

kaufmann repetto is pleased to announce *Ambienti Luminosi* ("Luminous Environments), a monographic exhibition of Bruno Munari's work curated by Luca Zaffarano and staged in collaboration with the Archivi Bruno Munari®. The exhibition aims to call attention to the artist's more important experimental research, highlighting its spatial, cinematic and immersive aspects and groundbreaking nature. Right from the beginning Munari's interest was focused on the creation of environmental interventions designed to probe in a radically innovative manner the dynamic encounter between space, movement and form, between light and color, between viewer and work. The exhibition in Milan presents an unprecedented dialogue between rare examples of his *Useless Machines* of the 1930s and '40s and the *Direct Projections* and *Polarized Light Projections* of the 1950s, made available by the artist's archives and rarely shown before. These "luminous environments" offer the public a multisensorial experience and at the same time evoke the open and dynamic dimension that characterizes the artist's imaginative approach to experimentation. Adaptable to spaces of any size—from those of the home to museum settings—they are in fact an expression of the democratizing and participatory conception of aesthetics that lies at the heart of Munari's research.

Revealing his transdisciplinary and unconventional talent from the outset, Bruno Munari was drawn in equal measure to new processes of production and the exploration of innovative artistic media and languages. The pioneering work of the avant-gardes—from Futurism to the Bauhaus and Neoplasticism—stimulated him to broaden the conception of the traditional artifact through experimentation with forms and images in movement. At the center of his research lay space and the exploitation of its properties in immersive installations, establishing them as a modern realm of expression in which to create—thanks in part to the use of new technological procedures—perceptual experiences that went beyond the static character of painting and sculpture.

Taking on board both the theorizations of the Futurists and the research of László Moholy-Nagy and others, Munari developed the idea of self-propelled mobiles, and in the early 1930s started to explore, with his *Useless Machines*, the concept of abstractionism in space. He utilized his "machines," designed with minimal forms and a limited use of color, as devices able to produce abstract shapes on the walls of the environment through the play of light and shadow, obtaining in this way short movies without the use of film. These experiments culminated in the creation of environments based on topological and "planar" sculptures, like *Concave-Convex* of 1947, made from a sheet of wire mesh folded inwards at preestablished points that when suitably illuminated produced evanescent images in the space in which the viewer stood.

In the same way space became the pivotal element for the experimental research initiated with projected compositions, commencing with *Direct Projections* (1950) which Munari used to create immersive and spectacular settings. The painting was done with micro-compositions of materials of various kinds (plastic, cardboard, cotton thread, natural forms, netting and liquids, which were also subjected to processes of burning, scratching and distortion) inserted into the frame of a slide and projected on a large scale. From 1953 onward Munari took the idea further, making use of Polaroid sheets that permitted

decomposition of the light, generating paintings in shifting colors, paradoxically, from colorless and transparent material. These *Polarized Light Projections* and *Direct Projections* of large dimensions dematerialized the painting, making it possible to “fresco” the walls of environments that became, as a consequence, highly immersive, anticipating many of the video installations of the decades to come. “Modern life has brought us music on records [...] now it gives us projected painting” [B. Munari, 1954].<sup>1</sup>

Thus the exhibition in Milan, which unites “machines” and “projections” in two large environments, brings the viewer close to the experience Munari was seeking in 1957: “The artist’s job is to communicate to other people a poetic message, expressed with forms, with colors, in two or more dimensions, with movement; without worrying beforehand whether what will come out is going to be painting or sculpture or something else again (like the useless machines or projections) so long as it carries this message and this message speaks to, and is understood by, at least a few people.”<sup>2</sup>

The presentation also includes a pair of abstract works from the 1940s in which soft and sinuous forms are juxtaposed with classical geometric ones like straight lines, diagonals and rectangles, in a sort of *negative-positive* contrast that from 1939 can be found in other works that are on show here and belong to the series devoted to this perceptual ambiguity. In these works every form is independent, like the parts of an engine, and where “none of those parts acts as a background to the others but altogether make up the object.”<sup>3</sup>

Other works on paper from the 1950s echo the elements in unstable equilibrium of the *Useless Machines* through compositions that hark back to their minimal forms floating in space. The exhibition closes with some original *xerographs*, of which one in particular is dedicated to the Milanese Campari company, client of the well-known advertising poster *Declinazione grafica del nome Campari* created by Munari on the occasion of the opening of Milan’s first Metro line and now in the collection of the MoMA in New York.

Text by Luca Zaffarano

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<sup>1</sup> “Le proiezioni dirette di Munari,” *Domus*, 291 (February 1954), attributed to B. Munari in the contents.

<sup>2</sup> In Tristan Sauvage (penname of Arturo Schwarz), *Pittura italiana del dopoguerra (1945-57)* (Milan: Schwarz Editore, 1957).

<sup>3</sup> B. Munari, “I negativi positivi,” *Domus*, 273 (September 1952).