



Bruno Munari, *Fossile del 2000* (Fossil of the Year 2000), 1991, Plexiglas, metal, 14 1/4 × 8 1/8 × 4 3/4".

Bruno Munari

KAUFMANN REPETTO

In the 1930s, Bruno Munari (1907–1998) experimented with ceramics in Tullio Mazzotti's avant-garde workshop in Albisola, in the northwest of Italy. In his small ceramic *Bulldog*, 1934, curvilinear planes form the figure of an animal toy both tender and surprising, exemplifying the ironic air that runs through the practice of this artist-designer, who joined the second wave of Futurism in the late '20s. *Bulldog*—the earliest work in this exhibition, “*Ognuno vede ciò che sa*” (Everyone Sees What They Know)—already reveals Munari's wedding of methodological logic to imaginative freedom. His attachment to the poetics this combination produced persists throughout his oeuvre; it is also expressed, for example, in the desecration of the Futurist myth of the machine in *Macchina aritmica* (Arrhythmic Machine), 1951–83, whose kinetic mechanism behaves in bizarre and unproductive ways.

Fossile del 2000 (Fossil of the Year 2000), 1991, one of a series of works with the same title that Munari began in the late 1950s, featured metal elements, such as parts of disassembled radios, between two sheets of Plexiglas, as if they were remains or residues of an out-of-date technology. For the “*Xerografie*” (Xerographies) series, begun in 1963, Munari used a photocopier to create unique images, twenty-five of which were on display here. The title of each work, *Xerografia originale* (Original Xerograph), is an oxymoron expressing the reversal of the function of the copy machine, which here becomes a medium for inventing images rather than duplicating them. Munari’s shifting of metal nets, pieces of paper, or other such materials during the scanning process resulted in images that record a movement that is gestural, accidental, and unrepeatable.

Munari was always ready to probe all of the creative possibilities offered by any tool, to make them available to everyone. His investigation of xerography is contemporaneous with the birth of *arte programmata*, or “programmed art,” as Umberto Eco dubbed it in 1962, represented in the show by works such as *Polariscope*, 1960, or *Tetracono* (Tetracone), 1965, as well as by works pre- and postdating this movement, including *Negativo positivo* (Negative Positive), 1951–89; *Concavo convesso* (Concave Convex), 1990; and *Filipesi* (Threadweights), 1991, all of which analyze the spatiotemporal dimensions of perception. *Concavo convesso*—the first iteration of which dates to 1946—expands geometry into the space, with a fluctuating aerial structure that conceptually and perceptually interrogates the viewer. Treating the artwork as an experimental model of awareness and experience, Munari typically assigns it the value of an exemplum and entrusts its users with a fundamental and active role akin to that inherent to the “open work” that Eco also theorized in 1962. What interests Munari is the definition of a rule, a programmed scheme, that allows infinite variations. The work becomes the instrument of an intriguing perceptual exercise with clear connections to kinetic art.

Allergic to dogmatism, Munari never abandoned the playful lightness that became a powerful channel of comprehension and involvement. The series “*Sculture da viaggio*” (Travel Sculptures), ca. 1958–90—represented in the show by seven pieces—evinces his approach. Through these easily handled works, which can be folded flat to fit into an envelope, Munari demonstrates the degree to which aesthetic and cultural experience, as a

vital necessity, can be extraordinarily accessible, both simpler and more commonplace than it might first appear.

—Alessandra Pioselli

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

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