

ENRICO BAJ – PALAZZO REALE - MILANO

Project for a fantastic story in three dimensions

If designing the setting for an exhibition is always writing a story, in the case of an exhibition by Enrico Baj, especially a rich and composite retrospective like this one at the Palazzo Reale that celebrates its 100th anniversary, is like writing and illustrating a wonderful fantastic, imaginative, playful, ironic and surreal book.

The result is a book in three dimensions, which can be seen, read and crossed, and which is created by the artist with his works, the curator with the plot of the route and the architect with the set design.

Baj's characters and their stories, a vast and colorful gallery of types and research, have been organized in the path of the project conceived by the curators Chiara Gatti and Enrica Baj, through the succession of a sequence of thematic theatres with imaginative chapter titles such as "Nucleari", "Ultracorpi", "Dame" and so on.

The rhythm of the exhibition has three moments of emphasis, in the entrance apse that hosts around its skylight, in an almost sacred setting, the shaped figures of the grotesque and monstrous creatures of the fresco - puzzle of the Apocalypse, in the ten-meter tall fifth of the central square - similar to an execution wall - with the large and dramatic collage work of the Funerals of the anarchist Pinelli rich in an emotional and engaging scenography of its own and in the Lake of sculptures on which the metal structures of the Meccani rest floating.

The exhibition structure created with Unifor that composed of a modular metal framework covered with partitions of different heights, vertical and inclined, which couple by sliding one over the other defining with staggered planes and broken lines the geometries of the thematic spaces of the exhibition.

The vertical elements of the plinth supporting the ground and of the heads between the pairs of panels are covered "in mirror" so as to make the partitions suspended on the design of the terrazzo floor and separated, like objects floating in a dance, in the environment of the Hall of the Caryatids.

The platform on which the articulated metal sculptures of the robotic Meccano trellises rest, doubling in size and presence, is also treated with a reflective covering.

The material chosen for the panels, poplar plywood, is left "natural", deliberately with a neutral background and in contrast with the variety and richness of the materials - oil, enamels, collages, metal, fabric, wadding - that Baj has used in his works.

The lighting project developed with Viabizzuno leaves the perimeter of the rooms in the background, almost in darkness, which remain barely perceived as an architectural casing and concentrates the beams of light, using different solutions for the various rooms, on the facades of the exhibition floors with a measured intensity to allow a natural fruition of the works and without dramatic accents. The exhibition itinerary is complemented by the graphics curated by the Sonnoli studio that welcomes the visitor with a bright and magnetic Baj logo suspended in mid-air and uses, as a support for the texts, long sheets of paper that unroll vertically like a second order of pilasters along the walls of the Entrance Hall of the Skylight and extend on the internal panels of the exhibition, differentiating in color between curatorial passages and quotes from the artist. The entire installation project, in its complexity and in all the disciplines involved, intentionally always remains in the background in the delicate relationship between the space of the place, here already so present with the grandeur of the dimensions and the decorative richness of the rooms of the Royal Palace, and the multifaceted and imaginative work of Baj.