fondazione merz

PUSH THE LIMITS

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curated by Claudia Gioia and Beatrice Merz

7.9.2020 – 31.1.2021

The Fondazione Merz turns fifteen and in reopening its spaces to the public after the closure caused by COVID 19, it returns and relaunches with a major exhibition project, which already from its title offers an invitation to go further and to work to shape the future.

PUSH THE LIMITS is a project that investigates how art

takes itself to the limit to move the horizon of thinking, perception and speech ever further in order to introduce new elements; to say yes or no when "normality" falters; to highlight what is proposed in the present and to prevent a situation of merely treading water.
The artists we have invited and who have generously accompanied us even during the lockdown period take this opportunity to reaffirm the urgency of unleashing the infinity of possibles.

But what are these limits we need to be pushing at? Cultural, geographical, of identity, sexual, social and of vision. Each historical phase has witnessed them and perhaps today the largest limit and the one that groups them all is the lack of a language capable of describing them in order to overcome them. Thus art can still come to our aid, since a constitutive feature of art is that of working at the crossroads of languages, images, knowledge and of knowing how to cross one's time and history, at times at a tangent and at times frontally.
Each work on display is a push forward in a space where current codes of behaviour are suspended and transformation becomes possible; where the as if and the almost reality allow a flow of multiple visions and vocabularies relating them to different ways of living, testing them and finding new meaning.

The rhythm of the exhibition project is deliberately syncopated and the temperature tends to rise in the transition from one section to another.
The written word and the story. These are the works of

Barbara Kruger, Rosa Barba, Sophie Calle, Jenny Holzer, Shilpa Gupta and also Bouchra Khalili. Strong words, to exhort, to test the relationship between meanings and signifiers. To pick up on the actions and words of those who oppose and of those who will oppose. For those who are tired of personalism and want to strengthen the weave of the social bond anew.
The photographic and filmic image. Carrie Mae Weems, Shirin Neshat and Sue Williamson with images that translate and refer to realities that have been removed or considered outdated and which instead still remain the basis of dreams and nightmares, of changes and of steps backward.
A construction to be called thus needs stones and stone-like exhortations that are inclusive (Emily Jacir), but also to question once again what order and disorder we want for the human community (Cinthia Marcelle), and the otherness and shared knowledge to recognise that we have changed (Maria Papadimitriou).
Everything contributes to the construction of the world as building and the steps are many, repeated and almost never easy. From the volatility and apparent lightness of our flights forward (Chiharu Shiota), to a rigidity that is harmless only at first glance, of what continues to keep us entangled (Mona Hatoum). From the concerns of a present enmeshed in the toxic link between consumption and compatibility (Pamela Rosenkranz) and crossing the oceans driven by the myth and dream of earthly paradise (Fiona Tan).

It is the revolt of creativity that Katharina Grosse

summarises and introduces, bringing everyone to a boundlessness of the infinite possibilities to range, transform, risk, reunite, understand.
With a silent but determined obstinacy, intolerant of roles and systems, in bringing one's own sign forward where others have not dared, as characterised by Marisa Merz, who is the guest of this project.

The cloud of not knowing art continues to be opposed by a tenacious and intense wind that never stops seeking the words to tell the world. A wind that needs connections, adhesions and references to reconstruct an non-alienated way of thinking and meaning.

LIST OF THE EXHIBITED WORKS

Rosa Barba
Agrigento, Italy, 1972

Sea Sick Passenger appears as a large felt square lying on the ground but raised enough to generate a shadow. Reading the text requires some effort: the visitor looks down as he walks around and at the same time tries to reconstruct the meaning of the sentences. A process that transposes the visitor into a sort of kinematic matrix that mimics the movement of the typewriter carriage, snapping back and forth on the page. A process and an

involvement that transforms the reader into a publisher and builder of a new language of meaning.

Sea sick passenger, 2014
3 cut felt segments, cut-out felt letters
cm 450 x 450; ed. 3
Coll. Alessandro Maccaferri, Bologna

Sophie Calle
Paris, France, 1953

Sophie Calle presents a group of photographs from the *Parce que* (Because) series hidden by embroidered fabrics with a short text that viewers can read before lifting the cloth to discover the image. By lifting the fabric to look at the image, one is invited to look "beyond the curtains" that separate the public sphere from the personal one, thus establishing an intimate contact with the artist. With the link between text and photographs, chosen to create word games, the artist questions the methods used by artists to choose their subjects and the places in which to set them, so that the visitor can understand and share the choice.

Danger, 2018
color photograph, embroidered woollen cloth, framing
cm 39 x 49

Le jour des noces, 2018
color photograph, embroidered woollen cloth, framing
cm 73 x 49

Salle des fêtes, 2018
color photograph, embroidered woollen cloth, framing
cm 67 x 94

La ligne blanche, 2018
color photograph, embroidered woollen cloth, framing
cm 73 x 58

Equivoque, 2018
color photograph, embroidered woollen cloth, framing
cm 49 x 39

all works: courtesy the artist and Perrotin

Katharina Grosse
Fribourg, Germany, 1961

Katharina Grosse reinvents the pictorial gesture by giving it a spatial and temporal twist, not only in chromatic terms but also formal ones, mixing pictorial, sculptural and performative language. The work intervenes in the exhibition space of the Fondazione, redrawing its volumes and entrance and inviting visitors to cross it physically to experience a new idea of relationship with art and creative thinking.

The artist uses fabrics that fold, knot, drape and flood with colour, using bright pigments and smudged and dissolved paint stains, as if to entrust colour itself with the challenge and force to rethink current mappings in search of new coordinates.

The horse trotted a little bit further | Il cavallo trotterellò un po' più in là, 2020
acrylic on fabric
cm 5500 x 1500
Courtesy Barbara Gross Galerie and Gagosian Gallery
© Katharina Grosse and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Shilpa Gupta
Mumbai, India, 1976

Spread over a length of about 8 metres, the luminous writing "Where do I end and you begin" formulates an invitation and a stimulation that resonates on several levels. It can refer to something personal and intimate between two people, but also to a more political relationship between individuals belonging to a group or, in broader terms, to a nation. It is the awareness of the importance of the social bond, the transmission of knowledge and memory, of sharing a horizon of meaning so that no gesture, no battle, no freedom is lost. It is knowing that if we can look far away it is because others before us have contributed to making this possible.

Wheredolendandyoubegin, 2012
LED based light installation
cm 880 x 68 x 10
Courtesy the artist and GALLERIA CONTINUA

Mona Hatoum
Beirut, Lebanon, 1952

The *Impenetrable* installation, a 3 x 3 metre cube, at first glance appears as a light structure that has freed itself and is rising in space.
On closer inspection, upon approaching it, the work reveals its repelling nature in which the materials, very fine black steel pipes similar to barbed wire, evoke architectural structures designed to confine and become impenetrable.
The work was born as a reinterpretation of the *Penetrable* series by the Venezuelan kinetic artist Jesús Rafael Soto but, once the playful component of the invitation to immerse yourself in the work has disappeared, the barbed wire reveals a society in which barriers prevail over the sense of belonging.

Impenetrable, 2009
black- painted steel, fishing wire
exhibition copy; cm 300 × 300 × 300
Courtesy the artist

Jenny Holzer
Ohio, USA, 1950

The LED installation highlights the impunity enjoyed by US military personnel in the face of allegations of systematic abuse of detainees in the war in Afghanistan. The artist extracts the evidence from the reports of the investigators of the Army's Criminal Investigation Command (CID), collected in 2004.
This powerful work continues along the line already followed by Jenny Holzer who, with the written word and immediate messages, continues her battle against the mystification of reality, challenging social norms, prejudices and institutionalised violence.

SWORN STATEMENT, 2019
4-sided RGB LED sign
unique; cm 304.8 x 14 x 14
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth

Emily Jacir
Bethlehem, Palestine, 1970

Emily Jacir's work investigates personal and collective movement through public space and its implications on the physical and social experience of trans-Mediterranean space and time. Frontier works and thoughts to overcome what rules aim to make insurmountable and act upon what normally seems impossible. The artist plays on the nomadic character of the word capable of producing change and on the possibility of changing the symbolic order of things. The message engraved in Italian and Arabic on a stone that will be then placed at the entrance to the village of Pietrapertosa in Basilicata reads: *Sei venuto tra la nostra gente e la tua vita è sicura* (You have come among our people and your life is safe). The words of welcome repeated as a sort of "mantra" invite us to reflect on the themes of acceptance and integration.

Pietrapertosa, 2019 - 2020
stone Gorgoglione
179 cm Ø
produced by Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, Fondazione Merz in collaboration with Comune di Pietrapertosa
assistants on the project Giuseppe Nora, Qais Assali
Courtesy the artist; Fondazione Matera Basilicata 2019, Fondazione Merz, Comune di Pietrapertosa

Bouchra Khalili
Casablanca, Morocco, 1975

Memory and its transmission are important, especially if the transmission involves the succession of generations in an active way, which instead of simple witnesses become protagonists.

The video is a testimony of the artist's research on the *Black Panther Party* experience in New England and on the meeting of some of his members in the 1970s with the French poet Jean Genet (1910 - 1986) who on several occasions expressed support for the movement. The link between poetry and political activism, between the experience of social struggles of the 1960s and '70s and today, finds new witnesses in the story of young girls and therefore in the passing of the testimonial of memory.
In addition to watching the film, the visitor is invited to browse through *The Radical Ally*, the magazine created by the artist, which presents images taken from the video, texts by Jean Genet, a conversation between the artist and Jackie Wang and much other content.

Twenty-Two Hours, 2018
digital film, 4K
colour, sound
45' | ed. of 5 + 2 AP

The Radical Ally, 2019
artist's publication
edited by Xavier Nueno, co-edited by Bouchra Khalili
graphic design Léon Muñoz Santini
published by Gato Negro Ediciones and Instituto de investigation independientes
36 pages

all works: Courtesy the artist and mor charpentier, Paris

Barbara Kruger
Newark, USA, 1945

Breaking through selfishness, thinking of new ways of attention and relationship between the single and the many and the different are the real challenge of today.
Always seeking to break down the stereotypes of visual and political communication, Barbara Kruger's work touches on topics such as discrimination, consumerism, gender issues and power relations, affirming the strength of intelligence, knowledge and critical conscience. The statement she presents in the spaces of the Fondazione is therefore an invitation to those seeing it to break through their limits.

Untitled (Pensa a me pensando a te), 2019
digital print on vinyl
the work is produced for the show
site specific dimensions
Courtesy the artist and Sprüth Magers

Cinthia Marcelle
Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 1974

Marcelle suggests *reinventing, re-learning and reorganising* not only our way of looking but also of being together.
For the *The family in disorder* installation, she has created two rooms, each made using equal quantities of natural and industrial materials, including bricks, chalks, cotton sheets, soil etc. For the disorder, the artist invites a group of people to share and "occupy the space" to dismantle and rebuild it. Then follows the perfectly ordered space. The installation is an experiment on the occupation and transformation of a space open to the public and the importance of collective action. It also provides an opportunity to ask oneself: what order? What disorder?

The family in disorder, 2020
Cinthia Marcelle with the participation of Michela Depetris, Mario Petriccione, Rasha Shokair, Enrico Veglio
shoelaces, matchboxes, cotton bolts, black plastic sheeting, brown paper, bricks, masking tape, hook and loop fastener tape, chalks, stones, topsoil, gaffer tape, hemp rope, notebooks, chicken feathers, wood battens, carpet
Courtesy the artist; Galeria Vermelho; Silvia Cintra + Box4; Sprovieri Gallery

Shirin Neshat
Qazvin, Iran, 1957

In the dreamlike atmosphere of a forest inhabited by the ghosts of a traumatic past, the protagonist escapes the omens of annihilation and human destruction by resorting to the most extreme choice of imagining her own death. Sarah embodies the contemporary experience of the individual oppressed by the fear of death, violence and genocide. The film presented in the exhibition, *Sarah* (2016), is part of the trilogy called *Dreamers* that also includes *Illusions & Mirrors* (2013) and *Roja* (2016).

Sarah, 2016
b/w, sound; 12' 55''
Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York, Brussels
© Shirin Neshat

Maria Papadimitriou
Athens, Greece, 1957

This work is based on a phrase by Arthur Rimbaud – *Je est un autre*, (I is another) – which starting from 1871 recurs in his writings. It alludes to the concept of becoming and the need, in times of change, for an art that becomes the driving force for renewal and which, through the blending of the normal distinctions between colours, images, sounds, allows us to speak a new language suitable for changed times.
The work appears as a prismatic diamond whose reflective facets, with the consequent intermixing of borders and images, opens up in those who enter or pass by and reflect on the possibility of a new word and perception free of old codes.

Diamond of Otherness -Kaleidoscope of the motions of the soul, 2020
metal, wood and plexi mirrors, LED lights
cm 430 x 470 x 320 approx.
Courtesy the artist; the artwork project is powered by Onassis Foundation

Pamela Rosenkranz
Uri, Switzerland, 1979

In her *Amazon Spirits* installation, the artist combines her interest in the ecosystems of the Amazon with the history of the world colossus of the same name, a paradigm for contemporary consumerism. She creates a sort of set on which she places office supplies, ergonomic chairs, baskets and boxes bearing the Amazon logo, illuminated by a bright light that turns from white to blue to green. The space is enveloped in sounds emerging from an Amazon Echo speaker: whistles and chirps recreating the atmosphere of the tropical forest.
A non-place of a restless present, where the contradictions between lifestyle, consumption and planetary compatibility are already the questions of the near future.

Amazon Spirits, 2018

site specific installation with 11 *Amazon Spirits* and 4 *Alien Blue Windows*
lightex, LED, anodised frame, remote control, chairs, transparent foil, Acrylic and Anemine, latex gloves, waste basket, pedestal, plexiglas, alkaline batteries, Amazon Echo smart speaker, sound
variable dimensions
Courtesy the artist and Karma International, Zurich

Chiharu Shiota
Osaka, Japan, 1972

The *Where are we going?* installation appears more than ever attuned to our times and with the desire to get out of our web of weaves and impediments and embark on boats that take us elsewhere.
The analogies with the symbolism of the boat not only as a viaticum of transience but as an image of life, of the desire to be, act and transform are very strong. Each individual at the outset faces a path through an ocean of experiences, emotions, encounters and memories that make up a multiplicity of interactions, a strong fabric of human and experiential networks to the point of being part of a great crossing in which one is no longer alone.

Where are we going?, 2017-2020
metal frames, cotton thread, glue, ropes
variable dimensions
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Templon, Paris, Brussels

Fiona Tan
Pekanbaru, Indonesia, 1966

The *Brendan's Isle* soundtrack draws on a medieval Dutch poem about the adventures of Brendan (483-577), the Irish Benedictine monk. In search of earthly paradise, Brendan, known as the "Irish Odysseus", undertakes a fantastic journey. By listening, it is possible to immerse yourself in a journey across the ocean in search of an island that used to appear on maps, and for which Columbus himself searched, but which has never yet been conclusively found.

Brendan's Isle, 2010
sound piece
ed. 2/6 + 1 AP; 6' 52''
Courtesy the artist and Frith Street Gallery, London

Carrie Mae Weems
Portland, USA, 1953

Without re-appropriating the memory of the past, understanding it and reviving it through iconic images that bear witness to battles and epochal passages in the civil rights movements, there can be no real social growth.
For this reason the artist does not propose a celebration of the past but its staging with new images as a moment of growth for the new generations.
The video (which with the photographs is part of the *Constructing History* series) thus becomes a learning session for the classes of the future, while the photographs describe and transfigure crucial moments in social battles, such as the arrest of activist Angela Davis and the clashes at the University of Kent, Ohio, in 1970.

Constructing History, A Requiem to Mark the Moment, 2008
video; 24', 4''

A Class Ponders the Future, 2008
archival pigment print
cm 155 x 130,17 x 4,44 (framed); ed 5 + 2 AP

The First Major Blow, 2008
archival pigment print
cm 154,6 x 127 x 5,7 (framed); ed 5 + 2 AP

The Capture of Angela, 2008
archival pigment print
cm 155 x 129,5 (framed); ed 5 + 2 AP

all works: Courtesy the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York

Sue Williamson
Lichfield, England, 1942

In the *Other Voices, Other Cities* photographic work, the artist explores the definition of place, city and citizens in the era of globalisation. What does it mean to choose to live in a specific place and how to define the character of your city? These are the questions that the Southafrican artist asks a group of young people invited to participate in a seminar during which the preferred answer is voted for. Together they create and paint the letters that make up the sentence, finally photographing it in an appropriate place.
The large photographs are accompanied by the work *Voices from the Cities*, which plays with augmented reality in the outdoor spaces of the Fondazione, which with the complicity of the public relocates meanings and roles of some places, monuments and famous events in the world.

Other Voices, Other Cities, 2009 - 2017
pigment inks on archival cotton rag paper
exhibition copy; the work is produced for the show
variable dimensions

outside
Voices from the Cities, 2020
augmented reality, iPad
animator Jason Stapleton
Courtesy the artist and Goodman Gallery Cape Town, Johannesburg and London, Fondazione Merz with the support of

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