One of the things that has always interested me and that interests me most is studying the person, “man” as he is, his virtues and his defects. [...] I've always been curious about the world and I think that this depends uniquely on the great interest I've always felt, and still feel, for my fellow man. Fortunately, other people interest me more than myself.”
(Gillo Dorfles, Catalogue raisonné, Mazzotta, 2010)

Gillo Dorfles. ieri e oggi
Curated by Luigi Sansone
Opening: January 14, 2014 from 6 pm
From January 15 to February 22, 2014

The Fondazione Marconi is pleased to present an exhibition devoted to the works of Gillo Dorfles, a polyhedral personality of the contemporary artistic and cultural scene. Artist, teacher of aesthetics, philosopher and an extremely prolific and innovative art critic, Gillo Dorfles is a direct witness of XXth century artistic movements in which he is involved sometimes as a protagonist, some others as a careful critic and observer.

Dorfles devotes himself to painting since the early Thirties. He starts executing surreal compositions in egg tempera, a technique used by the XVth century masters. The artist himself admits that in those years he was not aiming to say something precise. Certain pre-existent symbols interested him: the cross, the moon and the sun were archetypal forms that seemed particularly suggestive to him and he used them but also in a very casual way. Since the beginning his painting – defined “organic” and “vaguely surreal” – is unencumbered by any subjection to rigid geometric structures and by the given rules of a sterile abstract style. Actually, his painting – as he himself says about his art – draws its raison d’être from an inner need to show the images that surface in his mind and to visualize the most urgent conscious and unconscious impressions that strike him.

In 1948 Dorfles is among the founders of MAC (Concrete Art Movement) of which he is one of the main exponents and whose artistic theories he inquires with particular attention and sensitivity. The period from 1958 sees a progressive reduction in his pictorial activity due to his teaching work, his studies in aesthetics and art criticism, and his intense activity as a writer. In these years various artistic movements follow one another: Informal Art, Pop Art, Arte Povera – movements that interest Dorfles as an art critic but are far removed from his sensibility as a painter and bring him to leave the artistic scene, where he returns only in the early Eighties.

The exhibition at the Fondazione Marconi is devoted to the last thirty years of Dorfles’s production, made up of a large series of mixed media works on cardboard (felt pen, acrylic, watercolour), ceramics and sculptures that Dorfles executes with renewed inspiration. The exhibition presents a selection of thirty works among acrylics on canvas, ceramics and a large-sized sculpture, created in polychrome enamels by the artist this same year. Dorfles’s disturbing and grotesque atmospheres (Capovolgimento, 1993) reappear in his latest production, as well as his metamorphic figures enclosed in black (L’orecchio di Dio and Simbiosi di esseri, 1996) and his typical symbolic characters, some inquiring and disturbing (Due simbionti, 2008), others ironic and playful (Il giocoliere, 2006).
The same imaginary world of Gillo Dorfles also reappears in the most recent acrylics on canvas (Circonvoluzione, 2011; Strega marina, 2012; Letargo, 2013). It is populated by pure and primitive forms coming from a repertoire already delineated in the past. New multiform beings, mid-way between the animal, human and vegetal worlds, seem to re-emerge in a perennial process of evolution. The line remains the absolute protagonist of improbable paths only inspired by his imagination, or better by his inner nature, to further confirm that Dorfles’s painting is free and instinctive and, as such, it is captivating and surprising.

“All of Dorfles’s pictorial and graphic work”, writes Luigi Sansone in the Catalogue raisonné published by Mazzotta in 2010 and gathering Dorfles’s whole artistic production up to then “is pervaded by a rare ability to engage the viewer in the pleasure of seeking and finding the mysterious inner world that is within each of us, and which, distracted as we are by superficial external demands, we unfortunately tend to forget. They are intriguing and stimulating works that take us back to the essentials of life, to distant perceptions experienced at a conscious and unconscious level with surprising and satisfying curiosity.”

The exhibition programme also includes two lectures (January 21 and February 11, 2014) that will be held by the artist himself, curator Luigi Sansone and art critic Claudio Cerritelli: The Renovation of Italian Art in the 1940s-1950s and A Survey on the Contemporary Art Scene, an additional testimony of Gillo Dorfles’s inexhaustible passion not only for art and its motivations but also for the careful and lucid observation of its underlying anthropological, social and cultural phenomena.

Biographical notes
Gillo Dorfles was born in Trieste in 1910. Following the outbreak of World War I he moved with his family to Genoa, where he spent his childhood. After the war he returned to Trieste and enrolled at the classical high school. In 1928 he moved to Milan to follow university courses in medicine. Three years after he decided to complete his university education in Rome as a student at the Cesare Frugoni clinic; in 1934 he graduated, specializing in neuropsychiatry.


He started painting in the Thirties. In 1948 he was a professor in aesthetics at the Universities of Cagliari, Trieste and Milan. In 1948 he founded the MAC (Concrete Art Movement) together with Bruno Munari, Atanasio Soldati and Gianni Monnet. Their intention was to propose a new language of expression, in order to assimilate and overcome the developments in abstract art that had been taking place in Europe during the previous decades.

In the course of the Fifties and Sixties Dorfles’s work as a critic was of revolutionary importance, undermining the then dominant model of Crocean aesthetics. Dorfles’s attention is especially focused on the study of mass media, fashion and design, as well as painting, sculpture, modern and contemporary architecture.

From the Sixties he taught aesthetics in several Italian universities (Milan, Trieste, Cagliari) and from the Eighties on he recovered his graphic and pictorial activities that he had abandoned due to his numerous commitments.

He has been awarded many international prizes for his work. Many exhibitions have been devoted to him in Milan (PAC, 2001 and Palazzo Reale, 2010), Trieste (Museo Revoltella, 2007), Chiasso (Max Museo, 2010) and Rovereto (Mart, 2011).


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