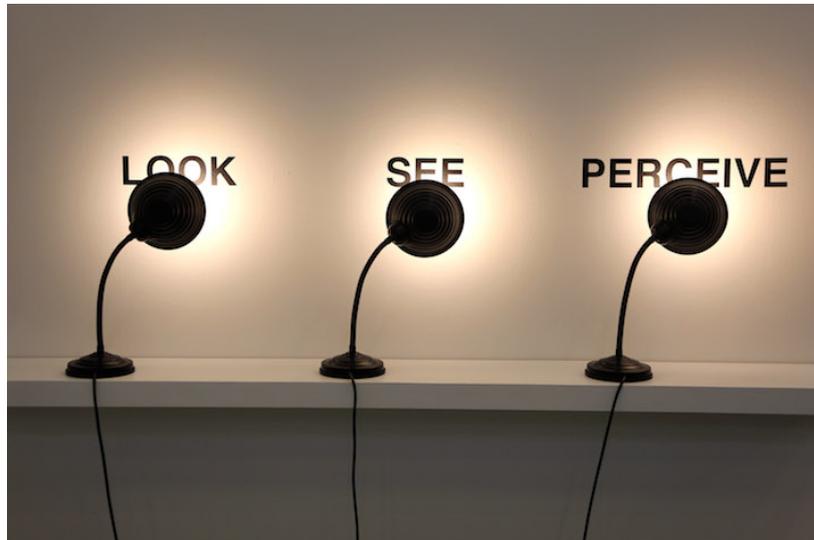


Arte Fiera: Italy's Oldest Fair Celebrates its 40th Year



It's not a secret that Italians love Italy. Nowhere is this more apparent than in [Arte Fiera](#), Italy's longest running, and largest art fair, now celebrating its 40th anniversary in Bologna. Over the weekend the fair showed more than 2000 artworks by 1000 artists, from 190 galleries (mostly from Italy), mainly focused on 20th century Italian art.

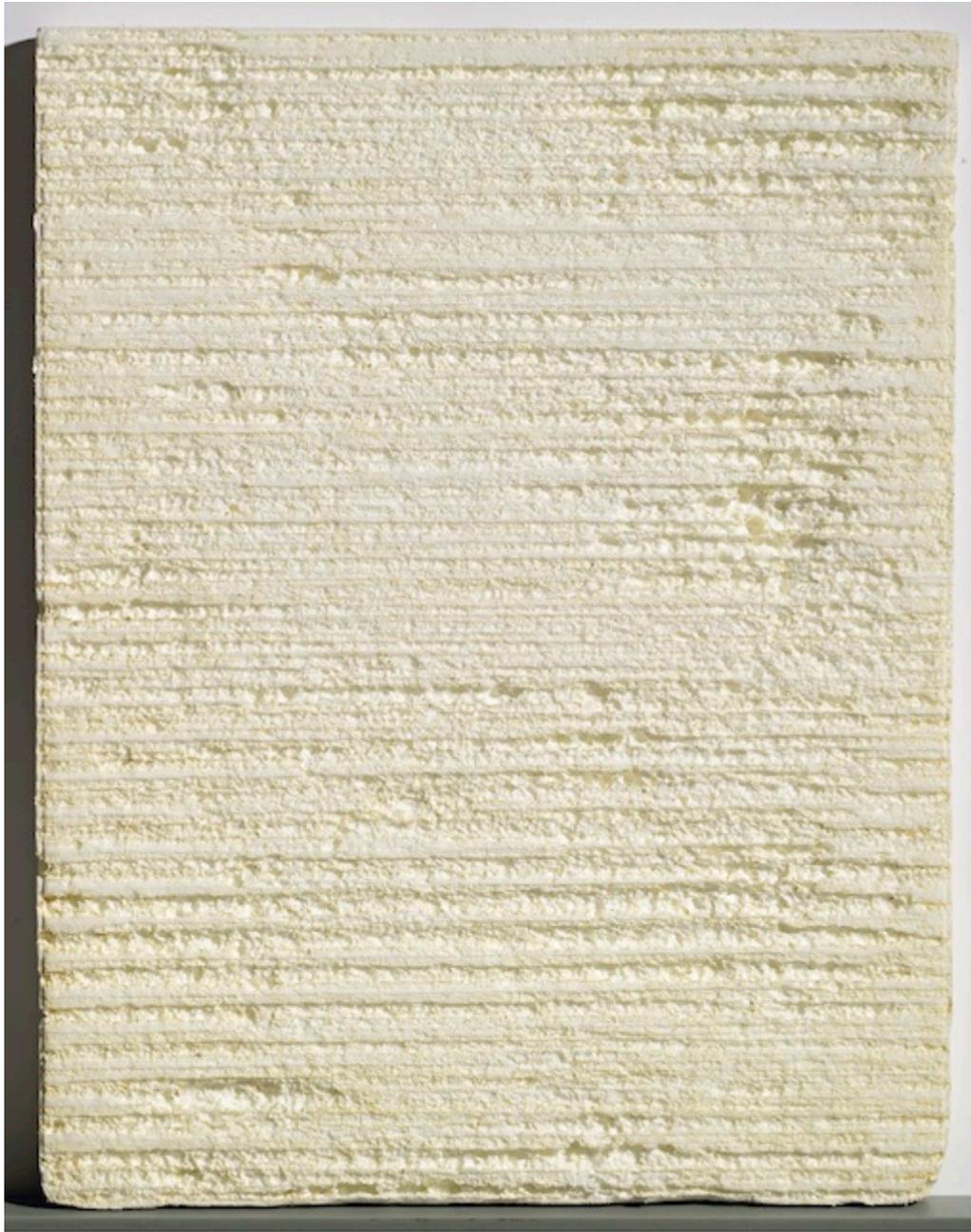
True to its nationalist spirit, the fair followed the art movement threads that have put Italy on the main stage for art: from Futurism to Arte Povera. Conceptual art was particularly well represented, with works by Vincenzo Agnetti and Alighiero Boetti spread throughout the fair.

However, this year, the aim was to look at a younger generation of artists showing work in Italy, with the fair's curators encouraging galleries to show younger artists, who would have been inspired by older incarnations of the fair. At Di Marino's booth, Marco Raparelli's "Piu Conosci Piu di non Sapere", 2015, a pile of black and white fake books, spines blocked out with philosophical and artistic predecessors, wryly nodded to the weight of this history on a young artist. Meanwhile, the spectre of the digital world loomed over a few of these younger works – the Azerbaijani artist Faig Ahmed's glitched out rug, "Tradition In Pixel" (2010), for example.

The focus on younger art also necessitated a new section of the fair focusing on photography. While a small section for now, it's a step in the right direction for the modern art collector, or, for that matter, consumer.

In this anniversary edition, the fair has made a concerted effort to demonstrate the relevance and narrative of Italian art since the fair has been running. Thus, there are two further exhibitions that push the art outside the fair context and into the institutional setting. Curated by the fair's directors, Claudio Spadoni and Giorgio Verzotti, both exhibitions demonstrate some of the machinations behind acquisitions made at the fair. These are for a more casual art audience, who may be more accustomed to seeing work in the context of a white cube rather than the stands of the commercial exhibition hall. In the Pinacoteca, the past 40 years of Italian art is elucidated by some of the leading galleries taking part in Arte Fiera 40. Flavio

Favelli's "Java Blond", 2012, for instance, creates a map of the world out of Gianduja chocolate wrappers, plastering the Italian treat onto every corner of the globe in Klimt-ish iridescent blocks. Meanwhile, at the other end of the chronological spectrum, forerunner of Italian conceptual art, "Achrome", 1960, by Piero Manzoni, shows a similar phosphorescence, adding shimmering varnish to a scored polystyrene block.



Piero Manzoni, Achrome, 1960, Polystyrene foam and paint phosphorescent, 65×50 cm. Courtesy: Robilant-Voena, London-Milano-St. Moritz

But the trajectory of history between these pieces is where it gets interesting, and this is what the exhibition lacks. Although linked by their representation at Arte Fiera, and their selection by leading Italian galleries for the exhibition, it's unclear how the pieces are related to one another. How has the stark conceptualism of the 1960s developed into contemporary Italian artworks? It's understandable to lack these links in the art fair, but in a museum, we ask for a little more.

Likewise at the MAMbo, where a selection of the institution's works acquired at the fair are on show, it is difficult to discern the narrative thread that makes these works sit together. What does Christian Jankowski's *Magic Numbers*, 2013, a video work where a magician sitting at an accountant's desk plays tricks with money before our very eyes, have to do with Irma Blank's handwritten scribbles that seem like writing? Monica Bonvicini's overlocking leather belts hanging through the ceiling next to a room housing Christian Boltanski's "Les Regards": they are worth seeing in person to experience, no doubt. But is it, conceptually, enough that these works were all purchased in the same location, year after year?

While Arte Fiera is on, the city of Bologna is transformed, with "Art City White Night" providing evening entertainment for 58,000 visitors. On Saturday night the city centre becomes the geographical conglomeration of Italy's most important art protagonists. The buzz on the streets is tangible: the crowds, the conversation; this is where the art fair really comes into its own, by creating a hub for this work to thrive.

Text by Josie Thaddeus-Johns