

**IDENTITIES  
BEYOND  
BORDERS**

Dialogue between  
humans and nature  
in the artworks  
of the Farnesina  
Collection

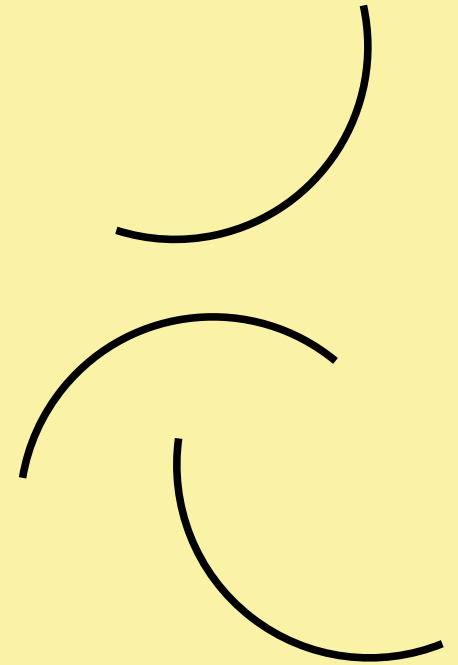


Italian Cultural  
Institute in Valletta

MUŻA – The National  
Community Art Museum  
Valletta

18.06 – 16.08.2026

Carla Accardi  
Letizia Battaglia  
Elena Bellantoni  
Tomaso Binga  
Silvia Camporesi  
Gea Casolaro  
Sarah Ciracì  
Martina della Valle  
Iginio De Luca  
Loredana Di Lillo  
Rä di Martino  
Paola Gandolfi  
Silvia Giambrone  
Maria Lai  
Ketty La Rocca  
Elena Mazzi  
Mario Merz  
Elisa Montessori  
Laura Pugno  
Agnese Purgatorio  
Marta Roberti  
Marinella Senatore



Ministero degli Affari Esteri  
e della Cooperazione Internazionale

Collezione  
**FARNESINA**



Ambasciata d'Italia  
La Valletta

ISTITUTO  
*italiano*  
DI CULTURA  
LA VALLETTA

**m**  
Heritage  
Malta

# Identities Beyond Borders

Benedetta Carpi De Resmini

*Identity Beyond Borders*, an exhibition project promoted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Farnesina Collection, offers a wide-ranging reflection on the concept of identity in a present marked by ecological crises, migration, geopolitical instability and cultural fractures. Conceived as an itinerant project in three venues and developed in collaboration with the Italian Cultural Institutes, the exhibition has gradually moved beyond its initial framework, driven by the strength and urgency of the themes it addresses. After Paris, the exhibition now enters the historic spaces of the Auberge d'Italie in Valletta, currently the seat of MUŻA – The National Community Art Museum. Here, the project enters into dialogue with the island of Malta: a territory deeply shaped by the memory of the Mediterranean, by histories of arrival, passage and cultural stratification. In this context, the exhibition becomes a space for reflecting on the ways in which individual and collective identities are constructed, transformed and redefined over time, within

a geography that has always brought different cultures, languages and visions into relation. The dialogue between generations and heterogeneous artistic languages activates new forms of critical imagination and historical reinterpretation, questioning the present through the relationship between memory, belonging and transformation. Mario Merz opens the exhibition path with the celebrated *Fibonacci* sequence, a metaphor for an organic and non-hierarchical form of knowledge that expands through connections and ramifications.

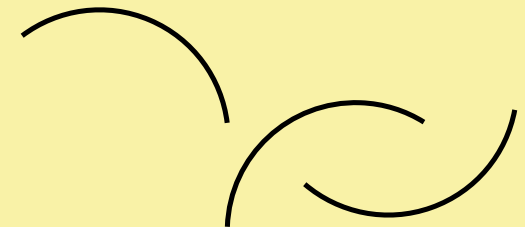
Around this central nucleus, the exhibition unfolds through three thematic sections: *Roots of Resistance*, *Geographies of Detachment* and *Unstable Ecologies*, each addressing the tensions of the contemporary world from plural perspectives. In *Roots of Resistance*, body and language become instruments of emancipation. The works of Letizia Battaglia, Tomaso Binga, Carla Accardi, Ketty La Rocca, Maria Lai and Elisa Montessori, key figures of the Italian female avant-garde, enter into dialogue with those of Elena Bellantoni,

Silvia Giambrone, Marinella Senatore and Loredana Di Lillo, generating a network of critical genealogies in which subversion emerges as a living practice and as the rewriting of new alphabets of disobedience. In *Geographies of Detachment*, the works of Gea Casolaro, Agnese Purgatorio and Sarah Ciraci reflect on the social and environmental fractures of our time, while the works of Ră di Martino, Marta Roberti and Paola Gandolfi present bodies and automatons suspended between the human and the non-human, serving as metaphors for an identity in constant transformation. In *Unstable Ecologies*, landscape is no longer a mere backdrop, but a vulnerable organism in constant transformation. The works of Silvia Camporesi, Martina della Valle, Elena Mazzi and Laura Pugno, together with the work of Iginio De Luca, approach nature as a site of crisis but also of possible regeneration, inviting us to rethink the relationship between human beings and the environment.

For the Maltese venue, the exhibition is enriched by a selection of works by Gea Casolaro and Laura Pugno. Pugno reflects on nature's regenerative and resistant capacity through the image of a plant able to consolidate fragile and shifting territories, while Casolaro activates a reflection on the construction of meaning and the dynamics of inclusion.

Also on view is *Rima di mari* by Tomaso Binga, selected specifically for this exhibition: a work that reflects on the sea and takes on particular intensity here, questioning the Mediterranean not only as a physical geography, but as a place of transit and continuous redefinition of identity.

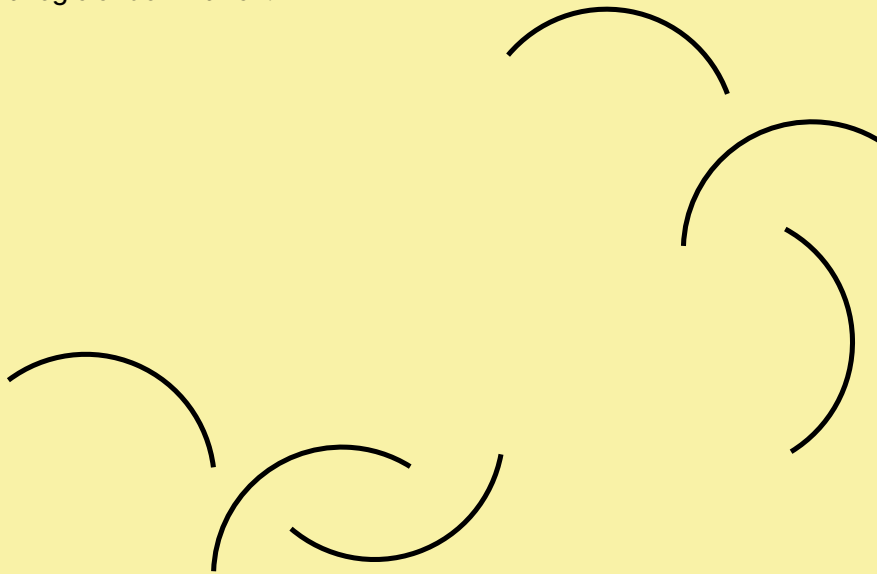
Within this interweaving of bodies, languages and landscapes, identity emerges as a mobile territory, where art imagines new relationships.



## Roots of Resistance

The works presented in this section highlight a critical reflection on the body and language, understood as tools of autonomy and transformation (Tomaso Binga, Elena Bellantoni). Some of them take shape as forms of resistance to forces of cultural oppression, as symbols of rebirth, and as instruments of mediation with the other (Carla Accardi). Artists such as Elisa Montessori employ symbols and metaphors drawn from nature to explore themes related to the affirmation of female identity. In this part of the project, the selected works address the transformation of the relationship between humans and the planet, emphasizing how that relationship has been altered by a logic of domination.

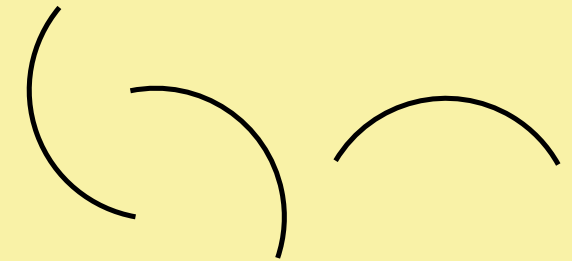
This is exemplified by Mario Merz's reflection through the Fibonacci series. The artists denounce power dynamics (Loredana Di Lillo), asserting collective participation as a form of emancipation (Marinella Senatore), and question the audience on how dominant culture has distorted the balance between human beings and everyday life (Letizia Battaglia, Maria Lai, Silvia Giambrone, Ketty La Rocca). The dialogue between patriarchal culture and nature thus becomes the core of the artistic reflection, shedding light on the complexity of the relationship between domination, identity, and Mother Earth.



## Geographies of Detachment

This section invites reflection on how current global transformations are profoundly redefining the concept of identity, both personal and collective, calling into question the original bond between humans and nature. The exhibited works narrate a growing sense of separation from the natural world, a detachment that fuels ecological and inner crises, addressed by some artists with a future-oriented perspective (Sarah Ciraci). In this ever-changing landscape, the artists act as interpreters of an evolving identity, offering sensitive insights into how planetary connections alter our sense of belonging and transform both

our relationship with the Earth and our very perception of self (Gea Casolaro). Their works trace emotional maps of identities suspended between roots and cultural mutations, revealing tensions among modernity, the environment, and individuality (Agnese Purgatorio). Some pieces (Rä di Martino, Paola Gandolfi, Marta Roberti) depict bodies or automatons suspended between the human and non-human: hybrid figures that become metaphors for a fluid identity, capable of crossing physical and symbolic borders and continuously redefining who we are and where we belong.



## Unstable Ecologies

The works in this section reflect on the ongoing environmental and social crises, addressing issues such as climate change (Silvia Camporesi, Laura Pugno), the exploitation of natural resources, and systemic inequalities. Art becomes a tool for awareness and denunciation, highlighting the deep connections between ecological degradation

(Elena Mazzi, Iginio de Luca) and social injustice. The artists also investigate the consequences of geopolitical and cultural conflicts (Martina della Valle), offering complex perspectives on the effects of global processes on the planet and its inhabitants, but also on the possibilities for resilience, transformation, and regeneration.

Carla Accardi (1924–2014) was one of the most representative artists of the twentieth century and a key figure in both the Italian and international art scenes. Active within the context of Informal

Abstraction movement, she was one of the founders of the Forma 1 group in 1947, alongside Giulio Turcato, Piero Dorazio, and Pietro Consagra. Her artistic language is distinguished by the original use of signs, colors, and abstract forms, combined with constant experimentation with materials and an innovative exploration of visual expression. Accardi's commitment to women's empowerment, is a fundamental aspect of her career: her painting affirms women's ability to convey powerful and autonomous messages, definitively breaking with roles and models imposed by male-dominated artistic traditions. In the work *Accondiscendi a contatti* (Allow for Contact), Accardi employs signs, forms, and colors to explore visual language as a tool for communication and the construction of meaning. Through her distinctive abstract and sign-based writing, Accardi investigates a form of universal, non-verbal language capable of transcending cultural, geographical, and temporal boundaries. The artwork thus becomes a space of mediation, where identity is not understood as a fixed belonging but as an open practice, engaged in continuous dialogue with the other.



Roots of Resistance

*Accondiscendi a contatti*, 2005

Vinyl on Canvas  
120 x 160 cm  
Photo © Giorgio Benni  
Courtesy Archive Accardi Sanfilippo, Rome  
The Farnesina Collection



Roots of Resistance

## Letizia Battaglia

Letizia Battaglia (1935–2022) was one of the first Italian photojournalists and a relentless witness to her homeland, Sicily. Her work goes far beyond simply documenting mafia violence: her images reveal the lives, contradictions, and dignity of ordinary people, especially women and girls, portrayed with an empathetic, non-judgmental gaze. In the photograph *Quartiere Albergheria*. *La bambina con il pane*. Palermo (The Girl with the Bread), Battaglia captures a fragment of everyday life that becomes emblematic of a broader reality. The girl's direct yet vulnerable gaze, as she clutches her piece of bread, speaks of resilience, poverty, dignity, and hope, condensing the complexity of a marginalized existence into a single gesture. Battaglia portrays Sicily in black and white, giving voice to women and girls through images that focus on substance over form. Her photography is both poetic and political, capable of going beyond reportage to become part of a broader narrative about identities in struggle and forgotten geographies. Her work reveals a fragile and compromised human and social ecosystem.

*Quartiere Albergheria*.  
*La bambina con il pane*. Palermo, 1979  
Giclée Print 70 x 50 cm  
Photo by Letizia Battaglia  
© Archive Letizia Battaglia  
The Farnesina Collection



Roots of Resistance

*The Fox and the Wolf: Struggle for Power*, 2014

Full HD Video, 7'58" and 6 Photographs  
38 x 46,5 cm each  
© Elena Bellantoni  
Courtesy the artist  
The Farnesina Collection

Elena Bellantoni (b. 1975) is a visual artist whose work incisively explores the intersection of body, language, and power dynamics, often using performance and video as tools for symbolic deconstruction. She was the first artist to enter the Farnesina Collection with a video piece: *The Fox and The Wolf: Struggle for Power*, filmed entirely inside the Farnesina. The piece addresses the theme of conflict through a symbolic and multilayered narrative. The protagonists, a fox and a wolf, embody the archetypes of cunning and strength. They engage in a charged struggle of power and seduction, reflecting the duality between the sexes and the enduring tension between nature and culture. The dynamics between masculine and feminine are personified by the two animals, who, in a kind of courtship ritual, showcase their most persuasive traits. This ritual is exemplified through the choreography of the tango, a dance

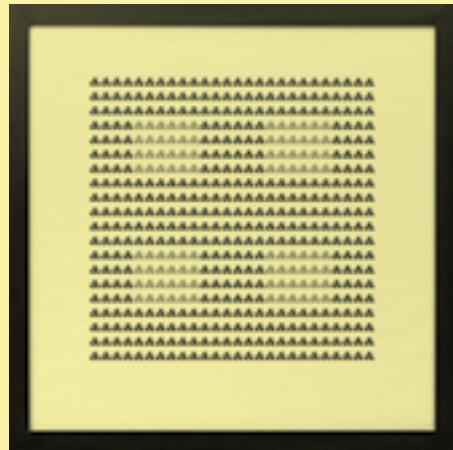
traditionally led by the man, which, in this case, is led by the woman, subverting conventions and redefining roles. The voiceover, in English, underscores the imposition of a dominant linguistic code, alluding to broader reflections on cultural and communicative hegemony in global contexts. For the first time, the two animal masks used by the tango performers, the Fox and the Wolf, are presented alongside the video work. These masks, much like the protagonists they represent, engage in their own subtle power play, further reinforcing the work's exploration of dualities and symbolic confrontation.

**Tomaso Binga** (b. 1931), the pseudonym of Bianca Pucciarelli Menna, was conceived as an ironic and provocative alter ego to expose the exclusion of women from the art system in the 1970s. Active since the 1960s, her practice brings together writing and gesture, word and body, in a critical and anti-rhetorical reflection on dominant language structures. The adoption of a male name in 1977, at Galleria Campo D in Rome, marked a symbolic act of resistance against the patriarchal mechanisms of the art world. Her work opposes cultural standardisation, using irony as a tool of subversion.

In *AlphaSymbol*, letters and graphic signs generate a series of optical-visual compositions that recall Kinetic Art and Optical Art, while simultaneously dismantling the logic of writing itself, transforming language into image, body and gesture. Her visual alphabet thus becomes a political act that challenges linguistic, aesthetic

and social conventions, reclaiming a space of freedom and self-determination for both language and the female body.

Within the section *Roots of Resistance*, the visual poem *Rima di Mari* (Verse of the Sea) is also presented. The work takes on a particularly powerful resonance in relation to Malta, as it directly engages with the island's condition and with the Mediterranean as a space of passage, encounter and waiting. Furthermore, the final verse, "PEACE for ALL is a day... of Waiting!!", acquires a particular symbolic significance. Surrounded by the sea and historically positioned at the crossroads of Europe, Africa and the Middle East, Malta becomes a metaphor for a threshold: a place that does not belong to a single identity, but exists through its continuous relationship with elsewhere. It embodies that condition of waiting which characterises liminal spaces, places suspended between departure and arrival, belonging and transformation.



Roots of Resistance



*Rima di Mari*, 2002  
Wall Text and audio  
Site-specific  
Courtesy the artist and Tomaso Binga Archive



Unstable Ecologies

**Silvia Camporesi** (b. 1973) is a photographer whose early work drew inspiration from myths, literature, and real life, before turning her focus to the Italian landscape. Her background in philosophy has shaped her photography into more than mere documentation, her images are interpretations that seek to reveal what lies beneath an object or idea. Since 2011, Camporesi has primarily dedicated herself to landscape research. In *Le tre chiese (Quando comincia l'acqua, #2, #3, #7)* - (The Three Churches. When the Water Begins #2, #3, #7), she portrays Venice as a "ghost" city. Through a lowered perspective, the lagoon's water is brought into the foreground, evoking the phenomenon of "acqua alta" (high water). In this triptych, Venice emerges as both a symbol of a unique cultural and historical identity and an emblem of the environmental threats that endanger the city's very existence.



*Le tre chiese (Quando comincia l'acqua, #2, #3, #7)*, 2011  
Inkjet Prints  
3 elements 63 x 73 cm  
© Silvia Camporesi  
Courtesy the artist  
The Farnesina Collection

## Gea Casolaro

Gea Casolaro (b. 1965) primarily uses video and photography to activate new possible readings of the image, bringing to light aspects of reality that habit or commonplaces tend to erase, hide, or forget. *Sopra il nostro futuro #5* (Above Our Future #5) is one of the works in a series of 40 shots taken in China and Argentina, two geographical, political, and social realities that seem to be at opposite ends of the spectrum, intended to highlight the contradictions of capitalist societies and the possible directions contemporary life appears to be heading. The artist adopts a sociological approach, addressing themes such as street labor, the condition of women, road systems, and urbanization to reveal the many contradictions of today's societies. The title of the work comes from a graffiti photographed on a wall in an Argentine city marked by poverty: "The government, the entrepreneurs, and the police will not trample over our future." The video, from the same series, is composed of photographs edited in sequence and is inspired by the kinetic studies of Edward Muybridge. It invites reflection on the dual concept of movement: movement as a metaphor to question the direction the world is taking, and movement as a form of protest, a call to revolt against globalization and neoliberalism. For the Maltese chapter of the exhibition, two additional works are presented,



*Prima che la notte duri per sempre*, 2015  
Video 7'39"  
Courtesy the artist and MAXXI  
- Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo



*Chi utilizza più lettere vince*, 2019  
11 laser-engraved wooden panels  
40,5 x 40,5 x 3 cm each  
photo © Mattia Gaido  
Courtesy the artist

Geographies of Detachment

further exploring key themes in Casolaro's practice related to the social, environmental and cultural transformations of contemporary life.

The video *Prima che la notte duri per sempre* (Before the Night Lasts Forever) unfolds on the threshold between poetic testimony and ecological reflection. Through images suspended between the natural landscape and a gradual immersion into darkness, the work evokes a condition of fragility and waiting, in which night becomes a metaphor for an imminent loss: the loss of biodiversity, of the balance between humanity and nature, and of our ability to listen to the ecosystem that sustains us. At the same time, the work suggests the urgent need for collective action.

With *Chi usa più lettere vince* (Who Uses More Letters Wins), Casolaro reflects on the themes of hospitality and migration, demonstrating how the addition of just two letters can transform the Italian word hostility into hospitality. Through a simple and immediate visual language, the work points to the possibility of cultural change grounded in dialogue, openness and the recognition of new generations of migrants as a vital resource for the growth and transformation of society.



*Sopra il nostro futuro #5*, 2005  
Photographic print mounted on aluminium panel  
60 x 80 cm  
© Gea Casolaro  
Courtesy the artist  
The Farnesina Collection



*Sopra il nostro futuro*, 2005  
Video, 07'36"  
Courtesy the artist



Geographies of Detachment

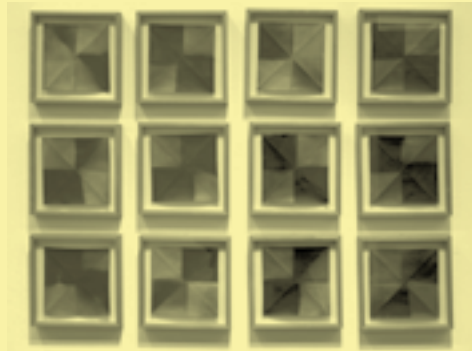
*Trebbiatori Celesti*, 2001  
Printed Photograph  
56 x 80 cm  
© Sarah Ciraci  
Courtesy the artist  
The Farnesina Collection

Video Animation 2'41"  
© Sarah Ciraci  
Courtesy the artist

## Sarah Ciraci

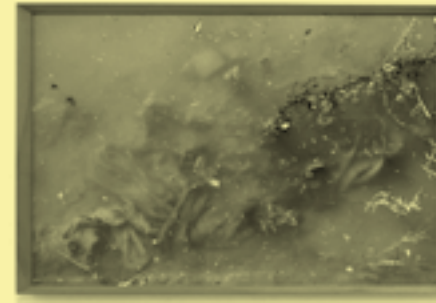
The artist Sarah Ciraci (b. 1972) creates digital photographs, slide projections, and videos that draw from the universe of science fiction and dreamlike imagery, often inspired by earthly landscapes reinterpreted through a visionary lens. Her research explores the connections between technology, perception, and nature, constructing scenarios that hover between the real and the imagined, between science and myth. The allusion to the posthuman present in Sarah Ciraci's work reflects an awareness of the increasingly pervasive and decisive role technology plays in our reality. Her works stage a world where the boundaries between organic and artificial, human and machine, become increasingly blurred, inviting reflection on the transformations of identity and perception in the technological era. The work *Trebbiatori Celesti* (Celestial Threshers) accompanied by the video created in the same year and restored by the artist for this occasion, represents a moment of suspension and meditation on Marcel Duchamp's masterpiece *The Large Glass*. It is an invitation to reconsider the foundational gestures of humanity, to restore symbolic value to what today appears distant or lost. In this sense, *Trebbiatori Celesti* is not only a reflection on separation, but also a call for reconnection and re-sacralization of the gesture, and of the divide between human and non-human. The work suggests a connection to agriculture and natural cycles, evoking the image of farming practices that can be understood both as a direct interaction with nature and as a way through which human culture shapes the environment. In this context, Ciraci's work can be read as a reflection on humanity's impact on the Earth, a crucial theme in today's discourse on ecology and sustainability.

**Martina della Valle** (b. 1981) artistic research combines analog processes and digital media. Her works develop through archival research as well as participatory processes, giving rise to site-specific installations, objects, and printed materials. *Under the Sun of Onomichi* (2009–2011) is a project developed during a residency in the city of Onomichi, marked by events related to nearby Hiroshima. In this context, the artist studied the effect of solar radiation on the territory. A deep connection between light, the city, and the history of the place was fundamental to the creation of the work. The encounter with an origami master, portrayed in the photograph (2011), and the observation of his work, understood as a process of destruction and reconstruction, marked a crucial moment in the genesis of the project, offering a powerful metaphor for transformation, fragility, and the possibility of rebirth through gesture. Within the work, light takes on a dual meaning: it is both a symbol of destruction and of rebirth. The 12 cyanotypes from the Farnesina Collection document what remains of an ongoing process, crystallizing the element of light, central to the piece. Here, origami becomes a metaphor for the cycle of life: a perpetual alternation between dissolution and rebirth.



Unstable Ecologies

*Under the sun of Onomichi*, 2009  
12 Cyanotypes from Origami  
12 x 12 cm each  
© Martina della Valle  
Courtesy the artist  
The Farnesina Collection



*Tevere Expo*, 2021  
fine art print on Hahnemühle paper  
mounted on Dibond  
2 elements  
100 x 70 cm  
Courtesy of the artist  
Farnesina Collection



Unstable Ecologies

The artistic research of Iginio De Luca (b. 1966) unfolds within a boundary zone between social critique and public space, taking the environmental crisis as a symptom of a broader fracture within contemporary systems of values. Through a language that combines irony, civic engagement, and direct interventions in public space, the artist questions the ways in which reality is observed and consumed, using photography, video, and urban actions as critical tools to expose the contradictions of the present.

*Tevere Expo* (2021) stands as an emblematic project within De Luca's practice and consists of a series of fifteen images, two of which have recently entered the Farnesina Collection. The work brings to the surface the hidden soul of the Tiber River, transforming it into a metaphor for a compromised ecosystem and, at the same time, for a community that removes its own responsibilities from view. The waste and debris depicted emerge only partially from the water, like an iceberg: what surfaces points to a much larger submerged reality made up of neglect, abandonment, and everyday denial. Within this shift between visible and invisible, center and margin, natural and artificial, the work questions the very boundaries of ecological and collective identity, revealing their profound instability.

Subsequently, the artist brought these photographs into public space through large-scale urban billboards across the city of Rome. The project thus takes the form of a paradoxical advertising campaign that "promotes the useless," denouncing the logics of accumulation and indifference that shape the relationship between human beings and the environment.

**Iginio De Luca**



*Under the sun of Onomichi*, 2011  
Printed Photographs on Aluminum  
66 x 100 cm  
© Martina della Valle  
Courtesy the artist  
The Farnesina Collection



*Under the sun of Onomichi*, 2011  
Video 03'15"  
Courtesy the artist

**Loredana Di Lillo** (b. 1978) employs multiple languages, from installations to photography, to open deep reflections on the relationship between the universal and the private dimension, intertwining two major recurring themes in her research: history and memory. In her artistic practice, these two themes constantly overlap, understood not as linear narratives but as fragmented, affective territories shaped by experiences of loss, repression, and childhood. In her work, memories, everyday objects, and private emotions are reassembled into images and visual gestures with strong emotional and symbolic impact. Collage, a recurrent technique in her production, allows her to overlay temporal, visual, and conceptual layers, producing a critical thought nourished by stratification and discontinuity. Loredana Di Lillo's photographic work, depicting her arm holding a kitchen knife, presents itself as a provocative image that questions the role of art, also understood as a potential tool of domination. The letter "T," the initial of Tyrant, evokes tyranny as a form of power that annihilates identity and enforces uniformity. The work reflects on the exclusionary dynamics of the West and on the ambivalence of art, capable of being both a means of liberation and control.



**Lettera T (Tyrant), 2013**  
C-print on Aluminium  
89,5 cm x 71,2 cm  
© Loredana Di Lillo  
Courtesy the artist  
The Farnesina Collection

Roots of Resistance



**Allunati #19, 2021**  
Gold Leaf, Pigment Print  
134 x 118 cm  
© R  di Martino  
Courtesy the artist  
The Farnesina Collection

Geographies of Detachment

**R  di Martino** (b. 1975) reflects on the passage of time and the discrepancies between epic narratives and everyday experience, constantly navigating between pathos and emotional detachment. *Allunati #19* (Moon-dazed #19) is part of a series begun in 2020, in which golden figures, captured in ordinary, domestic gestures, stand out against black-and-white lunar backgrounds. The artist creates a dialogue between terrestrial life and an alien landscape, generating a visual and conceptual short circuit that suspends time and narrative. The artwork belongs to a collective imagination oscillating between normality and the exceptional, revealing the paradox of the ordinary. The contrast between the monochrome background and the brilliance of gold gives the scene a disorienting aura: gold, like a symbolic spacesuit, becomes both protection and distance, as well as a poetic form of resistance in an unstable present. In this silent and motionless lunar landscape, the human figure reaffirms its fragile yet persistent presence, expressing a collective desire for simplicity, calm, and accessibility, standing in stark contrast to the complexity and anxiety of the contemporary world.



**The Thames Secret, 2005**  
Oil on Canvas  
190 x 190 cm  
Photo © Giorgio Benni  
Courtesy the artist  
The Farnesina Collection

Geographies of Detachment

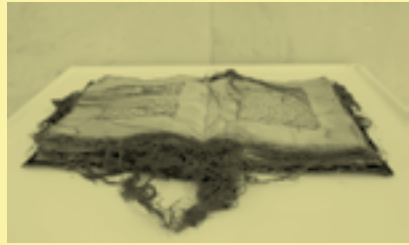
**Paola Gandolfi** (b. 1949) focuses her artistic research on the female figure and the psychophysical dynamics that define its identity. She explores inner and inaccessible territories, such as the female unconscious, drawing from psychoanalytic and feminist studies. The artist employs multiple techniques and expressive languages to shape women's bodies, urban maps, and double figures. Through the symbolism of the river, the artwork *The Thames Secret* addresses themes related to the conflict between nature and identity. The River Thames takes on a maternal significance: a womb that embraces the city of London and nourishes a hybrid figure. The composition is built on a mirrored image: the upper part features an urban map, while the lower part opens into a black, dreamlike space that houses the hybrid figure, an entity composed of a child and a cat. This dual visual register represents the dialogue between reality and the unconscious. The work thus takes the form of a visual and symbolic journey, where body and city reflect each other, revealing the vulnerabilities and submerged desires of contemporary identity.

**Silvia Giambrone** (b. 1981) Through the use of diverse languages – performance, installation, sculpture, sound, and video – Silvia Giambrone's work (b. 1981) explores the politics and practices of the body, with particular attention to the most hidden forms of subjugation. Her research investigates the political dimension of intimacy, seen as the ground where the deepest and most mysterious forces of the individual take root. The domestic space, seemingly safe, transforms into a context of learning and internalizing violence. *Mirror no. 34* is a mirror covered by a thick layer of wax and resin, from which acacia thorns emerge. The surface, visually fragile yet simultaneously threatening, denies the pleasure of seeing one's reflection, replacing it with an image that demands reflection on pain and vulnerability. The artwork addresses themes related to identity, perception, and the conflict between the self and the external world, placing nature, culture, and the personal dimension in dialogue.



**Mirror no. 34, 2023**  
Bronze, Resin, Wax, and Acacia Thorns  
90 x 52 cm  
Photo © Giorgio Benni  
Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery  
The Farnesina Collection

Roots of Resistance



Roots of Resistance

*Fili di pietra*, 1997

Thread, Tempera, Fabric  
24 x 38 x 4,5 cm  
Photo © Paola Farfaglio  
Courtesy © © Archive Maria Lai by Siae  
The Farnesina Collection

## Maria Lai

Maria Lai (1919–2013) is one of the most significant figures in 20th-century Italian art, known for her poetic and symbolic use of textile materials. Her artistic practice is deeply rooted in the traditions of her native land, Sardinia, which she drew upon not only for materials such as thread, fabric, looms, and bread, but also for themes tied to collective memory, myth, ritual, and folk knowledge. Through thread and the act of sewing, Maria Lai elevated traditionally feminine domestic practices into an artistic language, transforming them into tools of emancipation, memory, and resistance, and restoring dignity to a form of knowledge often marginalized. Her work, deeply imbued with a sense of the sacred and inspired by folk legends, engages in a profound reflection on themes such as identity, belonging, memory, and connection. In her piece *Fili di pietra* (Threads in Stone), the interwoven threads become a metaphor for bonds, relationships, and shared memories, in perfect harmony with her famous motto: “To be is to weave.” Here, thread takes on a universal symbolic value, evolving from a traditional feminine tool into a vehicle for storytelling, connection, and meaning-making.

Ketty La Rocca (1938–1976), regarded as one of the most relevant and innovative artists in the Italian art scene of the second half of the 20th century, focused her research on the female condition in the 1970s, critically addressing the power dynamics embedded in communicative languages. Her practice is marked by a radical engagement with political and social issues, particularly in relation to gender stereotypes and the representation of women. In the collage, *Questo marchio vuol dire malinconia* (This Brand Means Melancholy), she highlights how language, written, visual, and symbolic, is a cultural construct capable of profoundly shaping the perception of reality and the formation of identity. Her use of text, branding, and graphic elements points to the power of the communication system in shaping and influencing collective thought. In this work, the codified order stands in contrast to the individual's expressive freedom.

## Ketty La Rocca



Roots of Resistance

*Questo marchio vuol dire malinconia*, 1970

Collage on Paper 63 x 83 cm  
Photo © Paola Farfaglio  
Courtesy Archive Ketty La Rocca  
- Michelangelo Vasta  
The Farnesina Collection

Through an artistic practice rooted in anthropological research methodologies, Elena Mazzi (b. 1984) explores points of tension within contemporary societies. The artist often works with communities directly connected to her research themes, developing multidisciplinary tools for collaborative action and speculative thought. In *Self-Portrait with a Whale Backpack*, Elena Mazzi portrays herself with a “whale-backpack,” suggesting the symbolic weight that nature exerts on humanity and the responsibility humans should assume toward the natural world. The artwork stems from an accident that occurred during a trip to Iceland, in which the artist suffered several fractured vertebrae. From that experience, and from observing local customs, such as collecting whale bones to decorate gardens, emerged a self-portrait that weaves together personal memory, landscape, and myth. In the photograph, the signs of surgical intervention are still visible on the artist's body, which bears a large whale vertebra on her back – a concrete and poetic symbol of her journey. The work functions as a sensitive map of the relationship between humans and nature, and of the processes of trauma, regeneration, and transformation.

## Elena Mazzi



Unstable Ecologies

*Self-Portrait with a Whale Backpack*, 2018

Fine Art Photographic Print  
66 x 100 cm  
© Elena Mazzi  
Courtesy the artist and Ex-Elettrofonica Gallery  
The Farnesina Collection



*Encounters*, 2021

Video HD 05'29"  
Courtesy the artist and Ex-Elettrofonica Gallery

Mario Merz (1925–2003) was one of the leading figures of Arte Povera. His artwork *Fibonacci* reflects on the relationship between mathematical order and natural processes. In the 1970s, Merz began to explore the concept of exponential growth through the Fibonacci sequence, in which each number is the sum of the two preceding ones. For the artist, numbers represent rational tools for approaching the irrationality of life; the image of the snail and the spiral also recur symbolically in Merz's work. The numerical sequence, often inscribed on humble, organic materials, suggests that growth and evolution are governed by universal laws, transcending the boundaries of individual identity. Fibonacci thus becomes a metaphor for the expansion of nature and human knowledge, exploring the accumulation of experience and understanding. From this perspective, the work stands as a conceptual fulcrum, proposing a principle of interconnection between the real and the symbolic. It invites reflection on crucial themes, such as environmental crises and global transformations, that are addressed throughout the exhibition.

## Mario Merz



Roots of Resistance

*Fibonacci*, 1975

Ink on Paper  
42 x 60 cm  
Photo © Giorgio Benni  
Sartirana Arte Foundation Collection, Pavia  
The Farnesina Collection

## Elisa Montessori

Elisa Montessori (b. 1931) has been active since the 1950s, and her work has evolved through a broad range of technical and stylistic experimentation. Throughout her career, she has avoided any form of categorization, resisting rigid distinctions between abstraction and figuration, and embracing an open, fluid vision of art. Her ever-evolving visual language is influenced by Eastern philosophies, a deep attention to mark-making, and an ongoing dialogue between art and literature. The artwork *Disegni* (Drawings) features an abstract rhythm, composed of essential lines interspersed with vividly colored forms. At the heart of her research lies the relationship between woman and nature, envisioned as a continuous metamorphosis, where identity intertwines with the environment and becomes a visual flow. The composition, though seemingly spontaneous, is the result of a refined formal structure. Through signs, colors, and symbolic fragments, Montessori activates a network of associations, engaging the viewer in a constant process of interpretation and revelation.

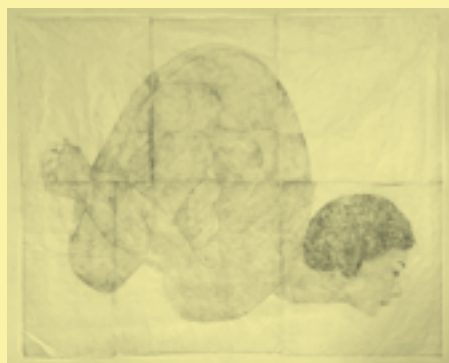


Roots of Resistance

*Disegni*, 2003  
Ink on Canvas and Paper  
225 x 165 cm  
Photo © Modestas Endriuška  
Private Collection, courtesy the artist  
The Farnesina Collection

## Marta Roberti

Drawing is the core of Marta Roberti's (b. 1977) artistic practice, which also extends into installations and animated videos. Through these mediums, the artist explores the relationship between East and West, studying and visually reinterpreting ancient myths and narratives. Her research is grounded in the idea that the self has no fixed boundaries and is not exclusively human, placing at its center a concept of fluid, hybrid identity. Her figures, suspended between the human and the animal, evoke a sense of trans-species belonging and reflect on the possibility of an expanded identity that challenges rigid ontological distinctions. In the work, the artist depicts a nude female body mimicking the posture of a snail, evoking a gesture of defense and vulnerability, but also of resistance and transformation. The position, intentionally unnatural and physically unsustainable for a human body, stems from a careful study of the defensive stances adopted by threatened animals. Drawing thus becomes a tool to explore the boundaries of the body, of species, and of identity. In this sense, the self-portrait takes the form of an othered body (pangolin), embodying crisis but also the potential for a new alliance between the human and the non-human.



Geographies of Detachment

*Self-portrait as a snail with pangolin haircut*, 2020  
Oil Pastel and Graphite on Yunnan Paper  
137 x 188 cm  
© Marta Roberti  
Courtesy the artist  
The Farnesina Collection

Marinella Senatore (b. 1977) is a multidisciplinary artist whose practice is characterized by a strong participatory dimension, both in methods and content. Her works emerge from collective and shared processes, where aesthetic research intertwines with social engagement, giving form to visual devices capable of sparking reflections on community, memory, and transformation. Through workshops, laboratories, and collaborations with diverse groups, Senatore develops projects that connect local experiences with global dynamics, questioning the meaning of social and political participation, particularly in contexts marked by identity crises. Her works become symbolic spaces for the elaboration of collective narratives and the assertion of new forms of active subjectivity. The piece *Protest Forms: Memory and Celebration* is an embroidered banner created in collaboration with local artisans and communities. These visual objects recall liturgical processions and trade union banners, but subvert their traditional function: the embroidery is not merely decorative but carries slogans, songs, poems, and messages of social protest, born from moments of gathering and exchange. In this way, Senatore restores centrality to the collective voice, making art a means of identity construction and a catalyst for emancipation.

## Marinella Senatore



Roots of Resistance

*Protest Forms: Memory and Celebration*, 2019  
Embroidery on Theatrical Velvet  
206 x 90 cm  
Photo © Sebastiano Pellion di Persano  
Courtesy the artist and Mazzolini, London – Torino  
The Farnesina Collection

Laura Pugno (b. 1975), born in a mountain village in the Biellese Alps, develops her artistic research from a deep connection with the alpine landscape, which has served from the very beginning

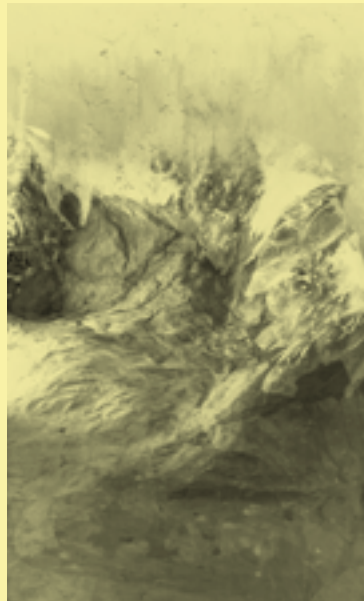
as a privileged terrain for exploration. Her familiarity with this environment, combined with an innate curiosity and a strong impulse toward discovery, has guided her investigation for over twenty years into the landscape as a cognitive and relational space, a place where one can symbolically “settle.” Today, in a time when environmental crises are pervasive in our lives, Pugno feels an urgent need to express the complexity of this context through art. In the work *Acting Out*, the landscape is constructed within artificial sets and then reworked with brushstrokes that erase parts of the image, a paradoxical gesture that seeks to reveal the essential. This act of subtraction becomes a tool to redefine visual hierarchies and reorganize reality in a more conscious way. Her landscapes, while maintaining a material quality, do not present themselves as comforting views but as elusive spaces, capable of challenging our habitual ways of seeing the world through pre-established categories.

Her investigation continues in *Ammophila Arenaria*, a work centred on the coastal ecosystem and the role of dune vegetation in the formation and protection of sandy shorelines. The piece takes on particular resonance within the Maltese context, an island whose identity is deeply intertwined with the sea and its coastal landscapes.

At the centre of the work is an amphora engraved with the image of *Ammophila arenaria*, a plant essential to the stability of coastal dunes. The vessel is marked by fractures from which strands of sand emerge and gradually accumulate on the ground in separate piles, symbolically evoking a process of dispersal and loss. Like an hourglass, the slow release of sand activates a continuous cycle of fullness and emptiness, transforming the work into a meditation on the fragility of ecosystems and their progressive alteration.



**Meccanismi di difesa, 2012**  
Video HD, colour, sound 04'44"  
Courtesy l'artista e Galleria Simondi



**Acting out, 2014**  
Abrasion on digital print  
84 x 64 cm  
© Laura Pugno  
Courtesy the artist  
and Simondi Gallery, Turin  
The Farnesina Collection



**Ammophila arenaria, 2025**  
Ceramic vessel and sand  
Variable dimensions  
© Laura Pugno  
Courtesy the artist  
and Simondi Gallery, Turin

Unstable Ecologies

Agnese Purgatorio (b. 1964), born in Bari, has long described herself as “caught between East and West”, a position that lies at the heart of her artistic research. The themes of migration, nomadism, and minority rights are central to her practice, which originates in photography and expands into collage, video, installation, and performance. Her work reflects a continuous inquiry into memory and collective experience, approached with both poetic and political sensibilities. In *Perhaps You Can Write to Me*, she adopts a theatrical and performative photographic style to represent life as existential nomadism, emphasizing a sense of timelessness and suspension through the use of black and white. In the video work of the same title, the artist is tied, like Ulysses, to the mast of a rowboat, blindfolded and carried by companions along the Sicilian coast near the Strait of Scylla and Charybdis. Her figure evokes martyrdom. The boat attempts to land several times, only to be repelled by the hostile reactions of the locals: “Leave this Country,” they shout. The video becomes a powerful metaphor for the condition of the migrant, for the frustrated longing for integration and belonging, where neither the undocumented person nor the artist finds refuge. Like Ulysses, they are forced to continue an endless journey, without a safe harbor. Similarly, in *Nella Clandestinità* (In Clandestinity), Purgatorio places migrants on a raft shaped like Italy, positioning them at the margins to underscore their solitude and exclusion. Leading them is a pregnant female figure, a symbol of future and change. The work offers a deeply symbolic and evocative image of humanity in motion, heightened by the expressive use of black and white.

## Agnese Purgatorio

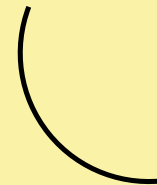


**Nella Clandestinità, 2014**  
Digital Collage  
79,5 x 113 cm  
© Agnese Purgatorio  
Courtesy the artist  
The Farnesina Collection

Geographies of Detachment



**Perhaps You Can Write to Me, 2015**  
Digital Collage  
79,5 x 113 cm  
© Agnese Purgatorio  
Courtesy the artist  
The Farnesina Collection



**Perhaps You Can Write to Me, 2009**  
Video Performance 3'52"  
Courtesy the artist