

Bruno Munari.

La leggerezza dell'arte

Exhibition guide

Bruno Munari (1907–1998) was one of the leading lights of twentieth-century Italian culture. An experimental artist, graphic designer, writer, lecturer and curator, he was a figure with an intense creative flair, able to grasp the transformations of the natural and artificial world with an original intellectual curiosity. His research straddles various disciplines and is rooted in the fervent debate on avant-garde artistic currents throughout the early decades of the last century.

Munari made a major debut in 1930 with his *Macchina aerea* ('Air Machine'), followed by his *Macchine inutili* ('Useless Machines'), light works floating in the air, leading abstractionism towards a dynamic and time-varying dimension. Over the following decade, it was a profound reflection on perception and the involvement of the onlooker that drove his actions. In 1947 he presented *Concavo Convesso* ('Concav-Convex'): a cloud-like work, created by folding the ends of a metal mesh inwards, which when struck by light creates an immersive environmental experience. His research continued with the abstract forms of *Negativi-positivi* ('Negative-Positives') and a new approach to the book-object with his *Libri illeggibili* ('Illegible Books'). These early investigations into the relationship between form, environment and space and into that between the artwork and the viewer were furthered in the early 1950s with his *Proiezioni dirette* and *Proiezioni polarizzate* ('Direct Projections' and 'Polarised Projections'): 'painting' here is no longer matter, but forms are projected on the wall by exploiting the artistic potential of the Polaroid filter, the function of which is to break down light to obtain the surprising effect of pictorial forms with ever-changing colours.

In 1958, he created his *Sculture da viaggio* ('Travel Sculptures'), works made of card or other lightweight materials, easily foldable and transportable, capable of satisfying the aesthetic needs of the modern traveller who wishes to interact with space.

At the beginning of the 1960s, with the emergence of the first photocopying machines, Munari used the new technology to produce shifting images, his so-called *Xerografie originali* ('Original Xerographs'), unique and unrepeatable works arising from an instantaneous performative act. The series of *Oggetti a funzione estetica* ('Objects with an Aesthetic Function'), which originated from his conceptual research, may be classified in somewhere between art and design.

From 1977, the artist began to concentrate on the development of an educational method for the staging of workshops mainly aimed at children. The acquisition and practical experience of a new knowledge of materials and creative processes are the key elements to these workshops, to be found at the heart of the 'Bruno Munari Method' to this day.

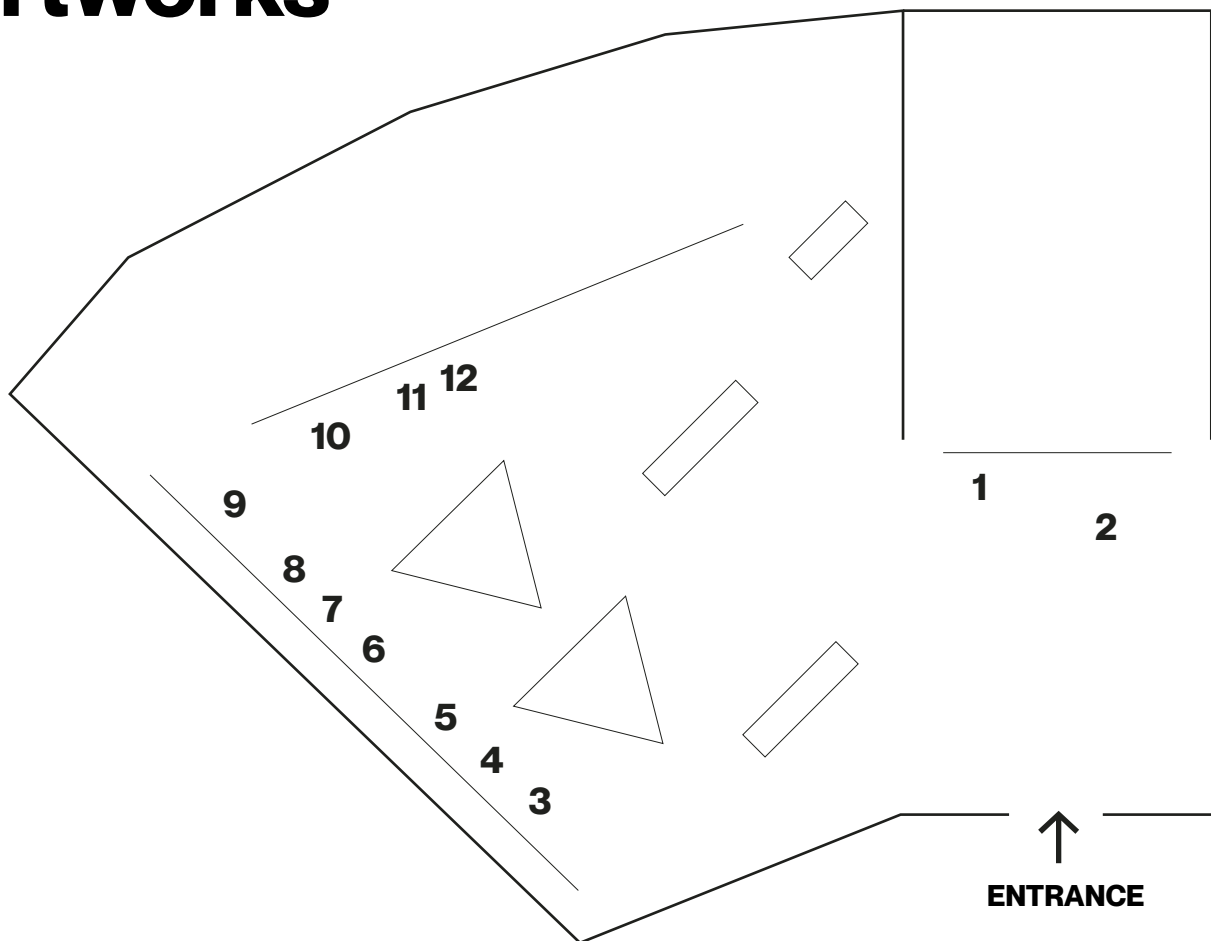
Perception

Everyone sees what they know. Knowing the images that surround us also means broadening the scope for contact with reality; it means seeing more and understanding more.

From his lectures at Harvard University, 1967

The twentieth century ushered in new languages in art, opening up to profound reflections on the perception and reception of works by the viewer. In the 1940s, Bruno Munari experimented with the telling of a visual story, one without words, made of lines drawn on transparent sheets, shaped pages, holes or tears, coloured papers and cotton threads (*Libri illeggibili*, 1949). Painting became a dynamic expression that generated works with a twofold nature: the viewer's eye can perceive unitary shapes or combinations of several distinguishable and autonomous forms (*Negativi-positivi*, from 1948). Munari's experiments continued into the 1960s, involving colours and materials to create changing shapes and shades, thanks to the mechanical movement of the clock (*Ora X*, 'X O'Clock', 1954) or the flow of water as in fountains (*La ruota*, 'The Wheel', 1958). In the 1960s, actions on the dynamic transformation process of colours cancelled the perception of matter (*Tetracono*, 1965). Much of Munari's research found application in the graphic design of books and record covers, or in studies on the legibility of a trademark such as the famous 1965 Campari poster to be found in the MoMA collection in New York.

Artworks



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|---|--|
| <p>01. <i>Xeroritratto di Bruno Munari</i>, 1968
Xerography
private collection</p> <p>02. <i>Scultura pieghevole</i>, 1951
hinged sheet metal, painted yellow giallo
private collection Turin</p> <p>03. <i>Due forme rosse</i>, 1947
tempera on card, applied to board
private collection</p> <p>04. <i>Columbia</i>, 1955
print, seven-inch record cover
private collection</p> <p>05. <i>Astratto</i>, 1937
mixed media on cardboard
private collection Rome</p> <p>06. <i>Libro Illeggibile N.Y. N. 1</i>, 1967
print, paperback book with dust jacket
private collection</p> <p>07. <i>Tetracono</i>, 1965
aluminium, iron, electric motor ferro
courtesy kaufmann repetto Milan / New York, Andrew
Kreps Gallery New York, Repetto Gallery Lugano</p> | <p>08. <i>Ora X</i>, 1963
plastic, alluminium, wood
courtesy Kaufmann Repetto Milan / New York, Andrew
Kreps Gallery New York, Repetto Gallery Lugano</p> <p>09. <i>Fontana "La ruota"</i>, 1958
iron, plastic
courtesy Kaufmann Repetto Milan / New York, Andrew
Kreps Gallery New York, Repetto Gallery Lugano</p> <p>10. <i>Negativo-positivo</i>, 1993
acrylic on canvas
courtesy Repetto Gallery, Lugano, Galleria Niccoli, Parma</p> <p>11. <i>Negativo-positivo</i>, 1951
oil on shaped board
private collection</p> <p>12. <i>Negativo-positivo</i>, 1950 (1987)
arylic on canvas
private collection</p> |
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The rule and chance

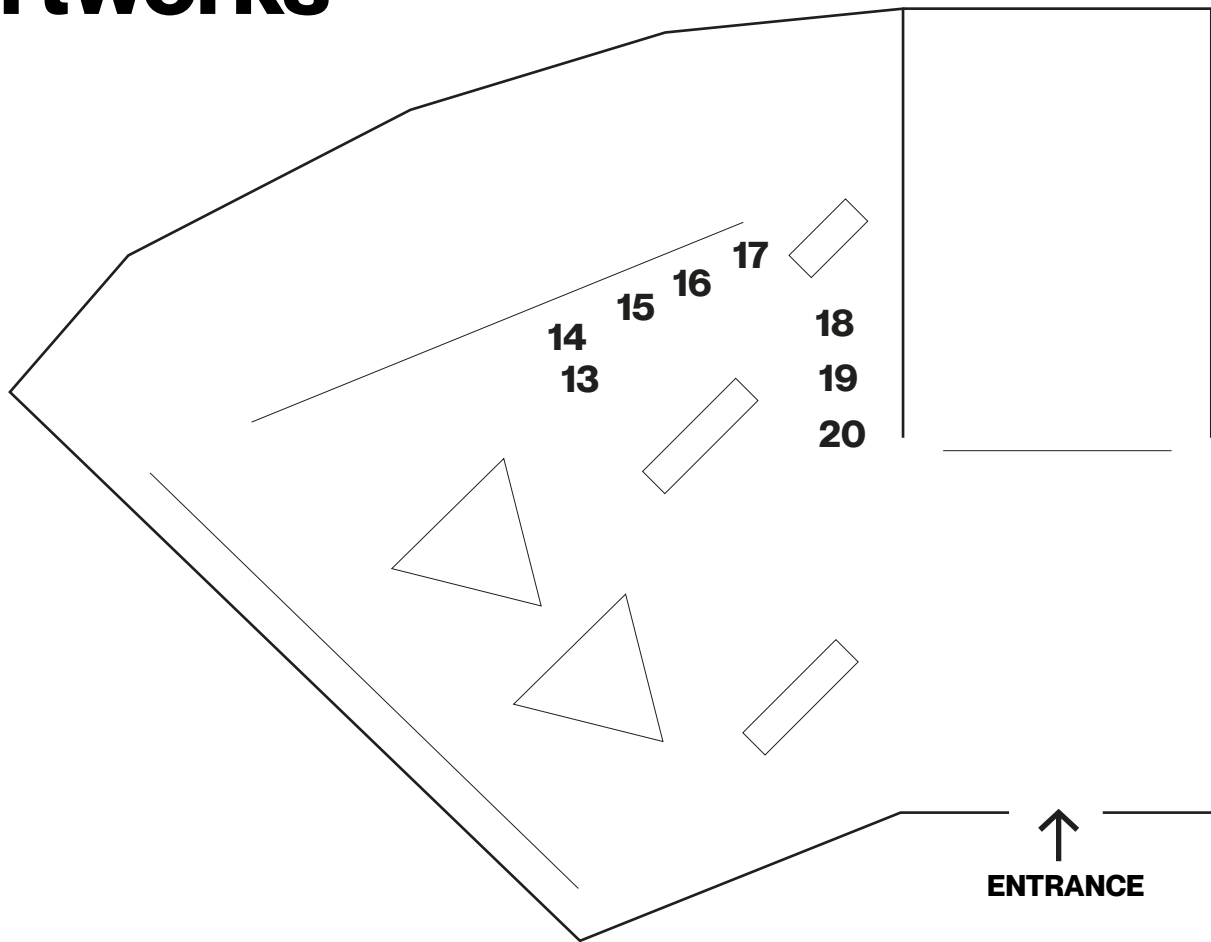
*The rule alone is monotonous; chance alone makes us restless.
The combination between rule and chance is life, it's art.*

Bruno Munari

In contrast to the Dadaist approach, in which chance prevails over logic, Bruno Munari prefers to seek a balance between opposing forces, believing that life, art, imagination and equilibrium can only arise from the encounter between chance and rational thought. Randomness is also a determining element in natural elements, where the development of certain structures – the rib of a leaf, a crystal, a stone – is influenced by multiple environmental factors, such as light, wind or humidity. The environment constantly modifies form, leading us to conceive of transformations as intrinsic elements of life.

From the law of chance, one of Dadaist origin, Munari tended instead towards a continuous dialogue between rule and chance. This incurred a thought and paradigm shift also in the production of his works of art.

Artworks



13. *Ricostruzione teorica di un oggetto immaginario*, 1970
mixed media, collage
private collection Arezzo

14. *Untitled*, 1955
mixed media, collage
private collection

15. *Collage 1963*, 1963
collage on card
courtesy Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz Bruno Danese,
Milan

16. *Composizione con tessuti stampati*, 1982
collage
private collection

17. *Olio su tela*, 1986
collage with oils on canvas
private collection

18. *P4-8 Colori nella curva di Peano*, 1975
acrylic on canvas
courtesy Galleria Granelli, Livorno

19. *P16 Curva di Peano*, 1975
acrylic on canvas
private collection

20. *Ricostruzione teorica di un oggetto immaginario*, 1971
mixed media, collage
private collection

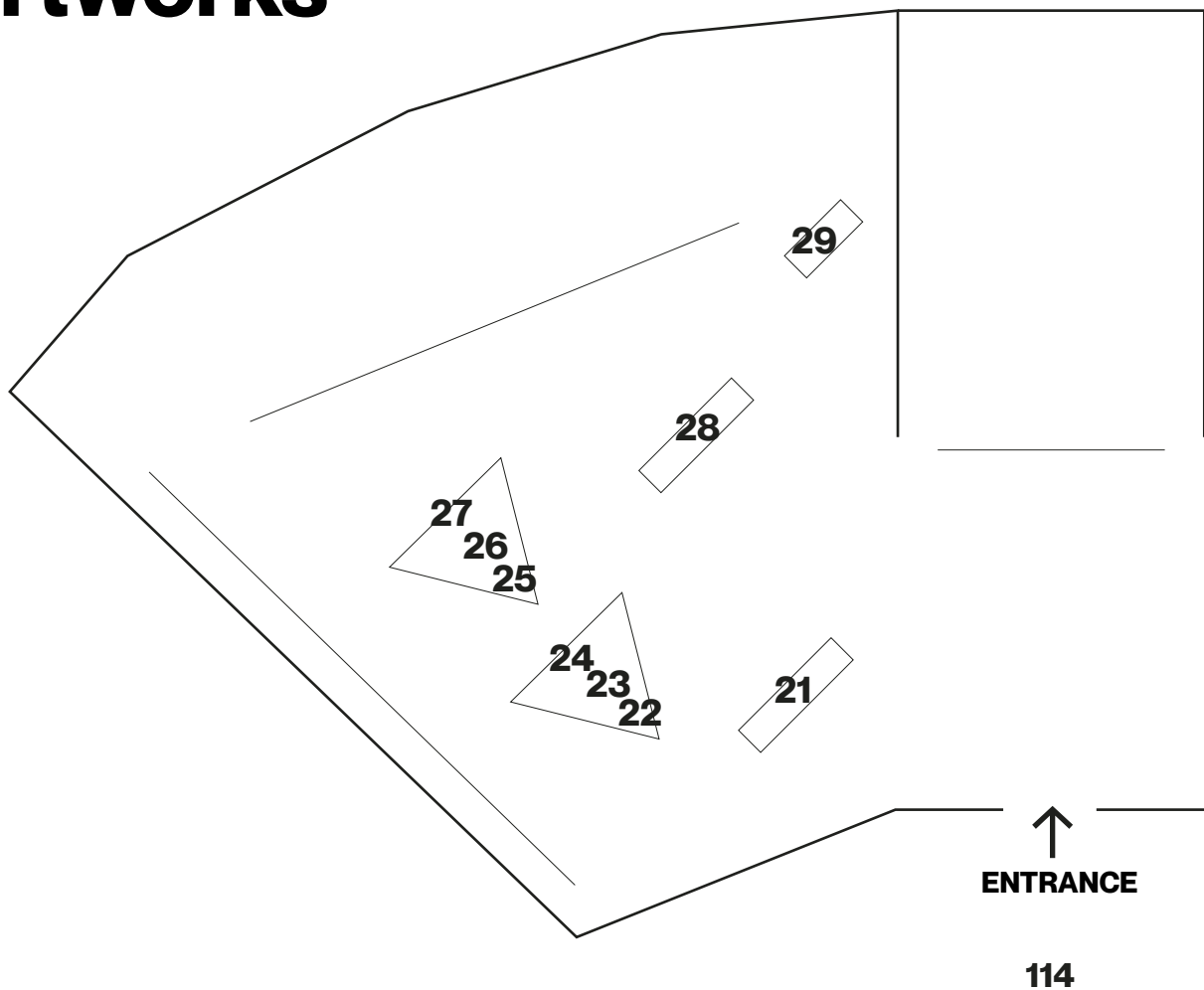
The dynamism of a shape

Art is constant research, the assimilation of past experiences, the addition of new experiences, be it in form, contents, matter, technique or media.

Bruno Munari, *A un millimetro da me*, 1987

Munari is a creator of forms in continuous transformation. His entire oeuvre dialogues with the theoretical intuitions of the Futurist Umberto Boccioni: “What we want to give is the object experienced in its dynamic becoming, i.e., to render the synthesis of the transformations that the object undergoes.” Investigating the possibility of making a sculptural form – which is by definition static – dynamic, Munari worked on a two-dimensional form with cuts and folds, obtaining three-dimensional sculptures that provide the onlooker with an interplay of solids and voids. In the artist’s practice, we may note dynamic forms based on the random movement of elements (*Macchine inutili*, 1932) and works made interactive by the intervention of the viewer (*Strutture continue*, 1959) or by the performative action of the artist (*Xerografie originali*, 1964).

Artworks



21. *Scultura*, 1958 (1989)
brass
courtesy Repetto Gallery, Lugano

22. *Scultura*, 1958 (1997)
nickel-planted brass
ed. Corraini, Mantua ex. 6/40
private collection

23. *Quadrato a tre dimensioni variazione II*, 1960
card
courtesy Kaufmann Repetto Milan / New York, Andrew
Kreps Gallery New York, Repetto Gallery Lugano

24. *Scultura da viaggio*, 1987
card
courtesy Repetto Gallery, Lugano

25. *Scultura da viaggio*, 1959
two-shade card, back-glued, die-cut and creased
ex. 2/300
Lucchini e Sanna collection, Turin

26. *Scultura*, 1936
folded sheet of brass
private collection

27. *Quadrato nella terza dimensione*, 1991
painted and folded metal
ex. 5/9 Corraini collection, Mantua

28. *Scultura*, 1958 (1994)
Balsa wood and textile
ed. U.X.A., Novara ex. 5/8
private collection

29. *Aconà Biconbi*, 1965
chromed sheet metal
ed. Danese, Milan ex. 41A/50
courtesy Kaufmann Repetto Milan / New York, Andrew
Kreps Gallery New York, Repetto Gallery Lugano

114. *Superflexy*, 1997
brass joints, plastic coloured poles
private collection

Fantasia

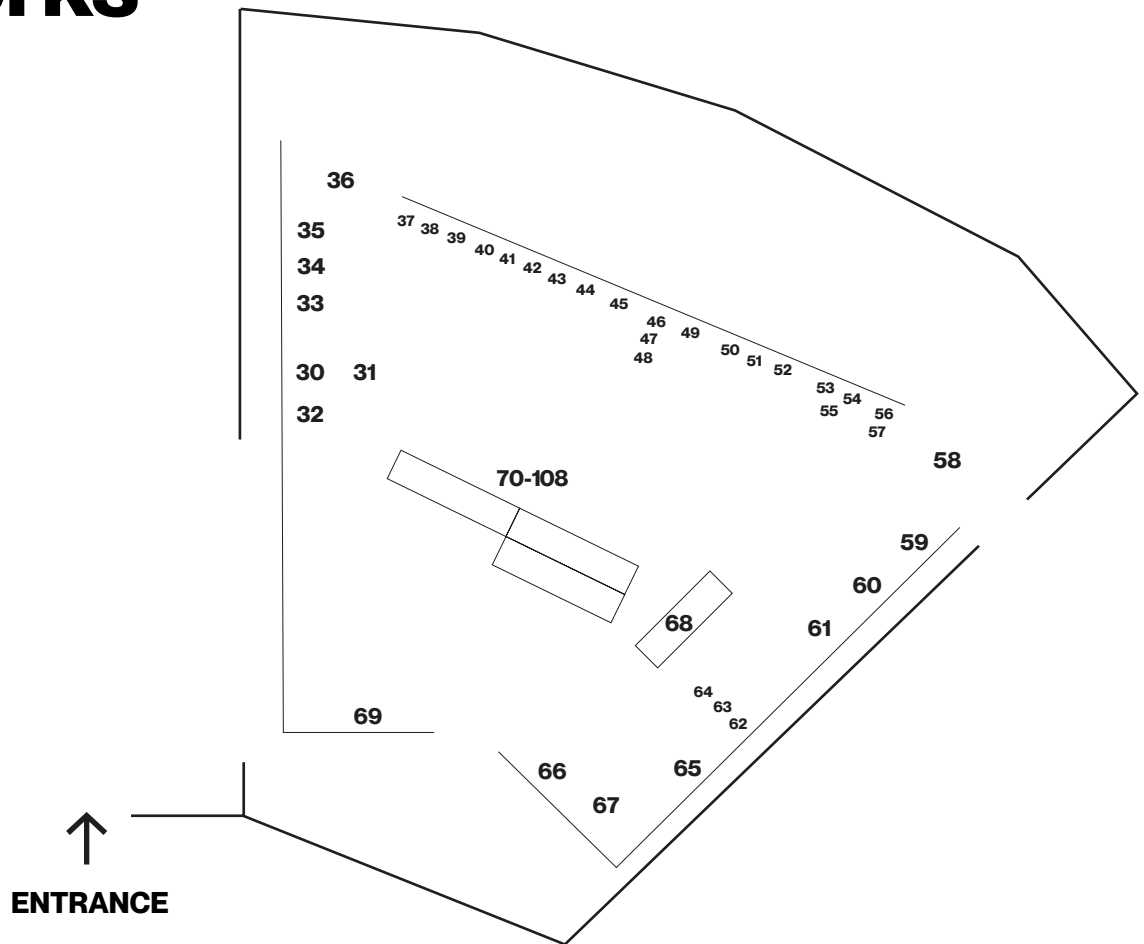
Without thinking why am I doing this and without knowing beforehand what will come next, at a certain point, to my great surprise, I find myself before a solid object which was not there before.

Bruno Munari, *Alta Tensione*, 1990

In 1977, Munari dedicated his book *Fantasia* to the study of this peculiar faculty of the human mind, the product of which arises from the relationship established between known elements. Imagination is ever more fervent the more the individual is able to weave relationships between his or her knowledge, allowing one even to ponder what seems impossible. When combined with creativity, the imagination can lead to a practical application of thought, sometimes even to the invention of objects or materials.

In 1958, imagination led Munari to consider the various manners and perspectives of viewing an object: a fork, for example, may look like a hand, taking on various positions and gestures and turning into a *Forchetta parlante* ('Talking Fork').

Artworks



30. *Abitacolo*, 1971
 paintd steel
 produced by Robots, Binasco (Milan)
 private collection

31. *La Pennellessa*, 1970 (1993)
 brush with plaits
 Duchamp exhibition at Palazzo Grassi, Venice, 1993,
 ex. 13/50
 courtesy Galleria Corraini

32. *Flexi*, 1968
 steel threads, plastic rings and suction cups,
 base in die-cut cardboard
 courtesy Repetto Gallery, Lugano

33. *Forchetta parlante Pardòn*, 1958
 silver
 courtesy Repetto Gallery, Lugano

34. *Forchetta parlante No grazie*, 1958
 silver
 courtesy Repetto Gallery, Lugano

35. *Forchetta parlante Très chic*, 1958
 silver
 courtesy Repetto Gallery, Lugano

36. *Lampada Falkland*, 1964
 elastic netting, metal rings and electric cable
 produced by Danese, Milan
 courtesy Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz e Bruno Danese
 private collection

37. *Sedia per visite brevissime*, 1945 (1988)
 walnut wood and aluminium
 produced by Zanotta, Nova Milanese, ex. 6/8
 courtesy Repetto Gallery, Lugano

38. *Xerografia originale*, 1964
 xerography
 courtesy Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz Bruno Danese,
 Milan

39. *Xerografia originale*, 1965
 xerography
 courtesy Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz Bruno Danese,
 Milan

40. *Xerografia originale*, 1977
 xerography
 private collection

41. *Xerografia originale*, 1976
 xerography
 private collection

42. *Xerografia originale*, 1980
xerography
private collection
43. *Pubblicità per i giocattoli silenziosi Pirelli*, 1957
window sign
courtesy Fondazione Pirelli, Milan
44. *Declinazione grafica del nome Campari (argento)*, 1980
collage
courtesy Galleria Campari, Sesto San Giovanni (Milan)
45. *Manifesto Einaudi*, 1970
sign for bookshop
private collection
46. *Bozzetto per il libro "Formiche cieche"*, 1962
mixed media
sketch for the series "un libro al mese", Club degli Editori,
volume No. 20, Pinilla, Formiche cieche, May 1962
private collection
47. *Bozzetto per il libro "La notte di Lisbona"*, 1964
mixed media
sketch for the series "un libro al mese", Club degli
Editori, volume No. 51, Remarque, La notte di Lisbona,
December 1964
private collection
48. *Bozzetto per il libro "Sfida a Venere"*, 1962
mixed media
sketch for the series "un libro al mese", Club degli Editori,
volume No. 24, Morgan, Sfida a Venere, September 1962
private collection
49. *Voilà*, anni '40
mixed media and assemblage
Silipo collection, Rome
50. *Fossile del 2000*, 1959
electronic components and metallic material in Perspex
private collection
51. *Fossile del 2000*, 1990
electronic components and metallic material in Perspex
courtesy Repetto Gallery, Lugano
52. *Fossile del 2000*, 1959
electronic components and metallic material in Perspex
courtesy Repetto Gallery, Lugano
53. *Gatto Meo*, 1949
foam rubber with frame in iron wire and nylon whiskers
produced by Pirelli, Milan
private collection
54. *Scimmietta Zizi*, 1952
foam rubber with frame in iron wire
produced by Pirelli, Milan
courtesy Fondazione Pirelli, Milan
55. *Sasso con gatto*, 1981
drawing on stone gathered by the artist in Riva Trigoso
(Sestri Levante)
courtesy Repetto Gallery, Lugano
56. *Pirelli. Rivista d'informazione e di tecnica*, n. 4, pag. 25,
1949
magazine / typographic print on paper
courtesy Fondazione Pirelli, Milan
57. *Pirelli. Rivista d'informazione e di tecnica*, n. 5, 1954
magazine / typographic print on paper
courtesy Fondazione Pirelli, Milan
58. *Polariscop*, 1967
metal box, white light, Polaroid filter, collage with
transparent plastic materials
courtesy Kaufmann Repetto Milan / New York, Andrew
Kreps Gallery New York, Repetto Gallery Lugano
59. *Mistero cosmico*, 1932
olio on canvas
private collection
60. *Macchina Area 1930*, 1930
mixed media and collage
private collection
61. *Niente, del resto, è assurdo per chi vola*, anni '30
photomontage and collage
private collection
62. *Presenza degli antenati*, 1970
print proof
private collection
63. *Presenza degli antenati*, 1970
print proof
private collection
64. *Presenza degli antenati*, 1970
print proof
private collection
65. *Studio per tensostruttura*, anni '50
pencil and India ink on transparency
private collection
66. *Tensione e compressione*, 1990
mixed media and collage
private collection
67. *Tensione e compressione*, 1990
seasoned woods and white cotton threads
private collection
68. *Alta tensione*, 1991
seasoned woods, white cotton threads and feather
private collection
69. *Declinazione grafica del nome Campari*, 1964
colour lithographic print
courtesy Galleria Campari, Sesto San Giovanni (Milan)

Artworks

92	93	95	96	97	101	101	100	104	103
86	94			88	102	101		106	105
85	87	88	89	90	96			108	107
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					75		76 77	78 79	
					70 71		72	73 74	

70. *Supplemento al dizionario italiano*, Muggiani Editore, 1963
brossura
private collection
71. *Les Fourchettes de Munari*, 1958
la giostra paperback, celluloid jacket
private collection
72. *Fantasia*, Universale Laterza, 1977
paperback
private collection
73. *Da lontano era un'isola*, Emme Edizioni, 1971
hard cover
private collection
74. *Nella nebbia di Milano*, Emme Edizioni, 1968
hard cover
private collection
75. *Supplement of the Italian Dictionary*, Carpano, 1958
paperback
private collection
76. *Cappuccetto verde*, Einaudi, 1972
paperback
private collection
77. *Rose nell'insalata*, Einaudi, 1973
paperback
private collection
78. *Cappuccetto giallo*, Einaudi, 1972
paperback
private collection
79. *Nella notte buia*, Muggiani Editore, 1956
hard cover
private collection
80. *Le Macchine di Munari*, Einaudi, 1942
hard cover
private collection
81. *Fotocronache di Munari*, Gruppo Editoriale Domus, 1944
paperback
private collection
82. *Abecedario*, Einaudi, 1942
hard cover, canvas back
private collection
83. *Alfabetiere. Secondo il metodo attivo*, Einaudi, 1960
paperback
private collection
84. *Bruno Munari's ABC*, The world Publishing Company, 1960
hard cover jacket
private collection
85. *Sent to America*, 1955
cover design for Einaudi
private collection
86. *Crisi in bianco e nero di C.E. Silberman*, 1965
print proof for Einaudi
private collection
87. *Cronache romane*, 1965
cover design for Einaudi
private collection
88. *Libro Illeggibile*, 1958
paper, card, tracing paper and thread
second edition produced by the artist in 20 copies,
ex. 4/20
courtesy Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz Bruno Danese,
Milan
89. *Better Day's*, 1948
cover design
private collection
90. *Le macchine di Munari*, 1941
collage for front cover
courtesy Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz Bruno Danese,
Milan
91. *Il poema del vestito di latte*, 1937
paperback book
ed. Snia Viscosa
private collection

92. *Xerografia. Documentazione sull'uso creativo delle macchine Rank Xerox*, 1970
paperback
private collection
93. *Il diario di Anna Frank*, 1954
front cover of the book *Il diario di Anna Frank*, Einaudi, 1954
private collection
94. *Se questo è un uomo*, 1960
front cover of the book by P. Levi, *Se questo è un uomo*, Einaudi, 1958
private collection
95. *Art D'Aujourd'hui*, 1952
front cover of the magazine *Art D'Aujourd'hui*, gennaio 1952
private collection
96. *Interiors*, 1954
front cover of the magazine *Interiors*, agosto 1954
private collection
97. *La Voce del Padrone*, 1958
record cover, L. Van Beethoven, symphony No. 6 in F op. 68 pastorale
private collection
98. *Ricordi*, anni '60
copertina del disco serie Westminster, J. S. Bach, concerto Brandeburghese n.3 in sol
private collection
99. *Disegni per il libro "Rose nell'insalata"*, anni '70
collage, ink and pencil on paper
private collection
100. *Disegni per il libro "Rose nell'insalata"*, 1980
collage, ink and pencil on paper
private collection
101. *Disegno per il libro "Rose nell'insalata"* – Cicoria, 1973
ink and pencil on paper
private collection
102. *Disegno per il libro "Rose nell'insalata"* – Porro? / Belga, 1973
ink and pencil on paper
private collection
103. *Disegno per il libro "Viaggio nella fantasia"*, 1967
ink, print and pencil on paper
private collection
104. *Disegno per il libro "Viaggio nella fantasia"*, 1967
ink, print and pencil on paper
private collection
105. *Disegno per il libro "Viaggio nella fantasia"*, 1967
ink, print and pencil on paper
private collection
106. *Disegno per il libro "Viaggio nella fantasia"*, 1967
ink, print and pencil on paper
private collection
107. *Disegno per il libro "Viaggio nella fantasia"*, 1967
ink, print and pencil on paper
private collection
108. *Disegno per il libro "Viaggio nella fantasia"*, 1967
ink, print and pencil on paper
private collection

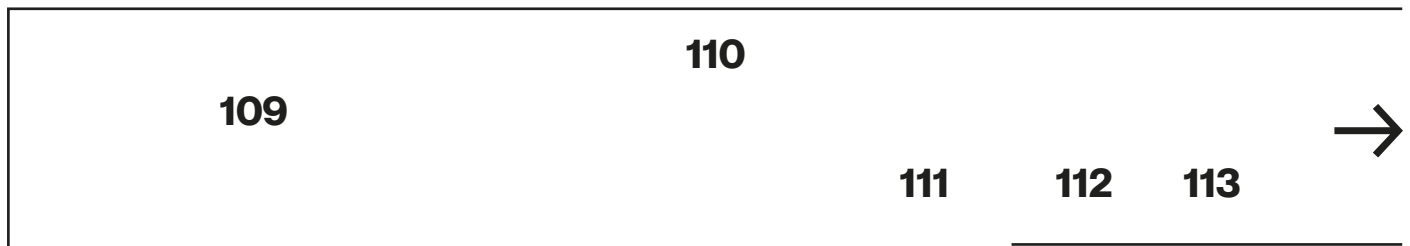
Painting with light

Munari's admirable, phantasmagorical, monastic yet at the same time ultra-technological room is in itself a lesson in simplicity and purity as well as compositional awareness.

Gillo Dorfles on Bruno Munari's work at the Venice Biennale, 1966

Starting in 1930, the artist tackled the theme of the 'machine', so dear to the Futurist avant-garde. His *Macchine inutili* (1932) were proposed as a new form of artistic expression, replacing painting and sculpture: they are 'useless' insofar as they are not productive, but they are mobile, hanging objects, designed to offer a harmonious variety of movements, shapes, colours and shadows. The relationship with space is manifested in the work *Concavo-convesso* (1947). The object, produced using fine wire mesh, is suspended and illuminated, taking on an organic appearance. The shadows projected onto the walls constantly change, making various elements coexist in the environment: form, light, movement, lightness, transparency, technology, planning and indeterminacy. With his *Proiezioni dirette* (1950), the artist created micro-compositions to be projected in large dimensions, using materials that are effective in terms of transparency, colour and material structure. Exhibited in several international museums, including the MoMA in New York in 1954, the *Proiezioni dirette* are a work exemplary of Munari's intense artistic activity, and together with Lucio Fontana's *Ambienti spaziali* ('Spatial Environments'), anticipated the dialectic between art and environment that would become a key feature over the following years.

Artworks



109. *Vetrini per proiezione diretta*, 1951
composition of various materials and frame for slides
courtesy Fondazione Jacqueline Vodoz Bruno Danese, Milan

110. *Concavo-convesso*, 1947 (1984)
metal net
ed. U.X.A., Novara ex. p.d.a./6
private collection

111. *Macchina inutile p.d.a.*, 1947 (1983)
painted wood and thread
ed. U.X.A., Novara ex. p.d.a./20
private collection

112. *Macchina inutile (per Bill)*, 1953 (1993)
wood, thread, plastic and screen printed forex
ed. Corraini, Mantua ex. 27/100
private collection

113. *Macchina Inutile*, 1945 (1980)
anodised and painted aluminium
ed. U.X.A., Novara ex, 19/19
courtesy Repetto Gallery, Lugano