

# What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

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## Bruno Munari

*Through June 29. Andrew Kreps, 535-537 West 22nd Street, Manhattan; 212-741-8849, [andrewkreps.com](http://andrewkreps.com).*



Installation view of Bruno Munari's "Works: 1930-1996," his first United States survey exhibition, at Andrew Kreps. Dawn Blackman/Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York

Bruno Munari (1907-1998) came of age at a turbulent time in Italian history. Heavily influenced by Futurism, he pulled away from that group in the 1930s as its leaders increasingly embraced fascism — but the association dogged his international

career. This might explain partly why “Works: 1930-1996” at Andrew Kreps is the first United States survey exhibition of this prolific artist, writer, designer, architect, curator and illustrator.

A series of solemn black-and-white photographs from Munari’s early years near the entrance depict workers at their machines and demonstrate him working — if not explicitly, then perhaps, tacitly — to show the industrial progressiveness of Italy under Benito Mussolini. Beyond that, the objects get more witty, imaginative, experimental and colorful. Paintings from this period and collages show the influence of Cubism and Futurism. Later ones, from the ’70s and ’80s, are brightly colored and elegantly composed geometric abstractions. Sculptures particularly reveal Munari’s polymathic approach: The echoes of architecture resound in his abstract geometric sculptures on pedestals from the ’50s and ’60s, and a chair from the ’80s with a precipitously slanting seat announces itself as an objet d’art rather than a functional one.

Munari was clearly more of a designer than a conceptualist (he designed everything from espresso machines to televisions), but he could slide into Dada- or Surrealist-inspired playfulness, as in a fork with curled up tines or two small sculptures that play off Marcel Duchamp’s transparent “Large Glass.” One more thing: the exhibition here comes primarily from the collection of Munari’s dentist, whom he met in the 1950s. At a moment when uber-wealthy collectors get most of the publicity, making the art world feel like a plutocracy, it’s nice to be reminded that innovation, change and art itself can rest in the hands of more ordinary people.

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