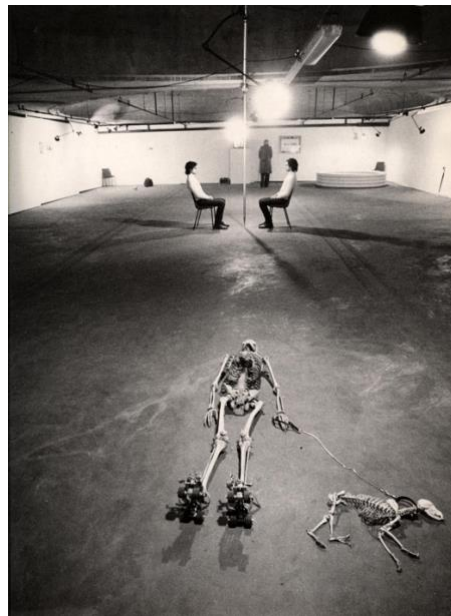


**PRESS RELEASE**



Achille Bonito Oliva in his studio in Rome, 2021  
Photo Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev  
Courtesy Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea



Gino De Dominicis, *Il tempo, lo spazio, lo sbaglio* (Time, Space, Mistake), 1969, and *Senza titolo (I gemelli)* (Untitled - The Twins), 1973 with *Asta in bilico* (Hanging Rod), 1967 in 'Contemporanea', Villa Borghese car park, Rome, 1973-1974.  
© Archivio Gino De Dominicis, Foligno  
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Courtesy Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea

***A.B.O. THEATRON. Art or Life***

**Curatorial development and coordination by Andrea Viliani**

**Concept by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and Achille Bonito Oliva**

**25 June 2021 – 30 January 2022**

Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea presents '**A.B.O. THEATRON. Art or Life,**' an exhibition dedicated to one of the most important Italian contemporary art historians, critics and curators, **Achille Bonito Oliva** (Caggiano, 1939).

'A.B.O. THEATRON. Art or Life' is part of the overall project *Espressioni* which investigates the multiple forms of expressivity that cross the history of art and society seeking an understanding of "Expression" that transcends the Eurocentric canon and any unique artistic movement.

Following the exhibition dedicated to Harald Szeemann in 2019, organized in collaboration with the Getty Research Institute of Los Angeles, this exhibition, organized by the CRRI (Castello di Rivoli Research Institute), focuses on Achille Bonito Oliva and constitutes the second chapter of an overall project that Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea and CRRI are dedicating to the most prominent contemporary art curators of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Starting from his training and activity in the field of visual poetry in the late 1960s, Bonito Oliva established a relation between some of the most prominent artists of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who contributed to the definition of radical new avenues of research, such as, in the late 1970s, those connected to Italian Transavanguardia internationally referred to as “New Expressionism” in the 1980s. Bonito Oliva is known for having launched the neo expressionist art movements through his presentation of their work at the ‘Aperto ‘80’ section of the Venice Biennale in 1980. He later also directed the overall 1993 edition of the famed Biennale of Venice.

With his 1976 book *L’ideologia del traditore. Arte, maniera, manierismo* (The Ideology of the Traitor: Art, Manner and Mannerism,) Bonito Oliva analyzed how Mannerism created a passage from the principle of creation in the Renaissance to that of citation, as a response of the artist to the crisis of society: the artist lost a sense of centrality and became a lateral figure, with respect to science and technology. This recalls the figure of the traitor who looks at the world, and does not accept it, who would like to change it but can only act with skepticism, without naive optimism. Similarly to the early 1500s, the 1970s were a period of ideological, economic, political and social crisis. In European culture, Mannerism developed in the early 1500s, just like the Transavanguardia developed in late 1970s and it was Bonito Oliva himself who made the analogy between Mannerism and the Transavanguardia.

Throughout Bonito Oliva’s activity, his critical writings and exhibition contributions, his curatorial flair, and intellectual provocations together constitute a **uniquely dynamic output characterized by an ongoing interrelation between word and image, performativity and communication**, and by a focus on the **increasing intersections between art and life, art and other fields, which Bonito Oliva called “nomadic transversality.”**

“Achille Bonito Oliva is the initiator of a particular kind of curator: expressive, histrionic, experimental, as well as encyclopaedic and performative,” affirms the Director of Castello di Rivoli **Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev**. “He works as a companion for the artists, unlike traditional art critics who prior to him and his generation would fashion exhibitions based on supposedly scholarly selection and interpretation criteria. Achille is surely a narcissist but in the best of ways and without vanity. He is an extraordinary and highly intelligent being, able to appear proud when necessary and humble when it is right to do so.”

The project presents a collection of artworks, documentation of exhibition displays and archival material. Major artworks on display include **Pino Pascali’s** *Primo piano labbra* (1965), which was showcased in Bonito Oliva’s first exhibition at Libreria-Galleria Guida in Naples in 1966. The exhibition also includes key pieces such as *Lo Spirato* (1968-73) by **Luciano Fabro**, which was presented at ‘Contemporanea’ in 1973, and a series of important Transavanguardia works, such as *Silenzioso mi ritiro a dipingere un quadro* (1977) by **Mimmo Paladino**, *Cani con la lingua a spasso* (1980) by **Enzo Cucchi**, *Sinfonia incompiuta* (1980) by **Sandro Chia**, *Il cerchio di Milarepa* (1982) by **Francesco Clemente** and *Testa dell’artista cosmico a Torino* (1984-85) by **Nicola De Maria**. The exhibition also includes *La Luna* (1968) by **Fabio Mauri**, part of the ‘Vitalità del negativo’ 1970 exhibition; *Metrocubo d’Infinito* (1966) by **Michelangelo Pistoletto** and *Articolazione totale* (1962) by **Francesco Lo Savio**, which was seen at ‘Minimalia’ in 1997-99, as well as *TV-Buddha Duchamp-Beuys* (1989) by **Nam June Paik**, included in ‘Tribù dell’Arte’, 2001. Also notable is *Fountain* (1917-64) by **Marcel Duchamp**.

Furthermore, through the presentation of a wide range of materials (**catalogs, artist books, invitations, leaflets, press kits, display projects and photographs, private correspondence, TV program recordings, photo and video documentation and a considerable portion of his personal library**), this exhibition celebrates the **role of the curator** in the field of contemporary art; moreover, this exhibition aims to draw a composite portrait of a proactive intellectual who has worked beyond the boundaries set by academic contexts, redefining fields of research and the means of curatorship, becoming a point of reference in the history of art of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.



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Exploring Bonito Oliva's vast curatorial, theoretical and performative activity, the exhibition 'A.B.O. THEATRON. Art or Life' is structured around **three** interconnected **levels** each corresponding to an important aspect of the critic-curator's multi-faceted activity:

- **Exhibition curating** (documentation of major thematic exhibitions, selected by the curator himself). The exhibits included in this section are 'Amore mio', 1970; 'Vitalità del negativo', 1970; 'Contemporanea', 1973-74; the Transavanguardia section includes 'Opere Fatte ad Arte', 1979; 'Le Stanze', 1979; 'Aperto '80', 1980 and 'Avanguardia Transavanguardia', 1982; as well as 'Ubi Fluxus ibi motus', 1990; 'Cardinal Points of Art - XLV International Art Exhibition', Venice Biennale, 1993; 'Minimalia', 1997; 'Le Tribù dell'Arte', 2001.
- **Encyclopaedic essay writing and private activities** (explored via Bonito Oliva's major publications and a considerable selection of unpublished material).
- **Performative expressions, journalism, speaking and public activities** (radio, cinema and, above all, television contributions, projects for newspapers and periodicals, as well as awards and those tools functional to the definition of a real cult of his personality, defining the autonomous dimension of his public figure).

A remarkable selection of TV footage kindly granted by **Rai Teche** is also exhibited. Among Achille Bonito Oliva's most recent TV appearances is his conversation with the pop star Harry Styles commissioned by GUCCI for GucciFest in 2020.

In conjunction with this exhibition, Achille Bonito Oliva has donated his entire archive to the **CRRI**, making the valuable intellectual heritage he has collected over more than sixty years - from his early teenage writings to his most recent productions - available to national and international scholars. Achille Bonito Oliva's archive will be studied, displayed and published for the first time on this occasion.

"It has been a continuous discovery and a great privilege," comments **Andrea Vilianni**, Curator and Head of CRRI, "to have had the opportunity to dedicate two years to the study of a yet unpublished archive such as this one, attesting to the over sixty years of critical and curatorial activity of Achille Bonito Oliva. Our exhibition is a milestone in the Castello di Rivoli and CRRI program dedicated to the greatest curators of the 20<sup>th</sup> century."

On the occasion of this exhibition, a bilingual (Italian/English) fully illustrated catalog has been published by **Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea** and **Skira**, with an introductory essay by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and an interview between Achille Bonito Oliva and Hans Ulrich Obrist. New essays by Marcella Beccaria, Andrea Vilianni, Cecilia Casorati, Laura Cherubini, Clarissa Ricci, Stefano Chiodi, Andrea Cortellessa, Carlo Falciani and Paola Marino are also included and complemented by entries dedicated to the main exhibitions curated by Bonito Oliva, plus an extensive bio-bibliography and chronology.

The curatorial project 'A.B.O. THEATRON. Art or Life' was developed by **Andrea Vilianni**, Curator and Head of CRRI, from a concept by **Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev** and **Achille Bonito Oliva**. He was assisted by an advisory committee whose members are **Marcella Beccaria**, Head Curator and Curator of the Museum Collections, along with **Cecilia Casorati**, **Laura Cherubini**, **Stefano Chiodi**, **Paola Marino**, art historians and curators who, over the years, have closely followed Achille Bonito Oliva's research, publications and curatorial activity.

On the occasion of this exhibition, **GUCCI** has designed the uniforms for the exhibition's "guardian angels," the gallery assistants who welcome visitors and take care for artworks while on display. Like gardeners in an imaginary park, the assistants (who in the past would be called "guards"), are renamed in French "jardiniers du théâtre" (gardeners of the theater) for this project. These "guardian angels" or gardeners will be dressed in a sage-green uniform, signalling the exhibition as a walk through a garden and creatively accompanying the project by transforming the traditional museum-sponsor relationship.



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The main sponsor in this case takes part in the creation of the exhibition design, highlighting the presence of the essential but often invisible workers of the art world. This project draws inspiration from the GUCCI February 2020 fashion show when the creative director Alessandro Michele and his team wore uniforms, thus providing the audience with a glimpse of the backstage work connected to the presentation of "The Ritual" collection.

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As usual, some of the works on display are on permanent loan at Castello di Rivoli from the Fondazione per l'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea CRT. **For this we thank the Fondazione per l'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea CRT.**



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Achille Bonito Oliva. Photo Sandro Giustibelli. Courtesy Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea

## Biography

**Achille Bonito Oliva** (Caggiano, 1939) is one of the most important art critics and curators of the 20th and 21st centuries. In 1961 he graduated in Law from the Federico II University in Naples, subsequently dedicating himself to artistic, philosophical and historical studies. As part of his training as a visual poet – contemporary with the research of Gruppo 63 and Operativo 64 – he published *Made in Mater* (1967), *Fiction Poems* (1968), and *5 Mappe del 1965* (1971). In 1966 he curated his first exhibition, a double solo show dedicated to Pino Pascali and Renato Mambor (Libreria-Galleria Guida, Naples), and in 1968 he was among the young critics who took part in the meetings of the *Assemblea* that accompanied the 'Arte povera più Azioni povere' exhibition at the Antichi Arsenali in Amalfi. From 1969 to 1971 he was Deputy Director of the Academy of Fine Arts in L'Aquila, and Assistant Professor (1971) and Professor (1976) of Medieval and Modern Art History at the University of Salerno. In 1968 he moved to Rome, where he collaborated with La Sapienza University, becoming Associate Professor of Art History at the Faculty of Architecture in 1982 where in 1984 he also started holding a Contemporary Art History course.

In 1970 he was general secretary of his first major thematic exhibition, 'Amore mio' (Palazzo Ricci, Montepulciano) and curated 'Vitalità del negativo nell'arte italiana 1960-70' (Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome), a project that initiated his collaboration with the Incontri Internazionali d'Arte. In 1971 he curated the Italian participation in the 7th Paris Biennale (of which he would also co-curate the 13th edition in 1985) and 'Pérsona' (BITEF Belgrade International Theater Festival, Belgrade). In 1973 he curated the exhibition 'La delicata scacchiera, Marcel Duchamp 1902-1968' and the *Art Section* of the exhibition entitled 'Contemporanea' (held in the Villa Borghese car park, Rome), which he conceived in all its nine sections. In 1978 he coordinated 'Sei stazioni per artenatura. La natura dell'arte' at the Venice Biennale, for which in 1980 he also co-curated the exhibitions 'L'arte degli anni settanta' and 'Aperto '80', the latter with Harald Szeemann. The year before, in the magazine *Flash Art*, he published the article 'La Trans-Avanguardia italiana', theorising the movement as an overcoming of the ideological positions and conceptual paradigms of the previous decade, thus bringing back to the foreground – following the community 'we' season – the individual subject and opening up to a practice of nomadism and crossbreeding trespassing the very antinomies of avant-garde-tradition, invention-citation, abstract-figurative, global-local. Also in 1979, he curated the exhibition 'Opere fatte ad arte' at Palazzo di Città in Acireale, a project that was the first public presentation of the group of artists gathered under the definition of Transavanguardia – Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Nicola De Maria, Mimmo Paladino –, who were also part of the 'Le Stanze' exhibition (Castello Colonna, Genazzano, 1979-80), establishing a dynamic dialogue with the research of Arte Povera, which expanded to the European and North American context in 1982 with the exhibition 'Avanguardia Transavanguardia 1968/77' (Mura Aureliane, Rome). By this time, Bonito Oliva had become not only an interpreter of the "return to drawing, painting and sculpture" that was to mark the decade, but also a true public figure. In 1990, under the patronage of the XLIV Venice Biennale, he curated 'Ubi Fluxus ibi motus 1990-1962' (Ex-Granai della Repubblica, Venice) and in 1993 he was appointed Director of Visual Arts at the XLV Venice Biennale, entitled 'Punti cardinali dell'arte (Cardinal Points of Art)', testifying to a transnational and multidisciplinary method that spread to multiple venues with a plural curatorship. In 1995, he chaired the advisory commissions for the *Stazioni dell'arte* projects in Naples, in 1996 he was responsible for Western Europe at the XXIII São Paulo Biennial, in 1998 he was President of *Dak'Art 1998* and in 2001 he curated the 1st Valencia Biennial. His other

group exhibitions in the same years include 'Minimalia. Da Giacomo Balla a... ' (Palazzo Querini Dubois, Venice, 1997/Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome, 1998; presented again in 1990-2000 at the PS1 Contemporary Art Center, New York), 'Le Tribù dell'Arte' (Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome, 2001) and 'Eurasia. Dissolvenze geografiche dell'arte' (MART – Museo d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, 2008). In 2001 he also curated 'Transavanguardia italiana' (Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai), which was followed by 'La Transavanguardia italiana' (Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires, 2003; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Santiago del Cile, 2003; Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City, 2003-04) and 'La transavanguardia italiana' (Palazzo Reale, Milan, 2011-12). In 2003 he was also one of the authors of the catalogue, curated by Ida Gianelli, that accompanied the 'Transavanguardia' exhibition at Castello di Rivoli. He has been the curator of numerous solo exhibitions including, in 2010, 'Gino De Dominicis. L'immortale' which was the inaugural exhibition at MAXXI-Museo delle Arti del XXI secolo in Rome.

Parallel to his exhibition activity, his books and critical essays – starting with *Il territorio magico. Comportamenti alternativi dell'arte*, published in 1971 – constitute an uninterrupted sequence of works that, as a whole, reflect an encyclopaedic vision and a multidisciplinary and transgenerational investigation of contemporary and non-contemporary knowledge. His publications include: *Critica in atto*, 1972; *Arte e sistema dell'arte. Opera, pubblico, critica, mercato*, 1975; *L'ideologia del traditore. Arte, maniera, manierismo*, 1976; *Le avanguardie diverse. Europa/America*, 1976; *Vita di Marcel Duchamp*, 1976 (followed in 1978 by *Mercante del segno. Scritti di Marcel Duchamp*); *Autocritico automobile. Attraverso le avanguardie*, 1977; *Passo dello strabismo. Sulle arti*, 1978; *Arcimboldo* (with Roland Barthes), 1978; *Paolo Mussat Sartor. 1968-1978. Arte e artisti in Italia*, 1979; *Labirinto*, 1979; *Autonomia e creatività della critica*, 1980; *La Transavanguardia italiana*, 1980 (followed in 1982 by *La Transavanguardia internazionale*); *Il sogno dell'arte. Tra avanguardia e transavanguardia*, 1981; *Manuale di volo. Dal mito greco all'arte moderna, dalle avanguardie storiche alla transavanguardia*, 1982; *Critica ad Arte. Panorama della Post-Critica*, 1983; *Dialoghi d'artista. Incontri con l'arte contemporanea 1970-1984*, 1984; *Minori Maniere. Dal Cinquecento alla Transavanguardia*, 1985; *Progetto Dolce. Nuove forme dell'arte italiana*, 1986; *Antipatia. L'arte contemporanea*, 1987; *Superarte*, 1988; *Il tallone di Achille. Sull'arte contemporanea*, 1988; *Artae*, 1991; *Conversation Pieces*, 1993; *L'arte e le sue voci. L'arte è un "dimenticare a memoria"*, 1996; *Oggetti di turno. Dall'arte alla critica*, 1997; *Gratis. A bordo dell'arte*, 2000; *Estetiche della globalizzazione*, 2001; *I fuochi dello sguardo. Musei che reclamano attenzione*, 2004; *Lezione di boxe. Dieci round sull'arte contemporanea*, 2004; *ABO. La Repubblica delle Arti*, 2005. He is also the author of the encyclopaedic publications *L'arte fino al 2000* (1991) and *L'arte oltre il 2000* (2002), while in 2008 he edited the *Enciclopedia della parola. Dialoghi d'artista 1968-2008* and, in 2011, he began the publication of the *Enciclopedia delle arti contemporanee*. Among the television programmes conceived and conducted by Bonito Oliva there are *Autoritratto dell'arte contemporanea* (RAI 3, 1992-96), the special *Totòmodo, l'arte spiegata anche ai bambini* (RAI 3, 1995), *A.B.O. Collaudi d'arte* (RAI 1, 2000-01), *A.B.O.RDO DELL'ARTE* and *Il giorno della creazione* (Cult Network/Sky, 2004-05), *Fuori quadro* (RAI 3, 2014-15). Among the periodicals he has collaborated with are *Alfabeto2*, *Casabella*, *Domus*, *Flash Art*, *Corriere della Sera*, *Il Giornale dell'Arte*, *Il Giorno*, *La Repubblica*, *L'Espresso*, *Modo*. Bonito Oliva has been the initiator of a number of awards and recognitions. Among the ones he has received are the title of *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* of the French Republic (1992), the *Medaglia d'Oro ai Benemeriti della Cultura e dell'Arte* (2004) and *Grande Ufficiale dell'Ordine al Merito* of the Republic of Italy (2010).



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