

ART AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Part of the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Geneva, Palais des Nations

December 4 – 15, 2023

An exhibition presented by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and by the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations in Geneva in collaboration with Associazione Genesi

Under the High Patronage of the President of the Italian Republic

curated by Ilaria Bernardi

Press release

On November 10, 1948, in the wake of the Second World War, the General Assembly of the United Nations approved and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, one of the most significant, and still relevant, documents in the recent history of the world.

Seventy-five years later, from December 4 to 15, 2023, Italy will hold, at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, a major exhibition titled “**Art and Human Rights,**” curated by **Ilaria Bernardi**, promoted by the **Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations in Geneva in collaboration with the Milan-based Associazione Genesi**, which since 2020 has been committed to promoting Human Arts through contemporary art.

The exhibition is a part of the campaign promoted by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

For the purpose of casting light on how Italian art, from the post-Second War period to the present time, has underlined urgent social themes and ones closely related to those expressed in the Declaration, **sixteen artists, Italian by birth or by naturalization, were chosen.** These include three senior artists who were acclaimed in the 1950s and 1960s, after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted, and thirteen who have emerged in these past thirty years, after the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, marking the start of a renewed commitment to reinforce and develop all the legal tools available for the protection of human rights, built up since 1948 on the grounds of the Universal Declaration.

The works of the 16 artists will be on display in the Gallery opposite the Human Rights Room at the United Nations. **The artists will be given a space in which to show one or two of their works, accompanied by a descriptive text ideally linking them to one of the main themes of the Universal Declaration.** The exhibition will thus outline a narrative by successive "chapters" (the spaces of the individual artists) which when combined offer a picture of the key articles in the Universal Declaration.

Located at the center of the Gallery are the works of three masters: *Venus of the Rags* (1967) by **Michelangelo Pistoletto**, three elements of the *Enciclopedia Treccani* (1970) by **Emilio Isgrò**, and *Athletes of Herculaneum* (1985) by **Mimmo Jodice**: when observed these works seem to ideally point to some of today's most crucial issues, such as environmental sustainability, the right to an education, and the protection of artistic heritage.

The spaces dedicated to the artists of the later generations will unfold, one next to the other, around this central core, with works based on the themes included in the Universal Declaration.

The video *NUI SIMU* [That's Us] (2010) by **Marinella Senatore** made based on the voluntary participation of the ex-miners of Enna will be of use to recalling the right to a dignified job, while the work *They Will Say I Killed Them* (2017-2018) by **Danilo Correale**, which refers to six films that were never completed because they were blocked by censorship, will make it possible to further study a theme that is already a part of Senatore's participatory art and concerns freedom of expression.

Linked to freedom of expression and at the same time the right to health is *Still life* (2023) by **Irene Dionisio**, which focuses on Covid-related tragedies and isolation, and the role of the digital dimension within this particular context. Also focusing on the right to health are the works *On Walking* (2017) and *Alfabeto* (2018) by **Rossella Biscotti**, recounting the complex rehabilitation that was achieved thanks to progress in medical technology.

Another fundamental right concerns a healthy and sustainable environment, which allows humans to come into direct contact with nature. Works associated with this fundamental right are *Meridiane* (2020) designed by **Stefano Arienti** while following the lights and shadows created by the sun on paper, as well as *En route to the South* (2015) and *En route to the South, learning to be nomadic* (2017) by **Elena Mazzi**, both dealing with the theme of sustainable agriculture with particular interest in beekeeping.

Senza titolo (2019-2021) by **Francis Offman** focuses on the issue of diaspora, the search for one's roots and identity, thus encouraging a discussion on the right to freedom of movement.

The issue of the female condition, which is of great relevance in today's world, will be represented by three works: *Mirror no. 12* (2021), an installation by **Silvia Giambrone** on the theme of equality, as well as *Home Is Where You Leave Your Belt* (2019) and *The Fire Bites* (2019) by **Monica Bonvicini**, who raises the question about domestic violence and its victims who are frequently women.

Of crucial importance as well are the rights of minors expressed in two works: the video *The Picture of Ourselves* (2013) by **Rä di Martino** whose main subject is a girl; and the diptych *Self Portrait as my Mother on the Phone* and *Self Portrait as my Father on the Phone* (2019) by **Silvia Rosi** who, by identifying with her parents, seeks to appropriate her roots.

The exhibition ends with a close look at the question of multiculturalism, to which the works of two very young artists will be associated: *Observer les Étoiles* (2021) by Victor Fotso Nyie, *Naître au monde, c'est concevoir (vivre) enfin le monde comme relationship #1* (2022), and *Paysages Corporels – elle n'est pas déracinée* (2022) by **Binta Diaw**.

"This is the essence of cultural diplomacy: using our art, our culture, and our heritage to express a political message in defense of our basic values. It is with optimism and trust that we look to the younger generations, so that the need to protect human rights will be evermore tenacious and impactful in the future as well" (**Alessandro De Pedys, Director General for Public and Cultural Diplomacy**).

"Through the selection of Italian artists—some already well-known and well-established, others young and emerging—the curator of this exhibition are offering the international community the chance to reflect on the representation and perception of Rights, from 'classical' rights such as freedom of expression and opinion, the fight against discrimination, access to education, to more recent ones such as the right to a clean and sustainable environment and the full self-realization of gender identity" (**Ambassador Vincenzo Grassi, Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations**).

"The exhibition *Art and Human Rights*, besides being of elevated artistic and curatorial value, has major international repercussions for Italy. The choice of the exhibition project put forward by Italy to accompany the program for the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is indeed proof of the commitment and the sensibility of Italian institutions in guaranteeing and defending human rights" (**Letizia Moratti, President of Associazione Genesi**).

"Fully aware of the fact that the exhibition does not include all the Italian artists who have dealt with themes related to the ones expressed in the Universal Declaration, the Art and Human Rights exhibition aims to outline a story that, albeit partial, touches on the key themes of the Declaration through specific works by major Italian artists from different generations" (**Ilaria Bernardi, curator of the exhibition**).

The exhibition is coordinated by the cultural enterprise Suazes and by Silvana Editoriale, the publisher of a seminal bilingual (Italian/English) catalog edited by Ilaria Bernardi. The volume contains a wealth of illustrations as well as essays by the historian Marcello Flores and by the curator, in addition to institutional texts by the Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani, the Director General for Public and Cultural Diplomacy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Alessandro De Pedys, the General Director for Political Affairs and Security of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Pasquale Ferrara, the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations Ambassador, Vincenzo Grassi, and the President of Associazione Genesi, Letizia Moratti.

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