* appears suspended in a limbo between the other two works on show.

## 3. Blind, 2021

All, 2007 Carrara marble, 9 elements 30 x 100 x 200 each Installation view, Kunsthaus Bregerz, 2008 Photo Markus Tretter This monumental new work is presented to the public for the first time on the occasion of "Breath, Ghosts, Blind". Installed in the Cubo, *Blind* gradually reveals itself as a monolith from the Navate area—as visitors approach and cross the threshold of the space, it unveils the outline of an airplane intersecting it at its top, both elements made from resin and in matte black color. Seen from below, the imposing installation induces the feeling of being overwhelmed and dominated. The sentiment of vulnerability and fragility prompted by the sculpture recalls the awe or amazement that one may feel when passing in front of religious buildings



like cathedrals and minarets. The correlation with an experience of a spiritual and solemn nature is heightened by both the shape of the work—a cross when seen in plan view—and the silence that pervades the exhibition space.

L.O.V.E., 2010 Carrara marble Figure: 470 × 220 × 72 cm Base: 630 × 470 × 470 cm Installation view, Piazza degli Affa, Milan, 2010 Photo Zeno Zotti

*Blind* inevitably alludes to the attack of September 11, 2001, and offers a synthesis of it, a single tower, as if the plane had become one entity with the building. Developed over several years, the work resumes and amplifies some of the key themes in Cattelan's practice. First and foremost, a reflection on historical events, including terrorist attacks, which he has already ad-



dressed in Untitled (1994), Lullaby (1994), and Now (2004). that refer respectively to the kidnapping and execution of the Italian politician Aldo Moro in 1978, to the Mafia attack on the PAC - Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea in Milan (1993), and the assassination of John F. Kennedy in Dallas (1963). Blind also continues the artist's exploration of death. which he often epitomizes with direct and iconic features, like in All (2007), made of nine marble sculptures representing the profiles of anonymous corpses each

covered with a sheet. From this perspective, *Blind* appears as a gigantic headstone, a memorial to the fallen. Similar to *L.O.V.E.* (2010), installed in the middle of Piazza degli Affari in Milan, it calls into question the value and significance of a monument: while the two works convey the idea of monumentality on account of their size, they also undermine it by creating a tension between conflicting forces and symbols.

With Blind, Cattelan crystallizes a moment that in just a few minutes caused the physical and symbolic collapse of an icon of New York City that had attracted the attention of other artists since its construction, such as high-wire walker Philippe Petit that in 1974 walked on a steel cable between the Twin Towers, suspended in the void. On this occasion as well. Cattelan appropriates once again a paradigmatic image by transforming it into a new symbol. In his intention, Blind goes beyond the events of that day: the episode and its resonance take material form in a work that becomes a memorial to a moment of shared pain and collective loss. Its plasticity may evoke other monuments to tragic historical events-such as the sculptural group of three public works of 1938 by Constantin Brancusi in Târgu Jiu in Romania, which pays tribute to the heroes of the First World War, and Peter Eisenman's Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, realized in 2005-but Cattelan proposes a different concept of memorial that unites abstraction and figuration. Finally, the title Blind also suggests another level of interpretation, insinuating doubt about exactly who it is that is unable to see, perhaps alluding to humanity in our current state.

17

# **Exhibited Works**

Navate

### 1. Breath, 2021

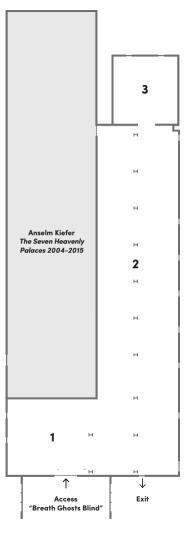
Carrara marble Human figure: 40 x 78 x 131 cm Dog: 30 x 65 x 40 cm Courtesy Maurizio Cattelan and Marian Goodman Gallery

### 2. Ghosts, 2021

Taxidermied pigeons Environmental dimensions Courtesy Maurizio Cattelan

### 3. Blind, 2021

Resin, wood, steel, aluminum, polystyrene, paint 1,695 x 1,300 x 1,195 cm Produced by Marian Goodman Gallery and Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan Courtesy Maurizio Cattelan and Marian Goodman Gallery



# **Selected Exhibitions**

Maurizio Cattelan (Padua, 1960) lives and works between Milan and New York. His solo exhibitions have been presented by institutions of international importance, including Blenheim Palace, Woodstock, UK (2019). Monnaie de Paris (2016). Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2016 and 2011), Fondation Beveler, Riehen/Basel (2013), Palazzo Reale, Milan (2010). Kunsthaus Bregenz (2008). MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt (2007), Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, Milan (2004), Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2004). MOCA Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2003), Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2003). Museum of Contemporary Art. Chicago (2002). Cattelan has also participated in major group shows. such as Yokohama Triennale (2017 and 2001), Venice Biennale (2011, 2009, 2003, 2001, 1999, 1997, and 1993). Gwangiu Biennale (2010). Biennale of Sydney (2008), Whitney Biennial, New York (2004), Seville Biennial (2004). Biennale de Lvon (2003). Skulptur Projekte Münster (1997).

Finalist of the Guggenheim Hugo Boss Prize (2000), the artist has received the Rome Quadriennale Prize (2009), the Arnold-Bode Prize, Kassel (2005), the honorary degree in Sociology by the University of Trento (2004) and the title of Honorary Professor in Sculpture by the Accademia di Belle Arti di Carrara (2018). This publication accompanies the exhibition "Breath Ghosts Blind" by Maurizio Cattelan

#### Lenders

Maurizio Cattelan's Archive

#### Acknowledgments

Cecilia Alemani, Carlo Antonelli, Alice Artico, Nicolas Ballario, Francesco Barcella, Luisa Basiricò, Maria Bassi, Massimo Berardini, Umberta Beretta, Aurora Bertoli, Gianni Bertoli, Andrea Boletti, Francesco Bonami, Michele Bonuomo, Linda Bresciani, Alice Brugnerotto, Francesco Bussi, Francesca Caccia, Lexi Campbell, Nicole Colombo, Chiara Confalonieri, Guglielmo Corradi, Carlo Cracco, Federico Dalla Pozza, Massimo De Carlo, Flavio Del Monte, Roberto Dipasquale, Luca Di Rosa, Elio, Pierpaolo Ferrari, Jennie Freeburg, Cosimo Giardino, Massimiliano Gioni, Matteo Gnata, Marian Goodman, Arnon Grunberg, Golan Haji, Annalisa Inzana, Matteo Izzo, Emily-Jane Kirwan, Mauro Linetti, Michele Maddalo, Paola Manfrin, Pasquale Mari, Vittoria Martinotti, Allison McDonald, Davide Memeo, Francesca Minini, Maria Miranda, Ester Morant, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Luca Olivari, Marta Papini, Chiara Parisi, Eva Pel, Emmanuel Perrotin, Elena Perugi, Andrea Pinotti, Demetrio Quaranta, Michele Robecchi, Rodrigo Rossi, Don Miguel Ruiz, Jamie Russell, Salvatore Russo, Patrizia Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Hong Sang Hee, Clara Scola, Marco Secondin, Nancy Spector, Chris Sutherns, Oliviero Toscani, Chiara Valerio, Dino Vannini, Timothy Verdon, Charley Vezza, Paride Vitale, Jessie Washburne-Harris

Special thanks to Lucio Zotti, Zeno Zotti, and Jacopo Zotti of Maurizio Cattelan's Archive for their precious collaboration throughout the entire process and the realization of the exhibition. Thanks to Marian Goodman Gallery for the support in the production of the artwork *Blind* (2021)

#### Texts by

Lucia Aspesi, Fiammetta Griccioli, Mariagiulia Leuzzi

#### Graphic Design Leftloft

#### **Editing and Translation**

Malerba Editorial & Partners, Milan

Cover: Maurizio Cattelan, photo, 2020

For all images: Courtesy Maurizio Cattelan's Archive Printed: July 2021

#### Pirelli HangarBicocca

Chairman Marco Tronchetti Provera Board of Directors Maurizio Abet, Gustavo Bracco, Ernesto Paolillo, Ilaria Tronchetti Provera General Manager Alessandro Bianchi

*Artistic Director* Vicente Todolí

#### Curator

Roberta Tenconi Assistant Curator Lucia Aspesi Assistant Curator Fiammetta Griccioli Research and Editorial Assistant Mariagiulia Leuzzi Curatorial Department and Special Projects Assistant Tatiana Palenzona

Head of Public and Educational Programs Giovanna Amadasi Educational Projects Laura Zocco Public Programs Production Arianna Bertolo Head of Communication and Press Office Angiola Maria Gili Press Office and Digital Communication Carlotta Biffi Communication Francesca Trovalusci

Partnership Development Fabienne Binoche

Event Organization and Bookshop Valentina Piccioni

Services Marketing & Operations Erminia De Angelis

Head of Production and Budgeting Valentina Fossati Installation Matteo De Vittor Installation Cesare Rossi

*Manager Assistant* Alessandra Abbate

*Registrar* Dario Leone Pirelli HangarBicocca is a non-profit foundation, established in 2004, which has converted a former industrial plant in Milan into an institution for producing and promoting contemporary art.

This dynamic center for experimentation and discovery covers 15,000 square meters, making it one of the largest contiguous exhibition spaces in Europe. It presents major solo shows every year by Italian and international artists, with each project conceived to work in close relation to the architecture of the complex, and explored in depth through a calendar of parallel events. Admission to the space and the shows is completely free of charge, and facilitators are on hand to help the general public connect with the art. Since 2012, Vicente Todolí has been the foundation's Artistic Director.

The complex, which once housed a locomotive factory, includes an area for public services and educational activities, and three exhibition spaces whose original twentieth-century architectural features have been left clearly visible: Shed, Navate, and Cubo.

As well as its exhibitions program and cultural events, Pirelli HangarBicocca also permanently houses one of Anselm Kiefer's most important site specific works, *The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004-2015*, commissioned for the inauguration of Pirelli HangarBicocca.

Media Partner of the "Breath Ghosts Blind" exhibition





**Technical Sponsors** 





## Pirelli HangarBicocca

Via Chiese, 2 20126 Milan IT

### Contacts

T. +39 02 66111573 info@hangarbicocca.org pirellihangarbicocca.org

#ArtToThePeople

Find out more about our exhibition guides on pirellihangarbicocca.org

# FREE ADMISSION

