

MAXXI to host a tribute to a great 20th century photographer

CLAUDIO ABATE superficie sensibile

over 150 images chronicling 50 years of contemporary art and the relationship of each artist with their work, from Carmelo Bene to Jannis Kounellis, from Pino Pascali to Joseph Beuys and many others

curated by Ilaria Bernardi and Bartolomeo Pietromarchi

EXTRA MAXXI space | 3 March – 4 June 2023

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You have to get into the works, experience them and make them your own – even love them. If you don't, you won't even be able to take good photographs. Claudio Abate

Rome, 3 March 2023. Claudio Abate (Rome, 1943 – 2017) immortalised the artistic and theatrical avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s, not only in Rome. He 'fixed' unrepeatable performances through his lens, taking photographs that are works of art in and of themselves. He lived and worked alongside the most prestigious Italian and international artists, from Carmelo Bene to Living Theatre, from Jannis Kounellis and Pino Pascali to Joseph Beuys, accompanying and rewriting the history of art of the last 50 years through images.

The first new exhibition of 2023, entitled **Claudio Abate superficie sensibile** (sensitive surface) and curated by **Ilaria Bernardi** and **Bartolomeo Pietromarchi** in collaboration with the **Archivio Claudio Abate**, will be dedicated to the artists' photographer; it will be held in the EXTRA MAXXI space from 3 March to 4 June 2023.

The exhibition presents a visual narrative of Claudio Abate through a selection of around **150 images**, including wall-mounted photographs and proofs in showcases. Some are famous, some little-known, some even unpublished; some have been restored for the occasion together with the original iron frames, and others have been printed specifically for the exhibition. Abate's work ranges from photographs of Arte Povera works, artists and exhibitions, to shots of the Italian and international art and exhibition scene; some of his pictures were also dedicated to theatre, fashion and current affairs.

According to MAXXI Arte Director **Bartolomeo Pietromarchi**, "Claudio Abate's exhibition pays tribute to a great protagonist of the Italian art scene – an author, witness, and director of contemporary visual culture and a point of reference for artists of different generations, from the late 1960s to his recent death. The exhibition is yet another element in the programme that MAXXI has been pursuing for several years, whose aim in recent decades has been collecting, promoting and enhancing Italian art and its most important and famous protagonists."

In the words of **Ilaria Bernardi**, "Dedicating an exhibition to Claudio Abate means paying homage to a photographer who was endowed with three important skills, among other things. Firstly, the ability to always be 'in the right place and at the right time', that is, to always witness and immortalise the most important moments of Italian and international art, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. Secondly, the ability to forge lasting relationships with artists and exhibition spaces in Rome, Italy and abroad. Finally, the ability to work as an art photographer, theatre photographer, photo reporter for magazines, fashion photographer, and even photographer-artist and organiser of exhibitions and cultural activities in his studio."

THE EXHIBITION AT MAXXI

The exhibition itinerary is developed by core themes that use **wall sequences** in order to retrace the photographer's most frequent collaborations and interests, as supplemented by **audio contributions** (with testimonies by Achille Bonito Oliva, Daniela Lancioni, Piero Pizzi Cannella and Fabio Sargentini) and **in-depth showcases** that testify to the way each photograph functions as a 'portal' to a world of meanings and stories.

Fondazione MAXXI | National Museum of 21st Century Arts Italian Ministry of Culture

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The set-up is fluid and enveloping: as they create their performances, the images of the artists stand out on curved magenta-red walls reminiscent of theatre – with viewers feeling like they are reliving the performances.

The starting point of Claudio Abate's journey through the world and archive is his early research, i.e. his first photographs, which featured artists such as **Mario Schifano**, whom he portrayed in black and white in his studio in 1959, and **Pino Pascali**. The first of the exhibition's focuses is dedicated to Pascali, which immediately reveals Abate's ability to establish a deep complicit interaction with artists – so much so that he transformed the act of taking the picture into an activator of works and actions. Witness the photo of Pascali wearing a mask on his face and a large mechanical phallus while animating the work *Araba fenice*, or those in which he plays with the *Armi* series while dressed as a soldier.

There is also the collaboration with **Carmelo Bene**, which began with the famous images of the 'outrageous' debut of *Cristo 63* at Teatro Laboratorio in Rome in 1963, thanks to which Bene was acquitted of the charge of urinating on the Argentinian Ambassador seated in the audience.

Jannis Kounellis, with whom Abate had a lifelong human and professional relationship (with over 20,000 photographs taken from the early 1960s to 2016) is portrayed in several photographs. A special focus is devoted to *Dodici cavalli vivi*, the memorable performance that took place on 14 January 1969 in the new premises of the L'Attico gallery, located in a garage in Rome's Via Beccaria.

It was precisely at **L'Attico** – established by Fabio Sargentini, a multifaceted personality as well as the beating heart of an extraordinary artistic season – that Abate documented exceptional exhibitions and performances, including those of Mario Merz, Eliseo Mattiacci, Robert Smithson, Gino De Dominicis and many others.

One section of the exhibition is devoted to major exhibitions in Italy and abroad, including **arte povera più azioni povere**, curated by Germano Celant in Amalfi in 1968; **Live in your head. When attitudes become form**, curated by Harald Szeemann in Berne in 1969 – where Abate met and photographed Joseph Beuys for the first time; and **Vitalità del negativo nell'arte italiana 1960/70**, curated by Achille Bonito Oliva and organised by Incontri Internazionali d'Arte at Rome's Palazzo delle Esposizioni in 1970. In Rome, Abate assiduously took part in the most important artists' experiments, as carried out in galleries, studios, or the most active institutions on the Roman scene until the 2000s. These included the **San Lorenzo school**, **Fondazione Volume!** and **Villa Medici**.

The exhibition ends with Abate's artistic-photographic experiments, which he envisioned as true works of art. Witness **Contatti con la superficie sensibile**, which he realised and exhibited in 1972 on the occasion of his first personal exhibition in Rome's Palazzo Taverna – the headquarters of the **Incontri Internazionali d'Arte** association, whose archive, now preserved at MAXXI thanks to Gabriella Buontempo's donation, has provided some of the vintage photographs in the exhibition. The series consists of life-size, black and white prints made by having the chosen subject directly touch a specific photographic paper produced in Germany and sensitised by light. The subjects are the artists with whom Abate always collaborated. For each artist portrayed, he asked them to bring an object to pose with and to make a gesture that distinguishes them. Seven *Contacts* were made in his studio: those of Gino De Dominicis, Eliseo Mattiacci, Jannis Kounellis, Vittor Pisani, Vito Acconci, Michelangelo Pistoletto and Mimmo Germanà. There is also De Chirico's *Contact*, which sees the painter pose in a room (adapted as a dark room) in the La Medusa gallery, where one of his solo exhibitions was being held.

The **Claudio Abate superficie sensibile** exhibition coincides with the publication of a monograph dedicated to the author, which Germano Celant worked on together with Ilaria Bernardi. After the death of the critic and curator, the volume – published by Silvana editoriale and complemented by a critical text by Carlos Basualdo – was completed thanks to the coordination among Studio Celant, the Abate Archive and Ilaria Bernardi herself.

On the occasion of the exhibition, a podcast was also produced with contributions from figures in the art world who knew and worked with Claudio Abate.

Free entrance with Museum ticket | 5 Euro only exhibition Claudio Abate

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