

**Catalogue of the exhibition Tinguely e Munari – Opere in azione, La Spezia, CAMEC – Centro Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, 2004**

**TINGUELY AND MUNARI by Bruno Corà**

The dominant sensation pervading all artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (as well as the entire population of the planet) was surely a concern with movement, speed and instability. A look at the other side of the coin shows that they all felt the influence of statics, immobility and equilibrium just as strongly. But it can also be said that the accentuation of the inertia/motion antithesis has been increasingly resolved in our era, to the degree that the equivalence of that archaic supposed dualism reached a critical point and, in light of the evident acceleration of our whole existence, it became perfectly clear that – as the Futurists had intuitively felt – life is entirely a matter of dynamism. Jean Tinguely, only five years into his incredible aesthetic adventure, began his 1959 manifesto *Für Statik*, with the phrase “everything moves”. He distributed 150,000 flyers of his manifesto by launching them from a plane over the outskirts of Düsseldorf. Today, almost fifty years later, in this exhibition dedicated to Tinguely e Munari which marks the opening of a new Center for the Arts of our times in La Spezia, we can see so many surprising and pertinent elements which are interwoven, in part a result of conscious critical choices pursued tenaciously, in part the result of imponderable mutual links due to coincidence and instances of synchronism which, in art, are never detrimental.

Were we to recall that in 1933, the creator of Futurism, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, expounder and cantor of speed, precisely in La Spezia, composing his *Aeropoema del Golfo*, glorified the simultaneous aerial dynamic-spatial perception and vision so close to the gestures subsequently reinterpreted and linked to the universal and, at the same time, “useless” mobility conceived precisely by Munari and Tinguely, it would not be in vain. “My words-in-freedom aeropoem about the Gulf of La Spezia, born of the freespirted friendship of a very fast airplane engine, responds to this Futurist Manifesto of Aeropoetry. The characteristics of aviation, that is, the ascending drive religion of speed suspension devoid of contact indispensable health of the engine dangers and sensitivity of the wings fusion of man and aircraft and whirling spherical perspective that has nothing in common with the profile of the horizon of old earthbound poetry impose absolutely new means and principles upon Aeropoetry”<sup>1</sup>. Munari, destined, in our era, in the Fifties, to become one of the illuminating points of reference of the Swiss artist's exploration, owed his first steps to the ranks of the Marinetti group.

So we perceive a conspicuous link between La Spezia and Futurism, between Marinetti's concerns to which, in singular, different and dialectical ways, both Munari and Tinguely could be considered his authentic heirs. What's more, the Tinguely-Munari relationship, for the first time so clearly, directly and contextually brought to light, was born of the simple observation of their intertwining relations, both in terms of linguistics and aesthetics as well as of the simple, explicit correspondence which existed between them. One of the many aspects which, although on different dates, “initiated” each of the two artists to art was their mutual passion for the movement of mill cogwheels of which both Munari and Tinguely personally cited significant and evocative chapters<sup>2</sup>. But, even before this motive came to light as the basis for this exhibition, the project was also spurred by other reasons and desires. Among these, a distant encounter between the author of this text and Tinguely himself, in the mid-sixties in Milan during his solo show at the Jolas Gallery in which – like a “governor” of art in the city – Lucio Fontana arrived in person to greet his Swiss friend. A memorable day for me, still at the beginning of a lifelong course full of awaiting surprises and no foregone conclusions. Nonetheless and, to the contrary, although I had lived and worked in places frequently visited by Munari, I never had the fortune of meeting the Maestro, a missed

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1 F.T. Marinetti, *L'aeropoema del Golfo della Spezia*, Valsecchi, Firenze, 2002, p. 23.

2 Cfr. B. Munari, *Le macchine della mia infanzia* (1924), in *Arte come mestiere*, Editori Laterza, Bari, 1997, pp. 251-252; inoltre J. Tinguely, in P. Hulten, *Una magia più forte della morte*, cat. mostra (Venezia, Palazzo Grassi, 1987), Bompiani, Milano, 1987, p. 13.

occasion always sublimated in an observation of his works and in listening to the accounts of various witnesses, authors of a vast “mythology” developed around his maieutic activities. In any case, the two artists sparked a dubbing of conscious promise in those studies I was starting to undertake being in contact with life itself and the gestures of many of their contemporaries.

In fact, even before having met Tinguely, a visit to the show of “programmed art” organized by Munari and Giorgio Soavi with a critical introduction by Umberto Eco, at the Olivetti store in Rome in October, 1962, had made a great impression on me and subsequently compelled me to delve more deeply into studies of the experiences of some of the protagonists of that event, Gianni Colombo, Davide Boriani, Getulio Alviani and of the entire matter of kinetic art. In later years, my encounters with Nouveau Réalisme, its exponents from Rotella to Christo, from Spoerri to Restany, and my study of the work of Yves Klein, firmly increased my need for a hands-on verification with Tinguely's work for penetrating his legendary generosity of ideas and explosive, liberating sense of humor.

Thus Munari and Tinguely seemed to be the links in that great artistic feat which, from Futurism to the post-war era, had adopted automates and machines and, on the threshold of our new millenium, threw open the doors to future developments of the use of data transmission in art. Their concepts and operational methods, but also their works themselves, emanated a vitality, a freshness, an irony and an emblematic poetic playfulness toward the formal processes practiced by other artists in their wake whose technological attitudes and interests were quite different, from Zorio to Fischli and Weiss.

Marking the starting point of an exhibition itinerary, in a Center open to the artistic experiences of a recently terminated century but also to the work of active contemporary artists, with a show dedicated to Tinguely and Munari, means once again stressing the intention and determination of considering a work of art an unrelenting dynamo capable of energy extendable well beyond the chronological or civic limits of its author. Likewise, this means underlining the need for further studies on the similarly problematic works and the little-known or completely unknown links they share by directly encountering and observing the works themselves. To a greater extent, such an initiative aims at affirming the importance of a historical memory of the facts of art, an essential that must neither be forgotten or ignored unless we accept the risk – in the best of hypotheses – of the painful occurrence of an unwittingly comparable replica. On the other hand, an emblematic example of philological respect in art came from Tinguely himself. During the entire course of his exceptional activity never did he fail to recognize the value and importance to his work of the experience of certain mentors, from Malevich to Duchamp, from Munari to Calder. And never did he suffer complexes, but felt pride in belonging and joy in being their active heir, with the force to innovate a tradition and a patrimony, and to lead it to unforeseen poetically intense results.

Moreover, each of those mentors can reasonably be considered a descendant of a European family tree, running from Archimedes to Brunelleschi and then to Leonardo, in our search for the source of the revolutionary vein of the idea of introducing machines into works of art or of the work-machine symbiosis itself. Aside from the great difference between Munari's and Tinguely's own, objectively different artistic calibres are, of course, the actual conditions of the two artists' respective timeframes and the differences of their critical awareness of historical exigencies. But with the appropriate coefficients for balancing each artist's relativity for instance, to Leonardo's outstanding multiform artifice, the fact that they both descend from artistic-technological roots is undeniable.

If philology is to be considered valid for artists, then it requires even greater observance by critics and art historians. Tinguely's last show in Italy took place thanks to Ponthus Hulten (1987)<sup>3</sup>. That show in Venice was an extraordinary event which co-opted both Palazzo Grassi and the Church of St. Samuel with hundreds of works.

This exhibition, “Tinguely and Munari”, celebrating the opening of the La Spezia Centro per l'Arte

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3 P. Hulten, *Una magia più forte...*, cit.

Moderna e Contemporanea, is not intended as competition either with the latter show or with any other of the important shows dedicated respectively to the two artists. Nor is it intended, in particular, to compete with shows vital to Tinguely's works and often curated by the Swiss master's greatest champion, Hulten, since times immediately prior to the disclosure of the *Yellow Manifesto* written by Bordier, Vasarely and Hulten himself (1955)<sup>4</sup>. To the contrary, the present exhibition differs from the Venice event in that more than ever before it develops and exalts the relationship between the works by Munari, whose historical encounter was already cited in the Tinguely catalogue for Venice: "In Milan, Tinguely met Bruno Munari, the fascinating European postwar artist called the 'new Leonardo' by Picasso. He is one of the most influential luminaries of the Italian art world. Two years earlier, in December, 1952, Munari had published an entire series of manifestos, among which: *Machine-Art*, *Machinism*, *Organic Art*, *Disintegrism*, *Total Art*". In his *Manifesto of Machinism* he wrote: Artists are the only ones who can save mankind from this danger. Artists have to be interested in machines, have to abandon their romantic paintbrushes, their dusty palettes, their canvases and easels. They have to start understanding the anatomy of machines, the language of machines, their nature, and to divert them into functioning in irregular ways to create works of art with the machines themselves, using their own means". In 1954 he was experimenting with various sorts of projections, such as those of plays of shadows and polarized light, and had even created a lively colored rubber ball with a smell and with a bell inside which rang each time it bounced: this was "total art", that is, shape, color, odor, movement. Munari's cleverness and his anticonformist concept of art intensely stimulated Tinguely in his own experiments. Tinguely went to visit Munari and declared that he wanted "to put his ideas about machinism into practice. Munari offered him the gift of two of the most beautiful 'useless machines' he had created in the early Thirties"<sup>5</sup>.

But, above and beyond his relationship with Munari, this exhibition offers us an opportunity for further stressing how, from the start of his work and in subsequent years – similarly to his friend, Yves Klein and many other artists who had adhered to Nouveau Réalisme – Tinguely won considerable attention in Italy. It began with his show in Milan in 1954 at the Studio d'Architettura B24 and was later reinforced by the efficient Milanese breeding ground animated by Enrico Castellani and Piero Manzoni which, in the first issue of "Azimuth" (1959) published and offered the reproduction of a "painting" as a gadget made in collaboration with Tinguely's *Méta-Matic n. 12* by Eva Aeppli in July 1959.

In combination with the expansion of the proposal of Nouveau Réalisme, this work was also hosted first at the Galerie Apollinaire (1960) (where Klein has shown in 1957) and then in the Galleria Schwarz (1961). In all of these Milanese episodes, including his show at the Galleria Jolas (1966), Tinguely had, among others, Munari, Fontana and certainly certain exponents of the Gruppo T in Milan, aside from his friend, Restany, as his natural interlocutors.

Memorable is still his participation in Milan in the tenth anniversary celebration of the founding of the Nouveau Réalisme group. For the occasion, Tinguely had built a self-destructing machine based on fireworks, explosions and combustion which demolished *La vittoria* (1970), which was the title of the enormous phallus eleven meters tall and built by Tinguely on a raised three-meter platform a few steps from the Cathedral, in the church yard! On exhibition in La Spezia, a drawing from a private collection in remembrance of the episode.

Similarly, the shows of Munari's work organized over the past few years, especially the posthumous one (1999) dedicated to him by Fondazione Bandera in Busto Arsizio curated by Alberto Fiz, and that in Cavalese (2003) together with the works of Luigi Veronesi curated by Orietta Berlanda and Claudio Cerritelli, but also that in Cantù (1995), besides the essay by Marco Meneguzzo,<sup>6</sup> all

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4 Il *Manifesto giallo* è stato redatto e pubblicato in occasione della mostra "Le mouvement" apertasi presso la galleria Denise René a Parigi dal 6 al 30 aprile 1955 con opere di Agam, Bury, Calder, Duchamp, Jacobsen, Soto, Tinguely e Vasarely. Esso reca contributi e testi di Pontus Hulten, Roger Bordier e Victor Vasarely ed è uno dei primi documenti teorici di arte cinetica.

5 P. Hulten, *Una magia più forte...*, cit., p. 17.

6 M. Meneguzzo, *Bruno Munari*, Laterza, Bari, 1993.

demonstrated, together with the importance of his work, the extent to which the “case” of Munari was, nevertheless, still unsolved or “indefinite”. It was not so much from the point of view of recognition which was noteworthy, but from that of placing him in 20<sup>th</sup> century art history and of the comprehensive role exercised by the artist in the context of figurative and contemporary art. I have already, during the years I spent in Prato as director of the Pecci Museum<sup>7</sup> where Munari had activated a “historical” department of education in art dedicated to children, had occasion to assert how necessary it was to “reread” Munari and seriously wonder who he really was and what the exercise of his complex, variegated career as an artist was actually aimed at. “Munari – I wrote – by his own definition (perhaps caused by the Futurist stigmatism contracted in his youth), was an anti-artist”. And, under certain aspects, the same characteristic could be assigned to Tinguely too, considering his taste for paradox, his congenital anarchist-like anti-conformism, his indifference to any and every form of canonic peace. But, starting precisely from the “reservations” of the two artists vis-a-vis the official facet of art or of its, sometimes fatuous, rituality, it is easy to understand how radical their need of affirmation of a tension directed exclusively toward the “truths” identified during the cognitive processes deriving from the creations of the works actually was. To the point that it became more important, in observing their work, to grasp the happy moments in which the mechanical device predisposed in the work enters a crisis and is caught off guard, almost made to jam, rather than when everything was working regularly. Those deliberately built “rejects” reveal a unique and shared vitality. In that sense Fiz’ pointer is timely, for it indicates that “at the start of the Fifties we mustn’t forget the *Arrhythmic Machines*, so important for the exploration developed later by the Swiss sculptor Jean Tinguely. In that case Munari executed ‘explorations of mechanical arrhythmia linked to little-known types of energy, that are emanated by mechanisms with regular rhythmic functioning’, making machines function in irregular ways in a sort of progressive humanization of the mechanical instrument that tends to be anthropomorphized”<sup>8</sup>.

From recent critical essay by Pietro Bellasi and Alberto Fiz and in the observations of Guido Magnaguagno and Marco Meneguzzo which appeared elsewhere in this volume, a chapter of new proclamations opens up before the works, effective for verifying the results and the concepts of these two great European artists: pioneers and protagonists of an art of movement which, from kinetic, has turned *telematic* (pertaining to data transmission) and, consistent with their desire for dematerialization, could even become telepathic!

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7 Negli anni dal 1955 al 2002, alla direzione del Centro per l’Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci di Prato, ho curato i “Quaderni del Centro”, uno dei quali, il n. 1, è dedicato a Munari.

8 A. Fiz, *Bruno Munari tra spiazzamento e demistificazione*, in *Omaggio a Bruno Munari*, cat. mostra (Busto Arsizio, Fondazione Bandiera per l’Arte, 24 ottobre 1999 – 13 febbraio 2000), Mazzotta, Milano, 1999, p. 21.