

Catalogue of the exhibition “Ricostruzione teorica di un artista; Bruno Munari nelle collezioni Vodoz – Danese, Milano, 1996

THEORETIC RECONSTRUCTION OF AN ARTIST by Marco Romanelli

“Theoretic reconstruction of an artist”, that is, of a painter, a sculptor. Painter and sculptor, as people used to say a long time ago, before Bruno Munari arrived. Since then however the cards have been reshuffled. Since then many people have tried to tell the story of Munari: Munari the graphic designer, Munari the designer, Munari teaching, Munari designing, Munari painting, Munari sculpting. But in reality verbs, for Munari, are too assertive, definitive and disciplinary. Whit Munari they don't work, or hardly ever. The verb to design doesn't work, Munari doesn't design. The verb to paint doesn't work, Munari doesn't paint. The verb to sculpt doesn't work, Munari doesn't sculpt. Not even the verb to play really works either, it's too loud. A few other, different, verbs perhaps. To find, for example. To find ideas as smooth as river pebbles, as light as plumes of smoke, as subtle as a wasp's flight. To dream, for example. To wonder whether Munari himself, for example, in all these long years, may perhaps himself have been a dream. As if he somehow had to vanish into thin air all the time, as if he were air himself. A deeply refreshing air. To dream of Munari and then to discover, each day, that Munari has once again gone beyond the dream. Munari is not made of flesh and blood, but of wind and rain. The Munari who does not ask, the self-sufficient Munari. Who goes out and comes back (impossible to date Munari). Munari refuses all finalities and all finalism, all progression. Munari comes full circle. The Munari who does not sell his works because he does not regard them as works. Munari and Dilma, Munari is Dilma, Dilma is Munari: the absolute dyad. Munari smiling, at critics for example. Munari who believes in children, Munari the child. Munari who believes in hands, Munari's hands, the quick small hands of a child picking up thing and putting them into his pocket, cutting and gluing, though not like a carpenter, more like an embroiderer. What colour are Munari's eyes? Grey perhaps, since his hair turned silver. Munari ecstatic. Munari sectioning a pear, or rather, Munari opening a pear to reveal its symmetries of pips, as the Japanese poet said, the dripping juice draws spiders' legs. Munari packing art into a suitcase, so that art can also be for travellers. Munari who loves luggage, travellers' suitcases, not galleries, of art. He always ends up forgetting works in them, always forgetting to get paid and then he does the design again, the one forgotten. But different. Time has passed, since the day before yesterday. Munari express. Munari the Japanese calligrapher, with a thousand signs in a matter of minutes. Munari has kept the faculty of children to see, Therefore he can see the world: bits of wood and stones and shells and bamboo cane and buttons and transistor valves and samples of cloth and threads, innumerable threads. Threads of light and noise, threads of wind, the wake of aircraft, smoke signals and chirping of crickets. How could we, in Milan, have heard the wind and the chirping of crickets, without Munari? How could you, Bruno and Jacqueline, have passed the time of years untouched by years, without Bruno Munari?

This is not something to be written, it's something to be read (which is perhaps impossible). Words to be kept between closed lips, behind half-closed eyes. One thing is clear: verbs don't work with Bruno Munari, not even the verb to tell. And if you start by saying you'd like to speak of him as an artist, as have we done at the beginning of this catalogue, you end up saying perhaps this wasn't possible.