Back to the Futurists

This rare exhibition of Bruno Munari's work reveals an inventive artist who used wit and imagination to make his work accessible, says Adrian Hamilton.

The title is "Back to the Futurists." The text discusses Bruno Munari's exhibition, noting his use of wit and imagination to make his work accessible. It mentions his work at the Estorick Collection in London and references his use of colors in his art. The text also highlights his contributions to modern art and his influence on the Futurists.
multi-media sculpture in the 1950s. He flourished in advertising and design in the 1960s and 1970s but never gave up on painting as a proper focus for creativity, and all his assertions that, in the words of his fellow painter Giacometti in 1976: "But, travelling says, China - the things are all much more rewarding sight than the gitary little pictures nailed on the gray wall of the insane painter's studio". His sensitivity from the 1960s along with his Geometric Compositions, and most of all his Negative-positive from the 1960s have extraordinary dynamic power in their use of colour and rhythm, even at their most mathematical. Paradisi was applied to composition as much as titles.

What made Munari so individual and so different from his colleagues was not just his wit but also his sharp intelligence. He was one of the first artists to create mobiles as part of his Useful Machines in the 1950s in an effort to add dynamics and spontaneous movement to sculpture. They still hang as modern and as graceful as an Alexander Calder, who started using mobiles at roughly the same time. The Street and Arrhythmia of wire, fabric, clockwork and bits of metals from the 1940s and 1951 are all shapes before their time, but also astonishingly light and in spite of it. Sensitivity to 7.900 and 1960 is the same but, whatever, his way of working with color and wood but it is, as its title indicates, almost spiritual in its feeling. Munari was never content with simply expressing his concepts but with taking them as far as possible in any work. His juxtapositions of imagery

were there not just to entertain but to interact with the viewer. He wanted an art that was total but also involving. An early sculptural object from 1950 is a Tactile Board in which the fingers are urged to move from enery paper across wood and feather. He was one of the earliest artists to think of using a work to create an environment, at first with his mobiles, then with objects that could cast shadows. Always fascinated by light, Munari experimented continuously with it reflected through sculptures and projected through slides and polaroids. The last work in this endlessly fascinating exhibition is a single object taking up a whole room. Concrete canvav from 1947 is a folded wire mesh sheet, suspended from the ceiling and lit from above so that it casts intricate shadows on the surrounding wall, gently moving in the air conditioning. It is as peaceful, intriguing and quite beautiful - an ordinary material filling up in an extraordinary way.

Munari is sometimes accused of spreading himself too thinly and widely to be a great artist. This three-room exhibition displays just how consistent he was, in his ambition and his imagination. A show to lift your spirits in these dreary times.


In the loop with Hollywood's next great leading man

Joseph Gordon-Levitt could be the new Leonardo DiCaprio, says Matt Mueller

Joseph Gordon-Levitt is having a terrific year, which seems strange to say when the past few years have already seen him headline an adored indie-romance (500 Days of Summer), lend built to a franchise tentpole (G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra) and back in the glow of Christopher Nolan’s Inception. Nonetheless, a second stint with Nolan in The Dark Knight Rises followed by this month’s thriller double-bill, Premium Rush and Looper, and a year that will culminate in the release of Steven Spielberg’s Lincoln, is further burnishing Gordon-Levitt’s claim as the boy most likely to become Hollywood’s next great leading man.

God knows the industry needs someone like Gordon-Levitt to step up as his generation’s DiCaprio, especially since no one else appears achievable. Entering a Toronto hotel room with a bottle of water in his hands and a gentlemanly swagger in his step, he has the appearance of a man very comfortable with his place in the universe right now. "How you don’t?" draws the 31-year-old Los Angeles, like he’s suddenly been inhabited by the spirit of Joey Tribbiani. Looper opened the Toronto International Film Festival the night before and, before the onslaught of Cloud Atlas, Argo and The Master, he’s getting the chance to be the toast of the town. Looper, a funny time-travel-thriller, reunites Gordon-Levitt with his Brick director Rian Johnson for what he describes as "a sci-fi movie that doesn't focus on shifty spaceships or lasers, but is ultimately more of a drama - much like The Dark Knight Rises."

Gordon-Levitt plays Joe, a mob assassin called a "Looper" who targets agents zapped back from the future. Not a bad gig, until the mob decides to close your loop and dispatch your future self to be terminated. Fortunately for Joe, the 30-years-older version of himself, played by Bruce Willis, makes a desperate effort to hunt him down and (maybe) finish the job. In no one’s eyes do Willis and Gordon-Levitt look like each other, and the older man’s casting led to a face-off of prosthetics for the younger in order to bring their features closer in line. Distractingly for Looper, the glue and rubber job also makes Gordon-Levitt resemble a lout villain from Warren Beatty’s Dick Tracy.

"It’s a bitters experience to look in the mirror and see a face other than my own," says the actor, who insists that the hours in the make-up chair he endured each morning were necessary to achieve his performance. Even Emily Blunt tells us later that when she first encountered her co-star on set, no one told her he was called in prosthetics. "I was just really confused why he looked so different," she says. "I thought, 'What’s he done to his face?' I thought he’d had an allergic reaction to a bee sting or something. "The scene hardly adds, "It’s a credit to his talents that he was able to embody Bruce Willis without cheaply impersonating him. They look nothing alike, but that’s why you buy it - because of Joe."

The opportunity to work again with Johnson was just thrilling for Gordon-Levitt’s chief motive for doing Looper. The film’s essential theme is the cycle of violence and whether raising children in the right way can prevent them growing up to become feared psychopaths, as in the case of a dark-eyed child (played brilliantly by Pierce Gagnon). "How a child is raised by their parents in, of course, going to have a profound effect on that child," he says. "Personally, I can vouch that my parents did an excellent job."

"Looper" is released in the UK on 28 September.

In the driving seat: Gordon-Levitt (front) with Paul Dano in "Looper".