

BAJ

## Baj chez Baj

Milan, Palazzo Reale

8 October 2024 – 9 February 2025

curated by

Chiara Gatti and Roberta Cerini Baj

Milan celebrates **Enrico Baj** (Milan, 31 October 1924 – Vergiate, 16 June 2003), one of the masters of the Italian and international neo-avant-garde, with a major retrospective featured in the autumn exhibitions, devised to retrace all the themes and subjects of his long and multifaceted achievement.

Baj returns to the Sala delle Cariatidi in **Palazzo Reale**, **exactly one hundred years since his birth and twelve years after the exhibition**, in the same room, of *I Funerali dell'anarchico Pinelli*, which for the first time will be integrated into an anthological itinerary and a detailed dialogue with other works by the master.

**Promoted by the Comune di Milano-Cultura and produced by Palazzo Reale with Electa**, the project is **curated by Chiara Gatti and Roberta Cerini Baj**. It presents almost **50 works** distilled over a period of time, from the early fifties to the start of the new millennium, passing through the phases of the artist's research and his engagement with different movements over time: from the recovery of Dadaism and Surrealism to the modes of Informal art, from the proximity to the Nordic group of Co.Br.A to the genesis of the Nuclear art movement, which Baj founded in Milan with Sergio Dangelo in 1951. Starting from the Abstract Impressionism of his beginnings, passing through the creation of his larval anthropomorphic figures and the eruption of the liquefied mountains in the magmatic body of *I Generali*, the show will take in his parody of extraterrestrial invasions to arrive at the Meccano army and the animated world of chests of drawers and pier glasses.

His characters, who have entered the popular imagination, his Ladies and Generals, Body Snatchers, Mirrors, Furnishings and monsters of the Apocalypse will animate a carousel of creatures resulting from the surrealist and sci-fi universe of **an artist who made irony and the grotesque a key to unhinging bourgeois conformism** and resist any form of established power.

His famous **aesthetics of trinkets and trimmings**, tassels and shiny buttons like insignia on the pompous chests of his emblazoned soldiers will be the common thread that stitches together the gigantic themes of Baj's poetics in sections, freed from a rigid sequence by chronology or genre, continuously cross-referencing art and literature, colours and words, following a sort of script that, even during the staging, will suggest a theatrical time and space to the viewers.

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**BAJ. Baj chez Baj is also being held in Savona and Albissola Marina. The single catalogue is published by Electa**

Marking the centenary of the birth of the Milanese artist, an exhibition dedicated to Baj's ceramic work in all its historical and chronological development, curated by Luca Bochicchio, opens on 8 October. Again under the title *BAJ. Baj chez Baj* the exhibition will open at the Museo della Ceramica in Savona, with a section also at the MuDA – Museo Diffuso Albisola at Albissola Marina, in the premises of the Centro Esposizioni and Casa Museo Jorn.

The scholarly collaboration between Milan and Savona, between the curators and the institutions involved, is intended to present two independent yet complementary itineraries, capable of paying homage to Baj's eclectic genius, **documented in the single catalogue, published by Electa**, in which the two exhibition itineraries unfold between places, forms, materials and encounters, following Baj's fascinating cosmogony in an epiphany of intelligence and creativity.

Electa will also devote a volume of its A-Z series to Baj, a series of monographs with entries recounting eclectic figures of the twentieth century.

## Biography

**Enrico Baj (1924-2003)** Born in Milan on 31 October 1924, Enrico Baj is one of the most representative and internationally recognised artists on the Milanese scene and in Italian avant-garde art of the twentieth century. After completing his studies at the Brera Academy, in 1951, together with Sergio Dangelo and Gianni Dova, he founded the Movimento Arte Nucleare and held his first solo exhibition in his hometown at the Galleria San Fedele. In 1953 he met Asger Jorn, with whom he founded the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus, opposed to the forced rationalisation and geometrisation of art. The following year he organised the International Ceramic Encounters at Albisola, Liguria. His debut in New York took place in 1960, when he participated in the International Exhibition of Surrealism: *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain*, curated by André Breton and Marcel Duchamp at the D'Arcy Gallery. The following year his work was included in the exhibition *Art of Assemblage* (1961), curated by William Seitz at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In 1964, a room entirely devoted to his work was presented at the Venice Biennale, followed by many important solo exhibitions, including those presented at Palazzo Grassi in Venice, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and at the Musée de l'Athénée in Geneva. He formed numerous relationships with poets and writers in Italy and abroad, leading to collaborations and the creation of artists' books. In 1999 Baj reaffirmed his strong ties with literature by creating a series of 164 portraits inspired by Marcel Proust's *Guermantes*. He engaged in many collaborations with other artists, including Lucio Fontana and Piero Manzoni. Baj died at Vergiate (Varese) on 16 June 2003. His numerous recent exhibitions included one at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome (2001-2002); at the Fondazione Marconi, Milan (2008, 2009, 2013 and 2017); at Palazzo Reale, Milan (2012); at the 55th Venice Biennale and at the Fondazione Arnaldo Pomodoro, Milan (2013); at the Museo Archeologico Regionale, Aosta, and the Luxembourg & Dayan Gallery, New York, (2016); at the Cobra Museum, Amstelveen, The Netherlands (2017). Works by Enrico Baj have been shown in prestigious group exhibitions: *Italia Pop. L'arte negli anni del boom*, Fondazione Magnani Rocca, Mamiano di Traversetolo, Parma; *Artisti e divi. Il racconto dell'arte negli anni del boom*, Museo del Novecento, Milan; *Cobra: una grande avanguardia europea (1948-1951)* and *Fondazione Roma, Palazzo Cipolla, Rome (2016)*; *Post War: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945-1965*, Haus der Kunst, Munich (2016-2017).

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