

Art | Basel
Basel

GALLERIES, HALL 2.0 / BOOTH E11
UNLIMITED, HALL 1.0 / BOOTH U2

MAZZOLENI □

THEATRE AS A PLACE FOR ART

GALLERIES

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO
LUCIO FONTANA
ALBERTO BURRI
PIERO MANZONI
FAUSTO MELOTTI
AGOSTINO BONALUMI
SALVO

UNLIMITED

MARINELLA SENATORE



The group exhibition ***Theatre as a Place for Art*** explores the question: *What is an art fair, if not a stage for performance?*

Through the works of renowned 20th Century Italian masters – Giorgio de Chirico, Lucio Fontana, Alberto Burri, Piero Manzoni, Fausto Melotti, Agostino Bonalumi, and Salvo – the exhibition space transforms into an immersive setting, inviting visitors to experience and interpret.

The booth structure, inspired by Burri's original design for *Teatro Continuo* (1973), serves as scenery of the presentation.

GIORGIO DE CHIRICO

(1888 – 1978)

Giorgio de Chirico was a prolific figure in the theatrical arts, collaborating with renowned writers, directors, and musicians, including Luigi Pirandello.

Deeply passionate about opera, he designed sets and costumes for numerous productions. Often, he did not paint the sets himself but entrusted the task to skilled set painters who worked from his sketches.

De Chirico's profound love of theatre is vividly reflected in his writings, where he frequently employs theatrical metaphors and imagery. Expressions such as “we step onto the stage of art” and “the sky like a curtain” illustrate how he viewed artistic creation as a performative act, akin to entering a dramatic scene.

Among the productions he contributed to were two seen at the Rome Opera, which helped redefine the role of set design in opera: Rossini's *Otello* (1964) and Vincenzo Bellini's *I Puritani*, originally created for the Florence Opera in 1933 and later performed in Rome.

His metaphysical aesthetics revive the tragic spirit of ancient Greek theatre. His sketches of heroic figures offer a contemporary reinterpretation of myth, presenting ambiguous characters who seem detached from a world that appears orderly only on the surface.

Artist Giorgio de Chirico on the sets of opera *Otello*,
Teatro dell'opera di Roma, Rome, 1964





Giorgio de Chirico

Gli archeologi – Amore e Musica, 1930s

Oil on canvas

65 x 54 cm

In *Gli archeologi – Amore e Musica* (1930s) two faceless mannequins are seated side by side, each enclosing a metaphysical landscape within their torsos. Their bodies serve as the starting point for a perspectival stage set, where the use of dizzying foreground perspectives enhances the impression of encountering a mode of existence that feels played rather than lived — shaped more by performance than reality.

The inclusion of archaeological motifs and dreamlike architectural fragments, as in a carefully meditated composition, conceals the subversive power of metaphysics: the appearance of typical objects in wholly atypical settings, with the broadest possible logical leap.

LUCIO FONTANA

(1899 – 1968)

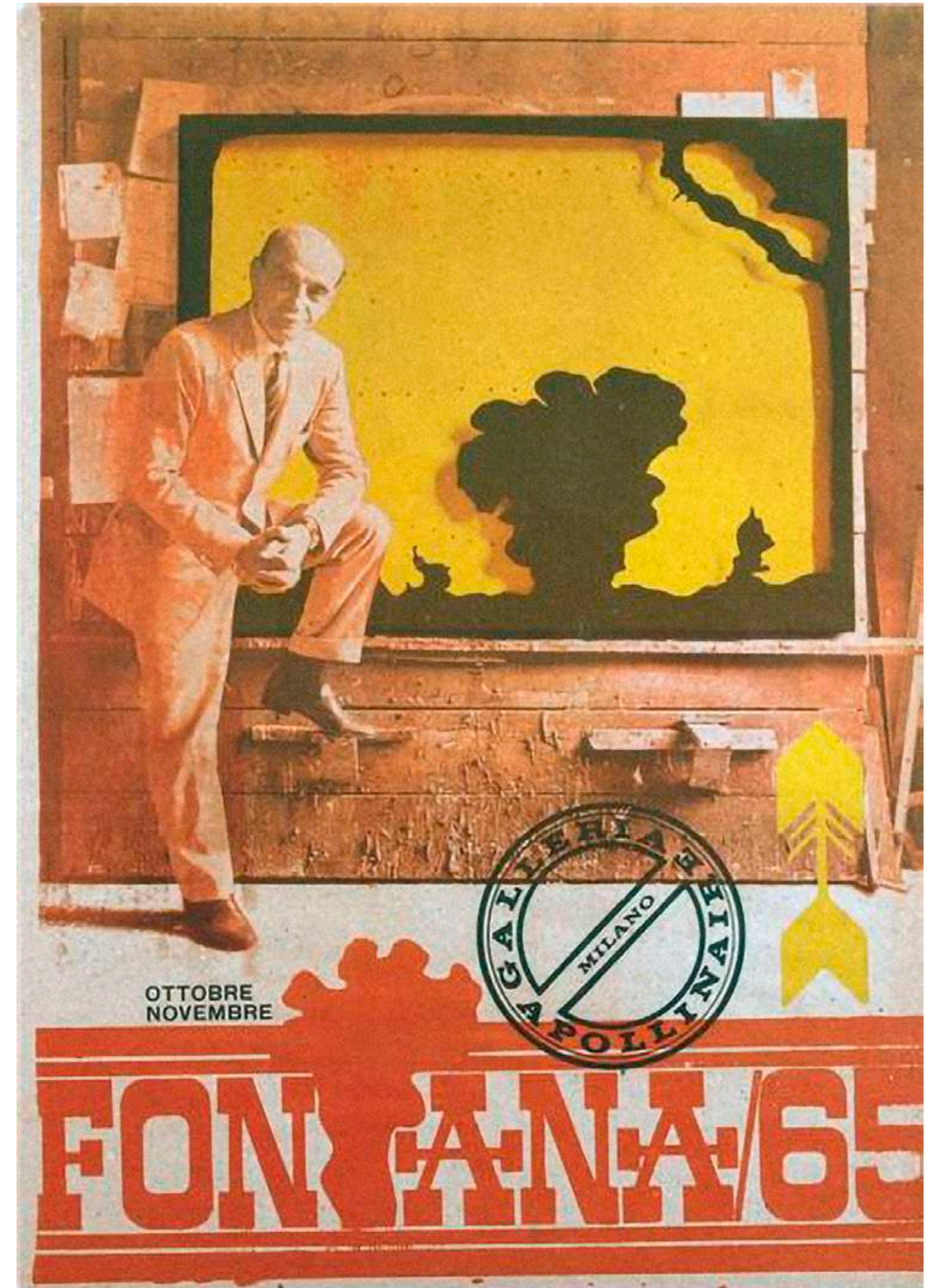
Lucio Fontana designed the costumes and set for *Portrait of Don Quixote* at Teatro alla Scala in 1967. Commenting in *Espresso Magazine*, Massimo Mila noted that “Fontana turned the stage into the interior of a huge box, inhabited only by abstract forms.”

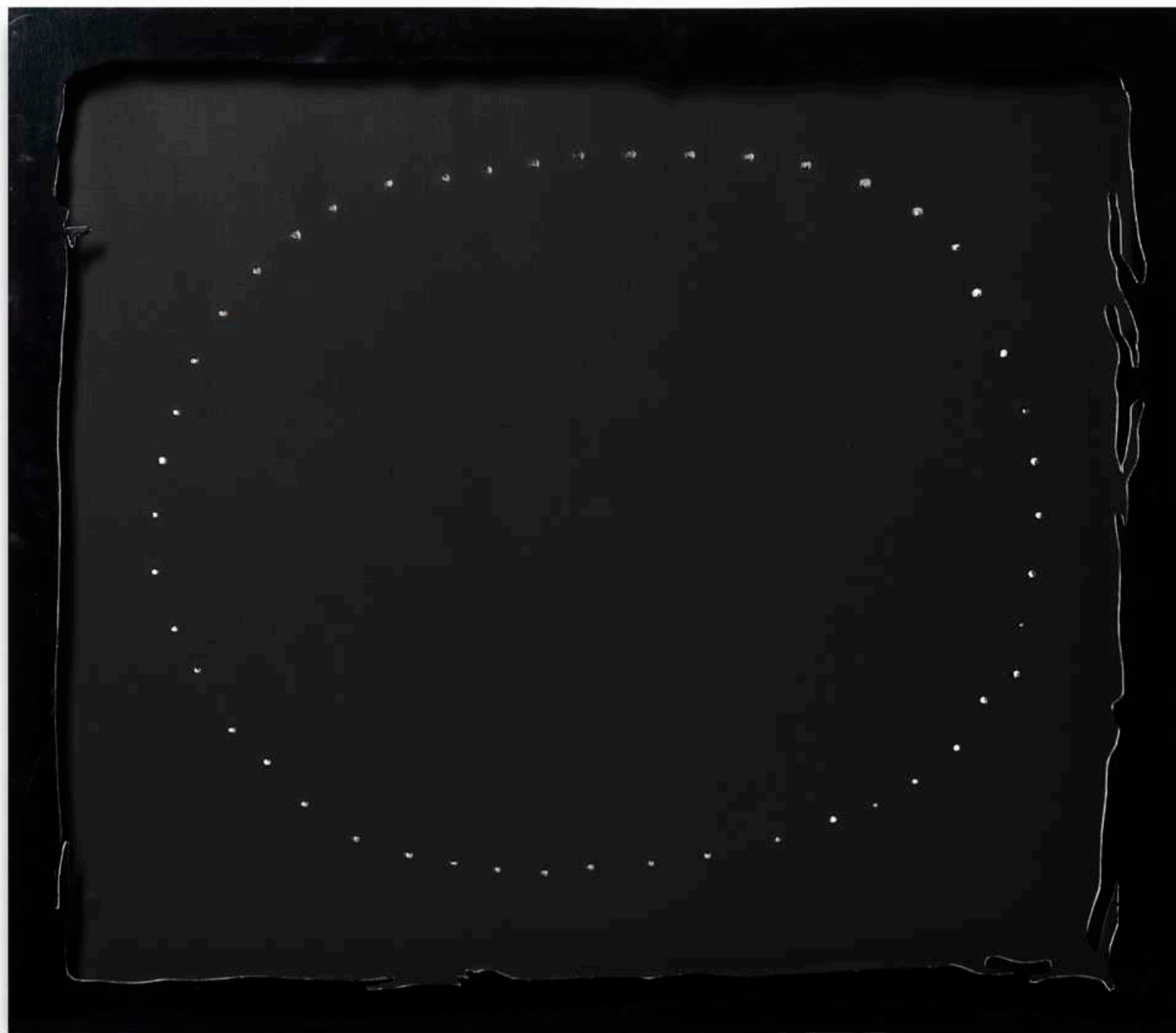
This idea of the “box” appears closely linked to Fontana’s *Teatrini* [Little Theatres], a series created between 1964 and 1966. Characterised by lacquered wooden frames shaped like theatrical wings and painted in uniform colours, the *Teatrini* propose a form of spatial figuration in which a monochrome, perforated backdrop acts as a kind of “sky”, transforming abstract space into a staged spectacle.

The *Teatrini* were first presented to the public in a solo exhibition at Galleria Apollinaire in Milan in 1965, where Fontana showed twelve works from the series. This exhibition marked the debut of the *Teatrini* and positioned them as a significant development in his spatial investigations. Fontana regarded these works as the culmination of his *Concetti Spaziali*, aimed at reshaping the viewer’s perception of space both within and beyond the artwork. He described this later evolution of his thinking as “Realistic Spatialism”.

Rather than offering a mimetic representation, the *Teatrini* seek to open a dialogue with the viewer, an evocative and open-ended gesture. Like empty stages awaiting performers, they invite imagination and interaction instead of delivering a fixed narrative.

Poster of the exhibition *Fontana/65*
at the galleria Apollinaire in Milan, 1965





Lucio Fontana

Concetto Spaziale (Teatrino), 1965

Waterpaint on canvas and lacquered wood

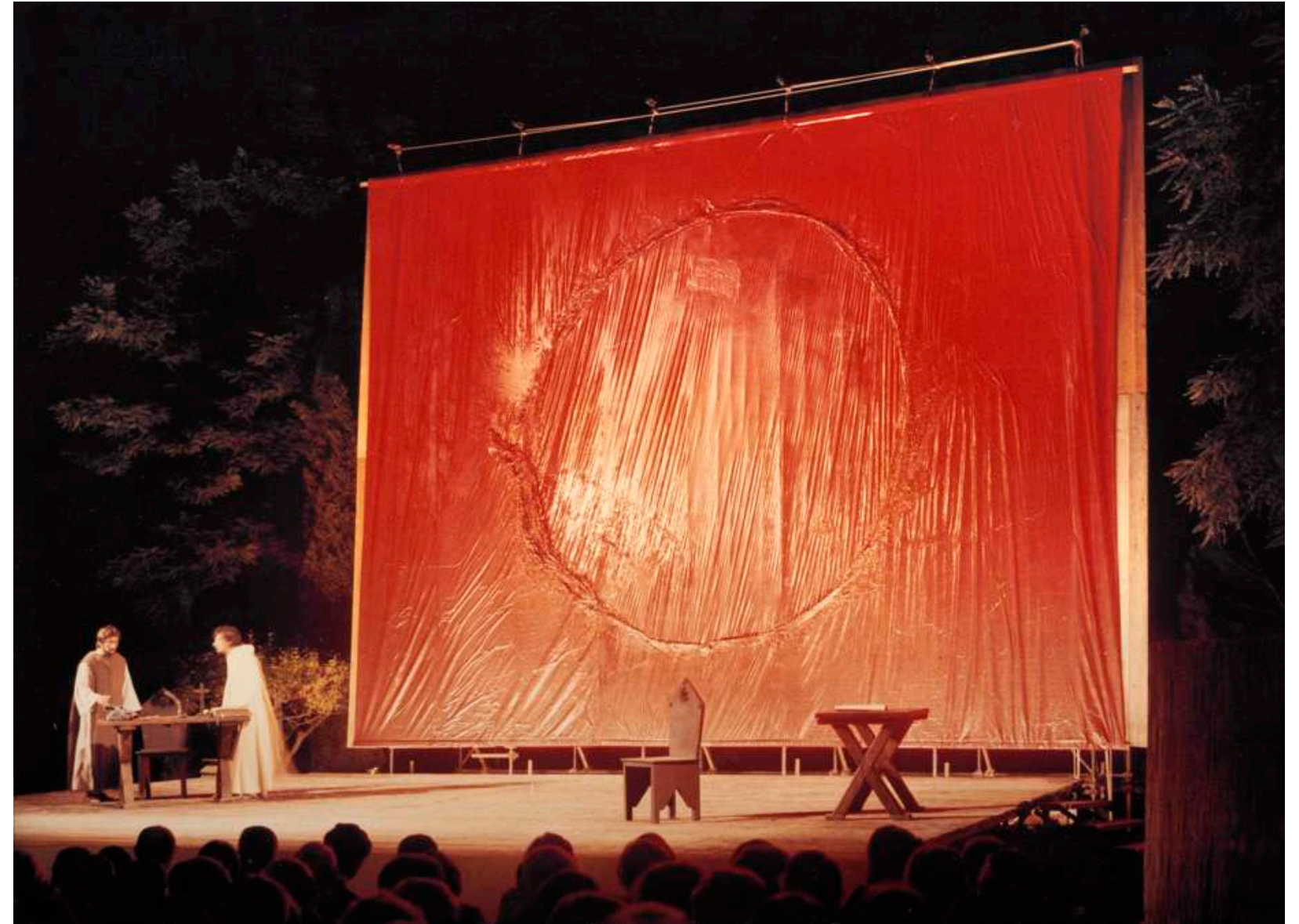
89.1 x 102.3 cm

ALBERTO BURRI

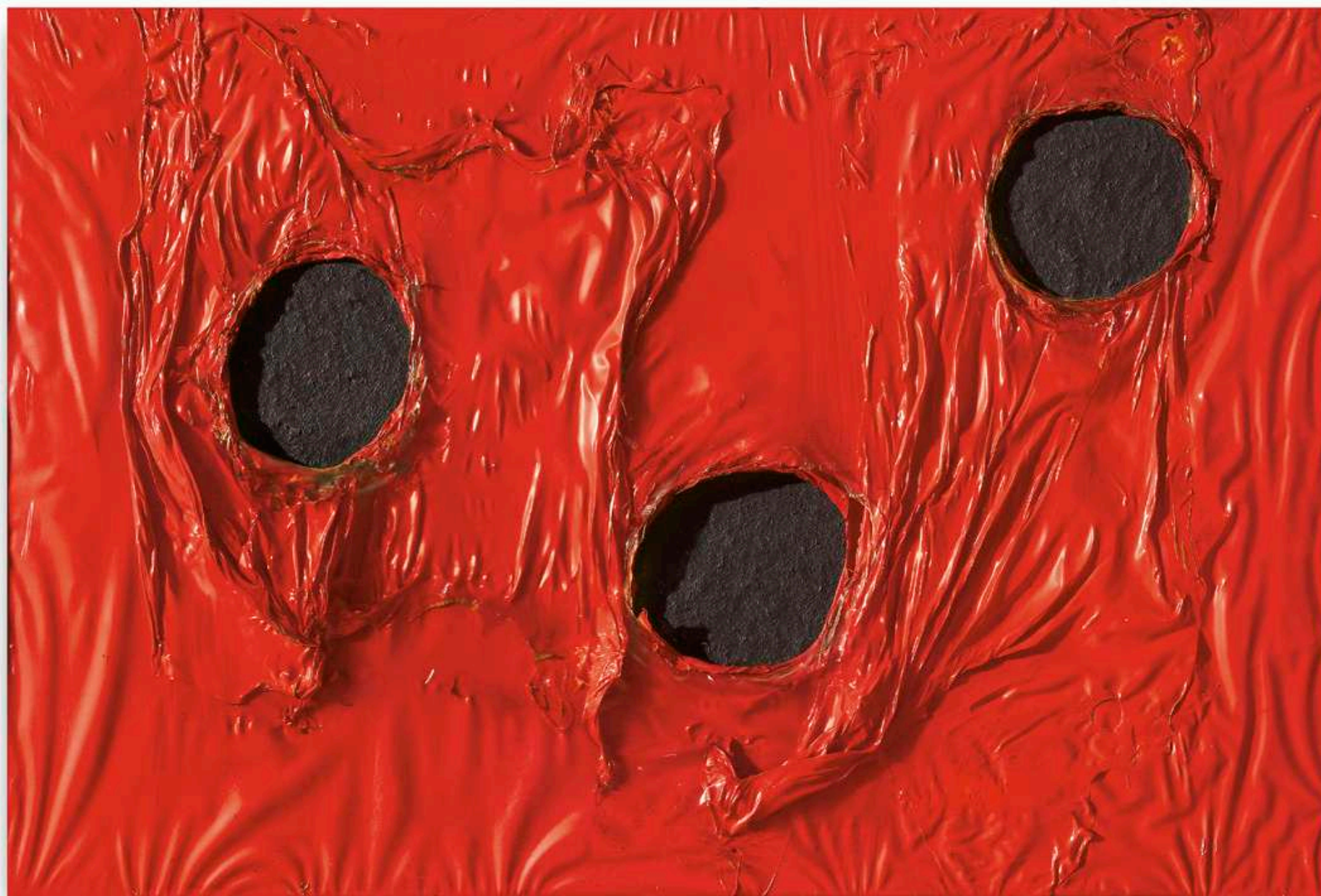
(1915 – 1995)

Alberto Burri's *Teatro Continuo* (1973), an open-air installation, marked a key stage in his longstanding engagement with theatre, culminating in *Scultura Teatro*, which was presented at the 1984 Venice Biennale. For Burri, theatre represented the ideal of a "total work of art", which became a recurring theme in his final decade through paintings and large-scale sculptures.

Burri's set design for *L'avventura di un povero cristiano* [The Adventure of a Poor Christian] (1969), presented at San Miniato's *Dramma Popolare* festival, echoed works like *Rosso Plastica* (1968) and exemplifies his signature use of plastic combustions. Part of his renowned *Plastiche* series, it was first shown in Rome in 1962 and later exhibited in London and New York. *Rosso Plastica* shows the artist's desire to redefine painting itself by moving beyond objective representation to focus on texture, material, and transformation.



Scenography by Alberto Burri for *L'avventura di un povero Cristiano* [The Adventure of a Poor Christian], 1969
A production by the Istituto di Dramma Popolare for the XIII Festival of Theatre in San Miniato.
Archivio Storico Fondazione Istituto Dramma Popolare, San Miniato (ETS)



Alberto Burri
Rosso Plastica, 1968
Plastic, acrylic, and combustion on cellotex
51 x 75 cm

PIERO MANZONI

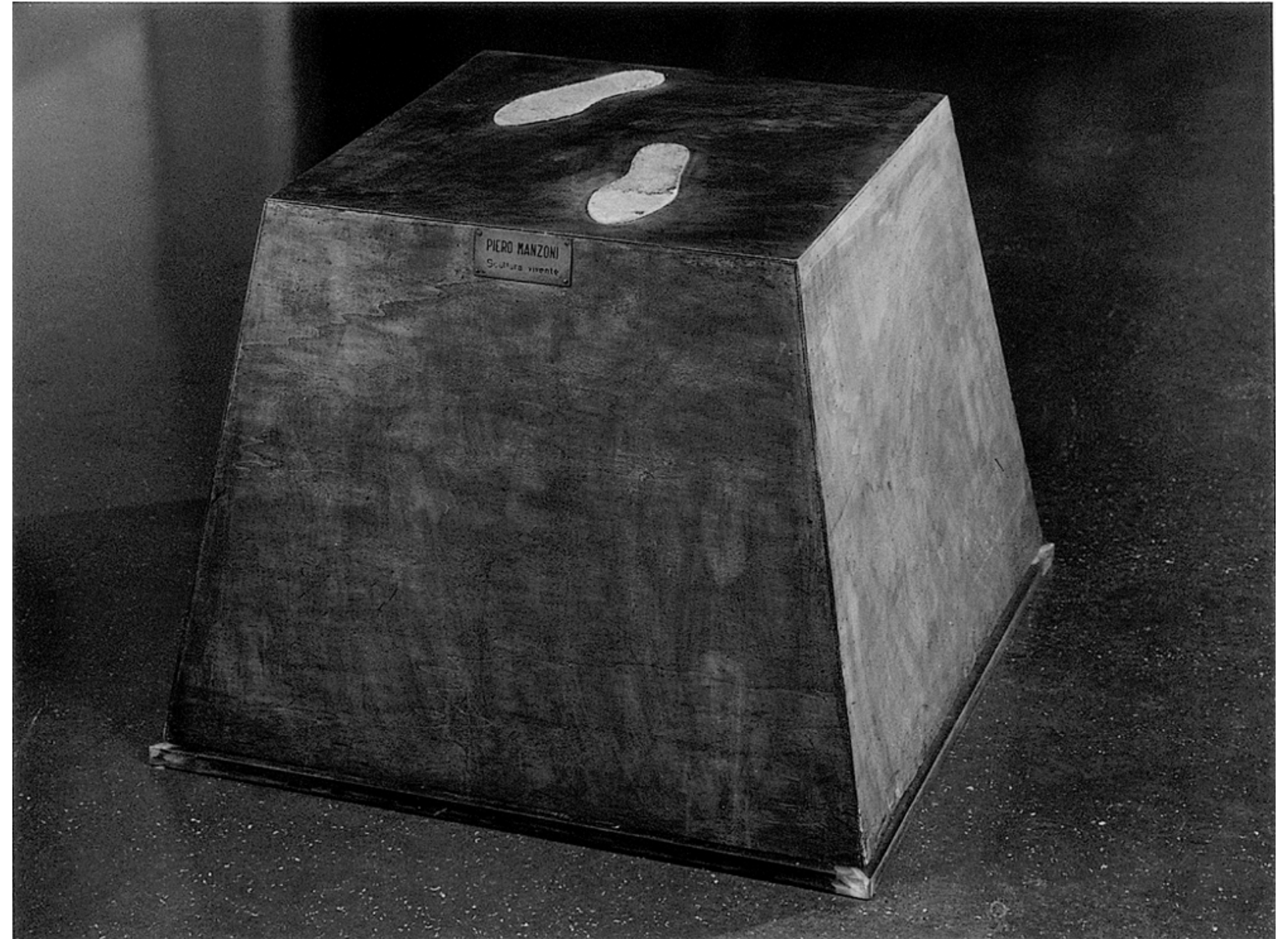
(1933 – 1963)

In 1961, Piero Manzoni carried out one of his most radical gestures: *Opere Vive* [Living Works] or *Sculture Viventi* [Living Sculptures], in which he signed both the plinth and the bodies of living models, momentarily transforming them into artworks. This performative act, blurring the boundaries between art and life, found a distilled and enduring form in *Base Magica* [Magic Base].

A minimalist pedestal inscribed with '*Base Magica – Scultura vivente*', it invited anyone who stepped onto it to become a living sculpture, a work by Manzoni by sheer declaration. The work encapsulates the artist's conceptual approach, where authorship is enacted, not crafted, and theatricality becomes intrinsic to meaning.

Manzoni himself noted that "any person or object placed on it, as long as it remained there, became a work of art".

Emphasising the performative and participatory nature of his vision, an exhibition copy of *Base Magica* will be included in the presentation, and visitors will be invited to step onto the plinth, becoming protagonists in their own moment of artistic transformation.



FAUSTO MELOTTI

(1901 – 1986)

Fausto Melotti's connection to theatre played a key role in shaping his sculptural work and artistic vision. His blend of abstraction and narrative transformed his sculptures into metaphorical and symbolic expressions. Often echoing the structure of the stage, Melotti's works incorporate balance, space, and tension, creating a dynamic, performative quality.

This connection to dramaturgy is most evident in his *teatrini* [*Little Theatres*] — a series of ceramic works produced between 1940 and 1960. While later sculptures fall outside this series, many retain a theatrical sensibility, inviting interpretation through allegory and visual poetry.

His work in set and costume design for ballet and opera during the 1980s further underscores his seamless fusion of sculpture and performance, blurring boundaries between the lasting and the ephemeral.

Fausto Melotti

La creazione del mondo, 1978
Brass, painted fabric, and plaster
90 x 74 x 36 cm (detail)





Fausto Melotti

La creazione del mondo, 1978

Brass, painted fabric, and plaster
90 x 74 x 36 cm

Disegno nello spazio (1981) reflects Melotti's aim for purity through formal clarity, achieved by *modulating* light, geometric forms into delicate, harmonious compositions.

During his calligraphic sculpture phase, he explored a seemingly fragile yet balanced visual rhythm, highlighting his belief that true harmony goes beyond mere balance.

Fausto Melotti

Disegno nello spazio, 1981

Brass

76 x 59 x 14 cm



AGOSTINO BONALUMI

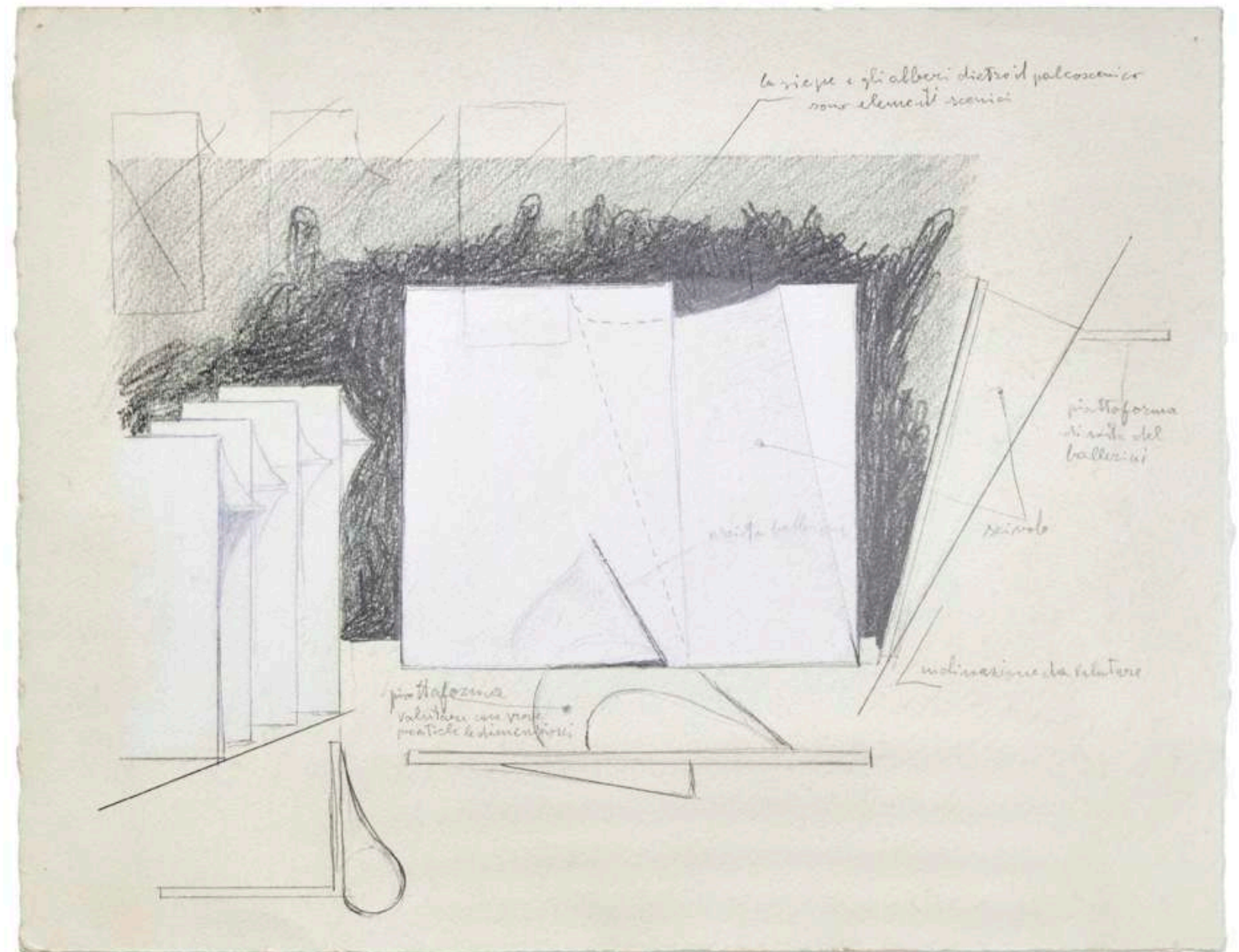
(1935 – 2013)

Agostino Bonalumi had several significant experiences with theatre. In 1970, Bonalumi designed the costumes and sets for Susanna Egri's ballet *Partita* at the Teatro Romano in Verona. His work *Bianco* (1968) represents the study of forms and colour that defined the set of this performance two years later.

He also worked in set design for the ballet *Rot*, staged in 1972 at the Teatro dell'Opera in Rome.

His works are not merely visual objects, but fields of energy—tensions between interior and exterior, between pressure and resistance. In his stage work, this dimension is amplified: the plastic-chromatic surfaces engage dynamically with the movement of bodies, sound vibrations, and light play.

His experience with theatre represents a fundamental moment in his plastic-dynamic research. As a result of this, these great theatrical spaces help to better understand Bonalumi's shift from painting to his later plastic environment.



Agostino Bonalumi

Set Design Project for the Ballet *Partita*, 1970
Mixed media, 19 × 27 cm



Agostino Bonalumi

Bianco, 1968

Vinyl tempera on shaped canvas

179.5 x 179 x 38 cm

SALVO

(1947 – 2015)

During the 1960s and 1970s, Salvo experimented with various media. In 1973, he began focusing exclusively on painting, structuring his pictorial language around a solid and meticulously crafted compositional framework, and adopting an approach to scene construction strikingly similar to that of theatre.

His methodology echoes the conventions of theatrical staging, where spatial depth is carefully orchestrated through layered elements.

Drawing inspiration from metaphysical art, particularly Giorgio de Chirico, whose influence can be discerned in Salvo's mysterious and contemplative atmospheres, he developed pictorial spaces that were both deliberate and dreamlike.

Alongside de Chirico, Salvo also drew upon the legacy of the old masters, including Raphael and Vittore Carpaccio.

In this regard, Salvo's spatial constructions often appear intentionally elementary and geometric, reminiscent of Renaissance techniques in their clarity and order.

This simplified, almost schematic approach to perspective further reinforces the staged quality of his compositions, lending them a sense of timelessness and artifice.



Salvo
La valle, 2003
Oil on juta canvas
100 x 80 cm

“Salvo’s paintings
are never descriptive;
they are theatrical
stages on which
light, silence, and
architecture perform.”

Paolo Fossati, *Salvo*, 1995



Salvo
La valle, 2006
Oil on juta canvas
100 x 130 cm



Salvo
Notte d'inverno, 2007
Oil on canvas
100 x 130 cm

“Salvo’s works have a constructed quality that recalls both metaphysical painting and theatre sets, where the world appears suspended and coded.”

Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *Arte Povera*, Phaidon, 1999

Salvo’s scenographic approach enhances the illusion of depth, rendering each composition a staged tableau. In this sense, his paintings do not merely depict scenes, they stage them, transforming the viewer into a spectator of a meticulously arranged visual performance.

Marinella Senatore at ART BASEL UNLIMITED 2025

We Rise by Lifting Others, 2023

We Rise by Lifting Others by Marinella Senatore is a monumental *luminaria* inspired by traditional Southern Italian festivals. This luminous installation transcends its decorative origins to create dynamic spaces for gathering, dialogue, and empowerment — concepts that lie at the heart of Senatore's practice.

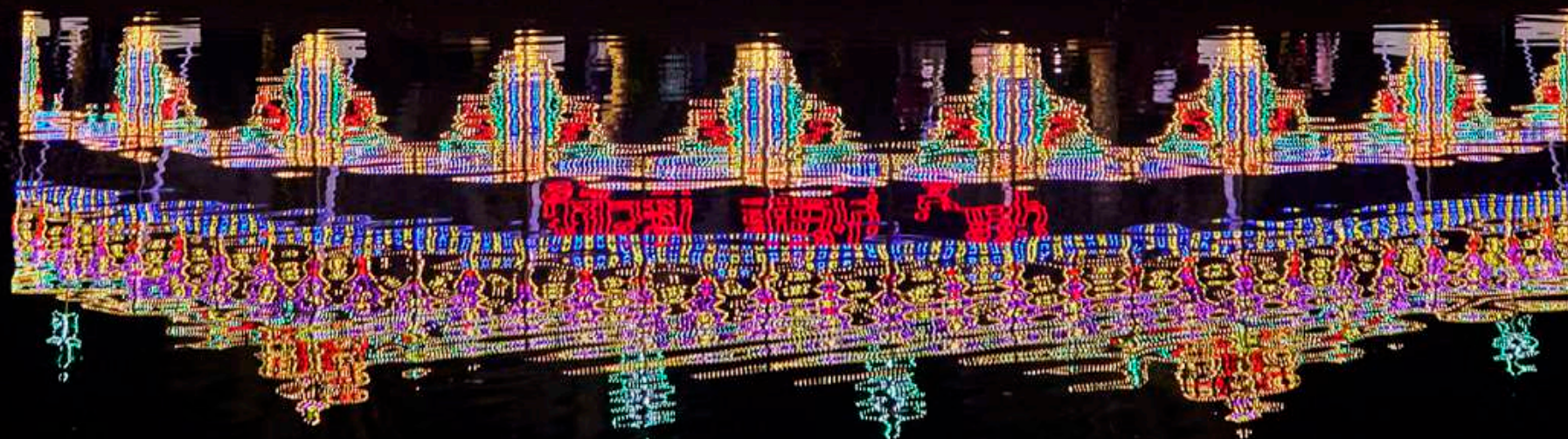
Her *School of Narrative Dance*, a nomadic and tuition-free project founded in 2012, epitomises her dedication to participatory art. Combining elements of dance, theatre, music, and traditions of political protest, the School promotes collaborative learning and artistic expression, blurring the boundaries between performer and audience. To date, over 8 million people across 23 countries have engaged with her participatory projects, which merge social activism with contemporary aesthetics.

In 2023, Senatore was invited to present her work at *Noor Riyadh*, the annual citywide festival of light and art that brings together Saudi and international artists, where **We Rise by Lifting Others** was exhibited for the first time.

For *Art Basel Unlimited*, the artist seeks to customise the installation with empowering phrases such as 'We rise by lifting others', attributed to Robert Ingersoll, and 'I contain multitudes', from Walt Whitman.

Developed through workshops and collective sessions with communities worldwide, these quotes weave together diverse experiences and memories, forging connections across time and space.

For more information about the artist, please **click here**. To download the artist's CV, please **click here**.



Marinella Senatore
We Rise by Lifting Others, 2023
LED bulbs and Flex LED on a wooden structure
7.1 x 34 m

[Light] "is a generator of energy
that propagates through space,
changing its structures
and the people within it"

Marinella Senatore



Marinella Senatore
We Rise by Lifting Others, 2023
LED bulbs and Flex LED on a wooden structure
7.1 x 34 m



Marinella Senatore, *We Rise by Lifting Others*, 2023.
LED bulbs and Flex LED on a wooden structure, 7.1 x 34 m
Photographs showing the making of the *luminaria*, 2023.
De Cagna Luminarie, Maglie (LE).

Marinella Senatore's neon works are an evolution of her *Luminarie*. While the *Luminarie* first appeared in 2016, the neon pieces followed slightly later.

Since 2021, the artist has been creating numerous designs in neon that reference the architectural forms of the Baroque, particularly rose windows and portals, alongside phrases linked to empowerment, already present in her illuminated installations.

The principal intentions and themes remain unchanged: the power of light to create genuine spaces for social gathering and interaction. These works act as a "call to muster" — an invitation to dialogue and the exchange of ideas.



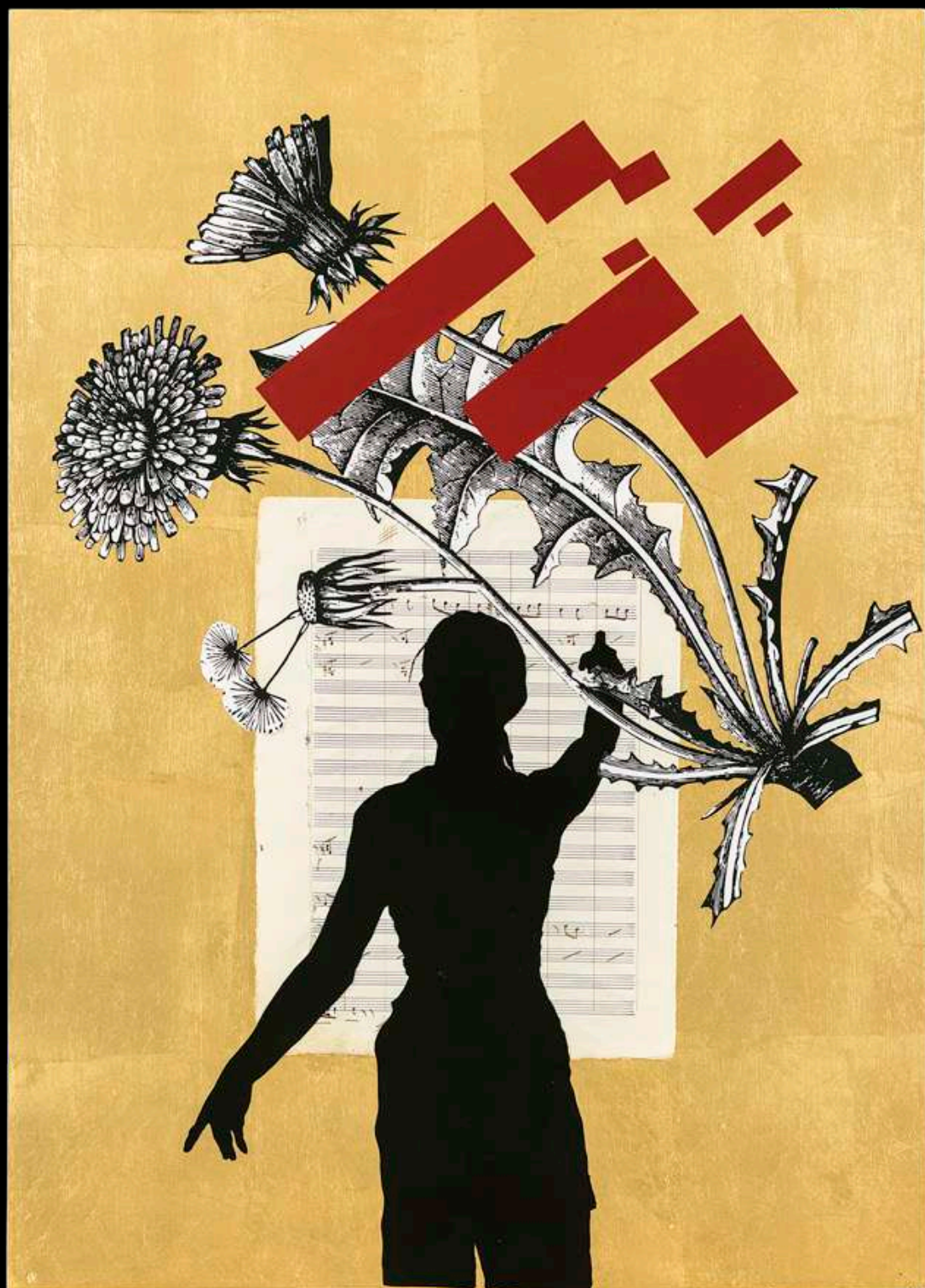
Marinella Senatore

Dance First Think Later, 2021

Glass tubes with mercury-free gas mixture (greeNeon)

mounted on a painted steel structure

120 x 120 x 15 cm



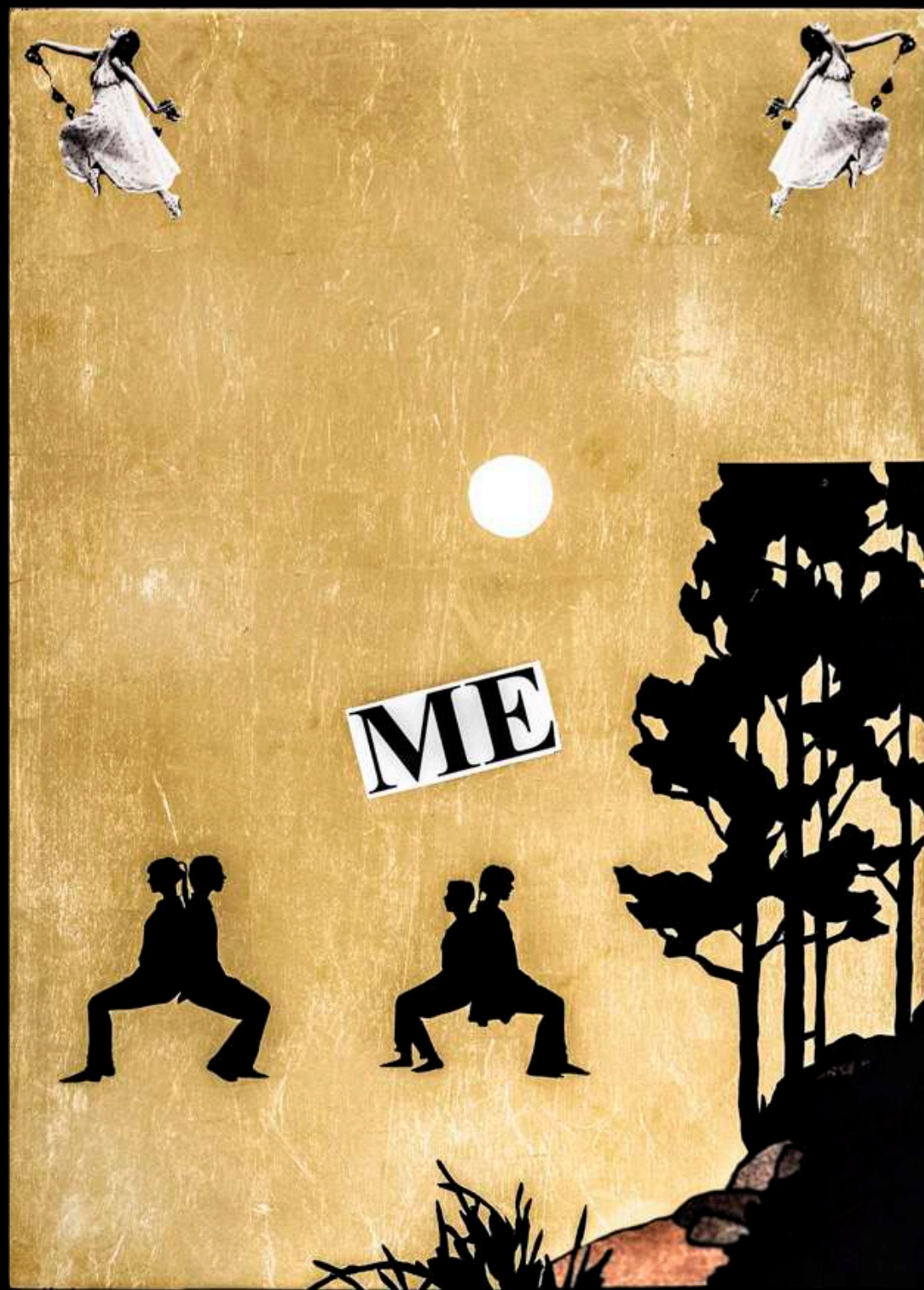
Marinella Senatore
Opera!, 2023
Collage and gold leaf on wood panel
70 x 50 cm

Among the numerous media used by Senatore, collage is not only the most recurring technique — a constant in the artist's 20-year-long research — but also, one of her most direct translations of her personal and collective vision.

Arranging the narrative elements on a surface is the direct transposition between mind and hands, concept and practice, which characterises her research.

Images and silhouettes of participants extrapolated from the 'collective actions' of the *School of Narrative Dance*.

There also references to music, painting, theatre and, of course, dance. This multitude of sources generates Senatore's "acts of thought".



Marinella Senatore
Paesaggio, 2024
Collage and gold leaf on wooden board
70 x 50 cm

MAZZOLENI

Mazzoleni is a leading Post-War Italian and contemporary art gallery based in London and Turin. With over 35 years of activity, Mazzoleni focuses on a museum-calibre exhibition programme and participates in the main international art fairs, including Art Basel and Frieze, as well as Artissima, Artefiera and Miart. Most recently, the gallery has expanded its reach towards new art scenes with its participation in Frieze Seoul, Art Abu Dhabi and Art Dubai.

The Mazzoleni collection is exhibited in museums and institutions worldwide, such as: the Centre Pompidou and Palais de Tokyo in Paris; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation in New York; the Smithsonian Institution in Washington; The State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg; Tate and the Estorick Collection in London, as well as Museo del Novecento in Florence, GNAM in Rome, MADRE Museum in Naples, Triennale Milano and Palazzo Reale in Milan, and the Venice Biennale.

Mazzoleni represents the Estate of Agostino Bonalumi.

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