



Come tu mi vuoi (As you desire me)

**30.06 —
20.08.2023**

Curated by ICON 2022 - FMAV School
of Advanced Studies Course for Curators

FMAV - Palazzo Santa Margherita
Corso Canalgrande 103, Modena

Come tu mi vuoi is the group exhibition curated by the participants of the ICON 2022 – FMAV School of Advanced Studies course for curators of the contemporary image. The exhibition aims to use the foundation's collections to take us on a journey that can reveal the sense of the relations at play in an image.

Like in the play by Luigi Pirandello, "Come tu mi vuoi" (As You Desire Me) from 1929, the exhibition reflects on the original ambivalence of the sense of identity, which always evolves within a relational process penetrated by the desires, expectations and representations of those involved. This brings up the theme of recognizability, which values the external image as proof, as if appearance were enough to objectively define reality.

The works on display call into question the ability of photography, design and video to speak of themselves, that is, to be metaimages that reveal the mechanisms behind how they were made. *Come tu mi vuoi* ironically and defiantly empowers its subjects to redefine the traditional forms of representation, beyond the canons and conventions found in visual culture and the collective imaginary.

The first section examines the definition of personal identity, of which the external image would like to act as proof. But resemblance, *mimesis*, is an act of construction too: the corresponding form becomes the outcome of a clever technicism studied to create the illusion of a doubled reality. In the same way as these coordinates led to the birth of perspective in the Renaissance (Giulio Paolini), a lot later, they led to the belief that photography can be an indexical document of reality.

Calling into question the value of representation as proof of the identities that they depict, the works on display here reveal themselves in the process of becoming an image: through disguise (Jonny Briggs, Gillian Wearing), duplication (Vivan Sundaram), manipulation (Wong Hoy Cheong, Lilly Lulay), alienation (Trine Sondergard), the revelation of multiple points of view (Barbara Probst) and erasure of the author's subjectivity (Franco Vaccari).

Artists in first section (in alphabetical order)

Jonny Briggs (Berkshire, United Kingdom, 1985)

Comfort Object, 2012

Composition of 5 c-prints, 96x96 cm

Fondazione di Modena Collection – FMAV

The artist uses the photographic means to explore the deceptive relationship between self and other. Central to the image is the father figure: in his lap, he holds the face that is also reproduced on the mask he is wearing, mixing up identities and questioning the parent-child relationship. Even though they look like digital manipulations, Briggs's works are made with 3D objects reproduced in photographs which he puts together afterwards.

Wong Hoy Cheong (Penang, Malaysia, 1960)

Carpark, from the “*Chronicles of Crime*” series, 2006

Inkjet print, 84x120 cm

Fondazione di Modena Collection – FMAV

The image stages an optically impossible attempted murder. The artist plays with the idea of vision as an aesthetic and moral artifice and with the ambiguity between real and imaginary. The *Chronicles of Crime* photographic series of which *Carpark* is part feature a pictorial flavour and references to noir, Bollywood and Malaysian criminality. In this image, Wong Hoy Cheong crystalizes the crucial moment separating life from death, the before and after of the committed crime.

Lilly Lulay (Frankfurt, Germany, 1985)

Zeitreisende j22abh7403s0b.jpg, 2011, 10x7 cm

Zeitreisende gr56kivstr07br.jpg, 2012, 12x9 cm

Zeitreisende m1atrp09ro.jpg, 2012, 10x7,5 cm

Zeitreisende pä020ab57gr.jpg, 2011, 8,5x5,5 cm

Zeitreisende pa23vh50wro.jpg, 2012, 7x10,5 cm

from the “*Zeitreisende*” series, photocollage: silver gelatin prints and c-prints

Fondazione di Modena Collection – FMAV

Every work consists of a collage on a private, either gifted or found, black-and-white analogue photograph. The subjects have been removed and replaced by digital pixels so that they no longer represent identifiable individuals.

The artist uses vernacular photographs which she modifies in a “manual post-production process”, calling into question the very essence of photography.

Giulio Paolini (Genoa, Italy, 1940)

Senza titolo, 1984

Black ink and collage on paper, 49,8x40 cm

Galleria Civica del Comune di Modena, Drawing Collection – FMAV

A figure in seventeenth-century dress reveals the codes of vision through the mechanism of perspective. Radiating straight lines reveal the visual cone of the figure intent upon drawing what he sees with the quill he is holding in the other hand. Paolini's conceptual-style research focuses on calling representation as such into question, on the relationship between work and spectator, and on exchanging looks and perspectives.

Barbara Probst (Munich, Germany, 1964)

Exposure #6a, N.Y.C., Central Park, 06.04.01, 2:44 p.m., 2001

Pigment inkjet prints, 70x105 cm each

Fondazione di Modena Collection – FMAV

The artist explores the ambiguities inherent in the photographic image: she abandons the camera's single shot and splits it into various points of view, in a game of different but simultaneous gazes. The subject is not so much the scene but the actual moment of the shot, the photographer's partial eye.

Trine Sondergaard (Copenhagen, Denmark, 1972)

Monochrome Portraits #02, 2009

Pigment inkjet print, 60x60 cm

Monochrome Portraits #03, 2009

Pigment inkjet print, 60x60 cm

Fondazione di Modena Collection – FMAV

The subjects portrayed by Sondergaard in this series never face the lens, as if they wanted to refuse to exchange looks with the person looking at them as would normally be the case. The images depict anonymous people captured in a moment of contemplation. The dark print shades chosen by the person who was photographed reveal nothing of their identities. Despite being portraits, the true protagonist of the photographs is not the people, but the transpiring sense of intimate suspension.

Vivan Sundaram (Shimla, India, 1943 - New Delhi, India, 2023)

Sisters Apart, from the “*Re-take of Amrita*” series, 2001

Pigment inkjet print, 38x36,5 cm

Quartet, from the “*Re-take of Amrita*” series, 2001

Pigment inkjet print, 38x36,5 cm

Fondazione di Modena Collection – FMAV

Sundaram’s works are photomontages which set out to explore the relationship between the artist and his past through optical illusion.

In the *Re-take of Amrita* series, Sundaram is an illusory vision slotted into his family archive photos, between his grandfather, who was also a photographer, his famous writer aunt and his mother. The new portraits that are created embody the mental image of the memory, manifested in its fragmentary, arbitrary reconstruction.

Franco Vaccari (Modena, Italy, 1936)

Photomatic d’Italia, 1973-74

collage of photographs on cardboard: c-print 20,3x25,4 cm and 5 silver gelatin photo strips 20x4 cm each

Galleria Civica del Comune di Modena Photography Collection,

Franco Fontana Fonds – FMAV

Photomatic d’Italia is a project whose goal is to directly involve the public in the artistic process, making it democratic, with unpredictable results. Vaccari provides passport photo booths where everyone is free to photograph themselves in different poses. The public leave the photo strip to the artist, thereby taking part in the conscious, voluntary construction of their own image through the photographic means.

Gillian Wearing (Birmingham, United Kingdom, 1963)

Me as Talbot, 2013

Silver gelatin print with frame, 148x122 cm

Fondazione di Modena Collection – FMAV

Wearing portrays herself in the guise of William Talbot, one of the fathers of photography. Through the mask, the artist’s eye reaches the observer, exchanging looks and references in the perfect meeting place that is photography.

The artist investigates construction of the self, identity and its layers. Masks are a recurrent element in her works. By hiding the individual’s identity, they give access to their most intimate, authentic dimension.

Noting how often we are labelled *prima facie* by convictions and conventions put upon us by the surrounding culture, the artists selected for the second part of the exhibition retake possession of their image and represent themselves how they intend to be seen. They strongly assert a fluid identity that is neither a foregone conclusion nor preformed by socio-cultural expectations.

The artists' emancipated, conscious exhibition of themselves (Alexandra Croitoru, Samuel Fosso, Ma Liuming, Milica Tomić) or of the portrayed subject (Jodi Bieber, Mario De Biasi, Cao Fei, Gianfranco Gorgoni, Fernand Michaud, Claudio Parmiggiani, Edward Weston) wrong-foots the observer, short-circuiting their interpretation. Hence, new codes need to be built to read the reality, which are no longer based on prejudices but on an authentic relationship with the other.

There is no lack of irony in this process, inevitably resulting in open condemnation or defiant determination (Anetta Mona Chişa & Lucia Tkáčová), or provocative anonymity (Kimsooja).

There are no exceptions to the identity-building mechanism sparked by the relationship between the looker and the looked-at: the eye of photographer Ken Dam (Salvatore Spatarella) sets his questioning sights on the spectator: "come tu mi vuoi?" ["How do you desire me?"].

Artists in second section (in alphabetical order)

Jodi Bieber (Johannesburg, South Africa, 1966)

Isolated Communities, Pofadder, Northern Cape, from the “*Between Dogs and Wolves*” series, 2006

Silver gelatin print, 55x37 cm

Fondazione di Modena Collection – FMAV

Among the white, western faces of celebrities portrayed in the posters on the walls appears the girl of South African origin who seems wants to stand out from the canons of beauty imposed by the West.

The series concentrates on a generation of young people who have grown up on the outskirts of society, in the difficult suburbs of Johannesburg which the photographer frequented for years in order to report its hardships.

Alexandra Croitoru (Bucharest, Romania, 1975)

ROM_, 2004

C-print, 45x67 cm

Fondazione di Modena Collection – FMAV

The artist portrays herself with her face covered by a balaclava in the colours of the Romanian flag. Referencing the visual codes of fashion and advertising, she obscures her identity, thus casting light on the prejudices and stereotypes surrounding the integration process.

In the “*ROM_*” series, the artist takes her place in the debate on Romania’s entry to the European Union, reflecting with cynical irony on the contradictions of a globalized world still laden with prejudice and discrimination.

Mario De Biasi (Belluno, Italy, 1923 – Milan, Italy, 2013)

Gli italiani si voltano, Milan, 1954

Silver gelatin print, 18,1x23,9 cm

Galleria Civica del Comune di Modena Photography Collection,

Franco Fontana Fonds – FMAV

The woman portrayed here is Moira Orfei, walking boldly towards a group of men, aware of the admiration with which they are looking at her. In 1994, this photograph was chosen as the lead image in *The Italian Metamorphosis, 1943-1968* exhibition at the Guggenheim in New York.

De Biasi was able to recount 1950s and 60s Italy in a neorealist key, always portraying the celebrities of the time and current affairs from an original point of view.

Cao Fei (Guangzhou, China, 1978)
My Future Is Not a Dream 05, 2006–2008
C-print, 120,5x150,5 cm
Fondazione di Modena Collection – FMAV

In this photograph, the subject is decontextualized from the surrounding environment, offering herself to the spectator's gaze as the person she would like to be. In the *My Future Is Not a Dream* series, the artist works on the contrast between the subjects represented and the environment they are in. They are factory workers shown in a period of great economic growth for China, casually and confidently representing their true aspirations.

Samuel Fosso (Kumba, Cameroon, 1962)
Autoportrait (SM12), 2003
Silver gelatin print, 46,5x46,5 cm
Fondazione di Modena Collection – FMAV

The artist started to make his self-portraits at the age of 14, at closing time in the photographic studio where he worked in Bangui, in the Central African Republic. In a repressive political climate, Samuel Fosso dresses up to create self-portraits in a playful space of self-mimesis, idealization and dramatization. "It's a way to free myself from myself," says the artist, anticipating the conventions and taste for transformism and metamorphous identities of postmodern photography.

Gianfranco Gorgoni (Rome, Italy, 1941 – New York, United States, 2019)
Maria de Los Angeles, Havana, 1981
C-print, 39,5x58,5 cm
Galleria Civica del Comune di Modena Photography Collection,
Franco Fontana Fonds – FMAV

In the portrait of *Maria de Los Angeles*, the artist exalts her figure and aesthetic beauty, proposing a female model in agreement with pre-established canons and expectations. Gorgoni was an international photo reporter who worked in particularly high-risk areas. He was witness to a large part of late twentieth-century art, photographing the big names and their works.

Kimsooja (Daegu, South Korea, 1957)

A Homeless Woman – Cairo, 2001

Video, 6'33"

Fondazione di Modena Collection – FMAV

A woman lying on a pavement in the city of Cairo is looked at and touched by numerous passers-by. The woman is the artist in a performance in which she tries to erase herself, while collecting the reactions to her provocative, immobile and silent offer of a relationship.

In all of Kimsooja's artistic career, the theme of anonymity transpires as a metaphor for the desire to merge with forces and events that usually prevent the explicit construction of the self.

Ma Liuming (Huangshi, China, 1969)

Fen-ma Liuming Walks the Great Wall 02, 1998

Silver gelatin print, 60x50 cm

Fondazione di Modena Collection – FMAV

The artist-performer, with a male body and delicate, androgynous features, works on exalting his physical features, since he feels he does not fit into any category. He contrasts the free, naked body of his alter ego, Fen-Maliuming, with the bulk of the Great Wall of China. His performances are guided by the need to experiment with the body, his research in stark contrast with the image wanted by the system and with western conceptualism.

Fernand Michaud (Levroux dans le Berry, France, 1929 - Tours, France, 2012)

La Trilogie, 1976

Silver gelatin print, 18,3x27,1 cm

Galleria Civica del Comune di Modena Photography Collection,

Franco Fontana Fonds – FMAV

The French photographer explores the relationship between observer and observed in a private, intimate context, and between what is visible to and hidden from the camera. Part of a trilogy in which the artist also immortalizes his daughter and granddaughter, this image portrays lover and co-worker, Odette, in her bathroom. For Michaud, the female nude embodies the body's sacredness, beyond its physical materiality.

Anetta Mona Chișa (Nădlac, Romania, 1975)
& **Lucia Tkáčová** (Banská Štiavnica, Slovakia, 1977)
Monument to Yesterday, 2008
Video, 7'46"
Fondazione di Modena Collection – FMAV

Gender politics and female sexuality in a patriarchal society are two of the themes dealt with by the artists. In the video, the clumsy striptease of a middle-aged woman throws out the illusory nature and seductive expectations of this spectacle. The artists use the human body as a form of political protest. The subtitles are taken from the *Manifesto of Lust* written in 1913 by Futurist poet Valentine de Saint-Point.

Claudio Parmiggiani (Luzzara, Italy, 1943)
Uomo che frusta la sua ombra, 1983
Drawing, pencil on paper, 40,5x27 cm
Galleria Civica del Comune di Modena Drawing Collection – FMAV

Here the artist represents himself whipping his shadow in an act imbued with violence and pregnant with psychological meaning. All of this is transferred upon the subject in a self-destructive, ironic and surreal action. Parmiggiani's language is innovative, personal, but at the same time universal: he manages to bring to life unusual images which seem familiar to us in their tragic beauty.

Salvatore Spatarella (Italy)
Ken Dami, fotografo in fotografo, no date, from the "Occhi di fotografo" series
Silver gelatin print, 14,5x22,4 cm
Galleria Civica del Comune di Modena Photography Collection,
Franco Fontana Fonds – FMAV

The looks exchanged between the photographer and the photographed are reduced to the bare minimum in Spaterella's series in which he takes close-ups of a single eye of some famous artists, including the photographer Ken Dami. The eye of the photographer that sees and interprets everything is laid bare by a photograph.

Milica Tomić (Belgrade, Serbia, 1960)

I am Milica Tomić (1988-89)

Video, 9'58"

Fondazione di Modena Collection – FMAV

Being part of a group can be reassuring, but it can have negative repercussions. The artist's face remains calm and implacable, while a wound is inflicted on her body every time that she declares, in 64 different languages, that she belongs to a nationality.

Her research, arising from her experience of the war in the Balkans in the 1990s, leads to a reflection that is more topical than ever, on themes such as the bond between individual and collective identity and the right to self-determination.

Edward Weston (Highland Park, Chicago, United States, 1886 – Carmel, United States, 1958)

Nude, 1936 (1958)

Silver gelatin print, 24x19.5 cm

Fondazione di Modena Collection – FMAV

The person whose portrait we admire is not just a model for Weston, but also a lover and muse whom he knows intimately. Invited to move freely in the space, she is the one who decides to show herself in that pose, which she knows is to the artist's liking.

Widely explored subjects, his nudes are in continual dialogue with still lifes, landscapes and portraits, parts of a vast but coherent corpus of works made by a pioneer of artistic photography and great experimenter.

The main character in Pirandello's play *Come tu mi vuoi* from 1929, is "L'Ignota" ("The Unknown Woman"). Throughout the play, her identity remains undetermined and ambiguous. She weaves in and out of the desires, expectations and representations of the other characters who would like to define her according to what they would like her to be, recognizing and identifying her on the basis of the images that they have built of her.

The Unknown Woman: - Look at me! Look in my eyes! Right into them.

They haven't been seeing for me any longer -

not even to see myself with!

I'm here and I'm yours.

Now make me - make me yourself just as you want me, as you desire me. -

Curated by

ICON 2022 – FMAV School of Advanced
Studies Course for Curators

Federica Benedetti

Sara Carbone

Lucia Cavallo

Sibylle Ciarloni

Gabriella Esposito

Cristina Lanzafame

Beatrice Puddu

Chiara Spaggiari

Asia Tituri



Fondazione Modena Arti Visive

fmav.org

FOUNDING MEMBERS



Comune di Modena



FONDAZIONE DI MODENA