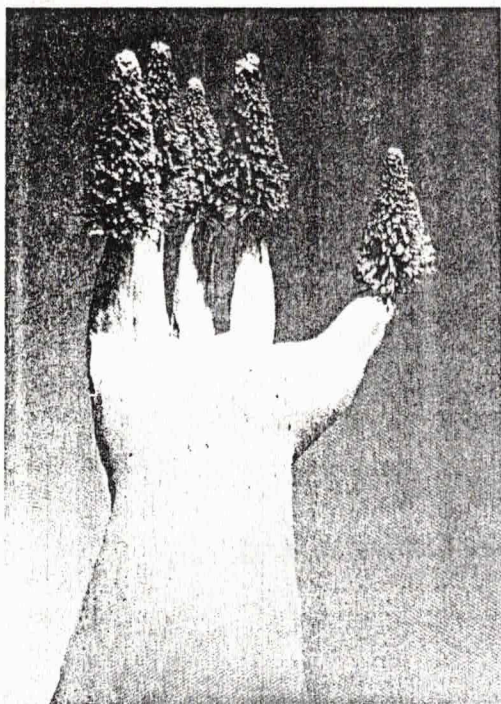


# ARTFORUM

SUMMER 1997



GIORGIO VERZOTTI ON PRIVATE MILAN

## Party Lines

Left to right:  
**Maurizio Cattelan**,  
*Untitled*, 1996,  
latex and maquette  
limp, ca.  
112 x 6 1/2 x 5 1/2"  
**Massimo Bartoloni**,  
*Camer*, 1995,  
chromium, ca.  
19 1/2 x 27 1/2"

ON THE NIGHT of July 16, 1993, the Pavilion of Contemporary Art (PAC) in Milan became the first target in a string of bombings that were later attributed to the Mafia. The Uffizi in Florence and a Roman church were damaged by explosives a few days later, and the PAC, an already fragile building, was razed when a car bomb set off a subsequent explosion in nearby gas lines. The city of Milan claimed that the pavilion would be rebuilt within a year, although it refused monetary aid from the central government in Rome. Milan had recently come under the rule of the Northern League, the federalist and now openly secessionist party that wants to cut ties with southern Italy, which is less prosperous than the northern region, and also with "thieving Rome." Because of this, it wasn't until last summer—on the third anniversary of the bombing—that Milan's only civic space dedicated to contemporary art was reopened to the public. Except for new lighting, a ventilation system, and modifications for handicap access, Ignazio Gardella, the architect who had built the PAC in 1943 over the war-torn stables of the Villa Reale, essentially re-created what was and still is an

extremely beautiful building (save for the inexplicable white wallpaper throughout).

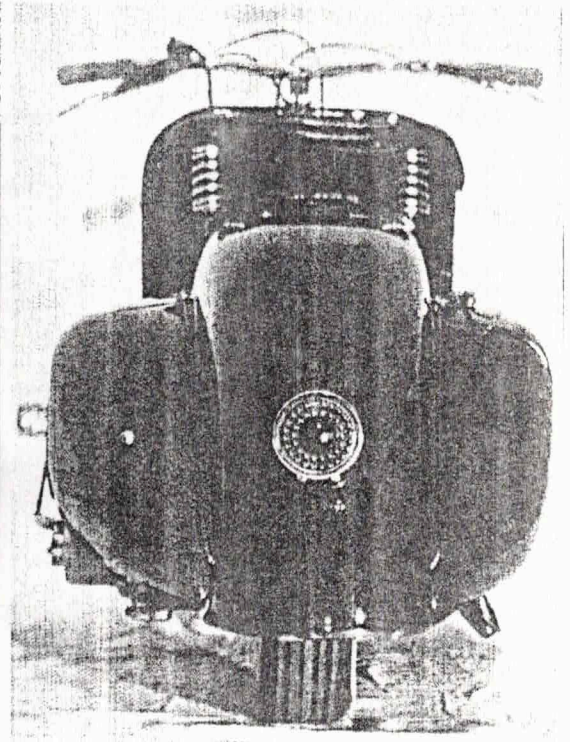
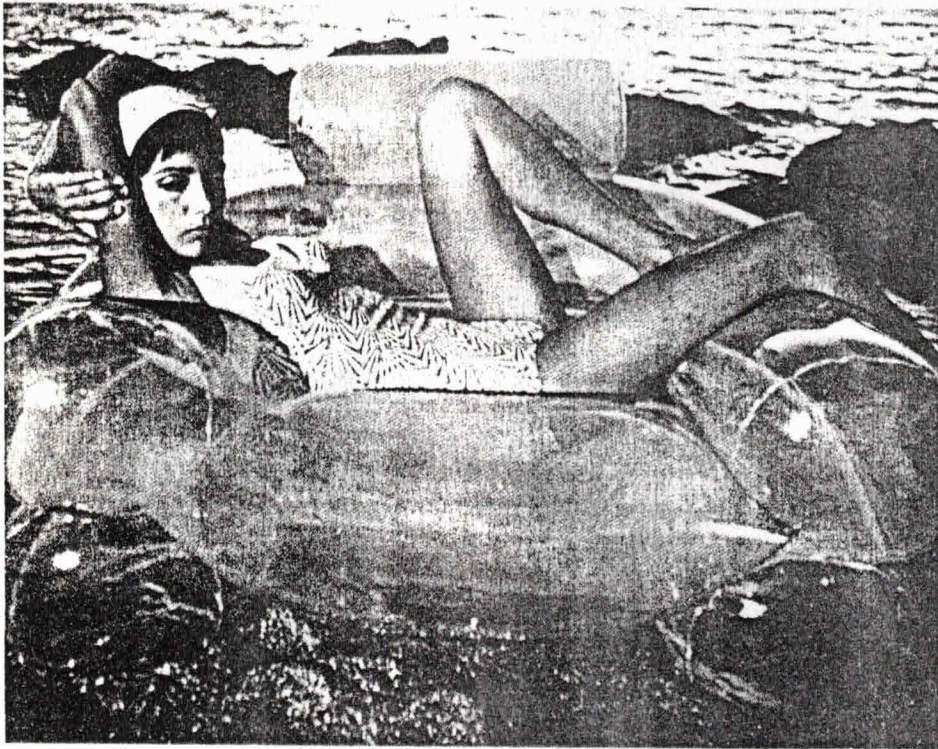
The PAC's inaugural show last summer was an homage to Leo Castelli, the American gallery owner born in Trieste. This was somewhat surprising given the longstanding contempt of Italy's public institutions—including those in Milan—for the art market and its agents, who are considered emissaries of the devil. Yet were it not for the city's thriving core of commercial galleries and nonprofit spaces, Milan would hardly be an obligatory stop on the art lover's tour of Europe. The public sector of Milan's art scene is in the midst of a long decline. Even at the PAC, the number of truly interesting shows in the past decade can be counted on one hand. Almost a year after its reopening, no exhibition schedule has been officially announced, and besides the Castelli tribute, the only other show mounted was a display of work from a famous private collection. Worse still, a director has yet to be named, and one even wonders if there are plans to do so: the PAC falls under the jurisdiction of the Civiche Raccolte d'Arte (Civic Art Collections),

which directs all city museums, and whose head, Maria Teresa Fiorio, is a distinguished scholar of ancient art.

The show dedicated to Castelli was conceived by Milan's commissioner of culture, Philippe Daverio, who has made it clear that, unlike his predecessors, he will participate directly in curating exhibitions. A former gallery owner in Milan who also made a brief, unsuccessful go of it in New York, Daverio is not interested in the avant-garde (though he loves figurative art, from de Chirico to Sandro Chia's painted teacups). So it's possible that Robert Morris' felt pieces and Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes from the Castelli show, which date back some thirty years, will be the most experimental art visitors to the PAC will see.

Ultimately, the stagnation at the PAC is just one facet of a scene in which politics and bureaucracy have led to widespread cultural decline. Many intellectuals accuse Daverio of being lazy, snobbish, and prejudiced; for his part, Daverio accuses his critics (including artists such as Luciano Fabro) of colluding with former civic governments supported by the Socialist Party. As with most other parties, the Socialists have now disappeared, after coming under attack from the judiciary which, starting right in Milan, arrested numerous political figures, public administrators, and well-known business people throughout Italy on charges of corruption. Overlooking the

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antipathy, justified or not, that Daverio has inspired in certain quarters, his accusations may have some basis in truth. (For the record, Fabro was never involved with the Socialists, and his significant contribution to cultural policy in the city is no mere recent phenomenon.) Nevertheless, the Northern League has not made good on its promises to improve urban life. Transportation and sanitation services remain inefficient, even as charges of corruption have landed on the doorsteps of some of the Northern League commissioners—who are, by their own definition, incorruptible.

One of the cultural consequences of this less-than-edifying discovery: an exhibition of international scope planned for the city's central Castello Sforzesco was abruptly canceled without its chief curator, Adelina von Furstenberg, being notified. Then there's the case of the Piccolo Teatro di Milano, whose funding, in its fiftieth anniversary year, was decreased by about a billion lire—a perfect example of public officials' disinterest in cultural affairs. Moreover, construction of a new building for the Piccolo has been

on hold for almost a decade. The project, backed by the theater's former director Giorgio Strehler, was blocked midway by bureaucratic snags and a lack of funds. The city's new government quickly resumed construction, but work soon stopped again and Strehler was dismissed, resulting in a scandal and a request that the Ministry of Culture resolve the decades-old problem. Walter Veltroni, the new minister of the center-left government (despised by the Northern League), intervened directly, appointing none other than Jacques Lang, the former French minister of culture, as the acting director of the Piccolo; yet it's doubtful that Lang can accomplish anything before stepping aside for a permanent director. So much for the Northern League's promise to streamline bureaucracy: compare this situation with the construction of the Bastille Opera in Paris, which took but a few short years despite the controversy that preceded it.

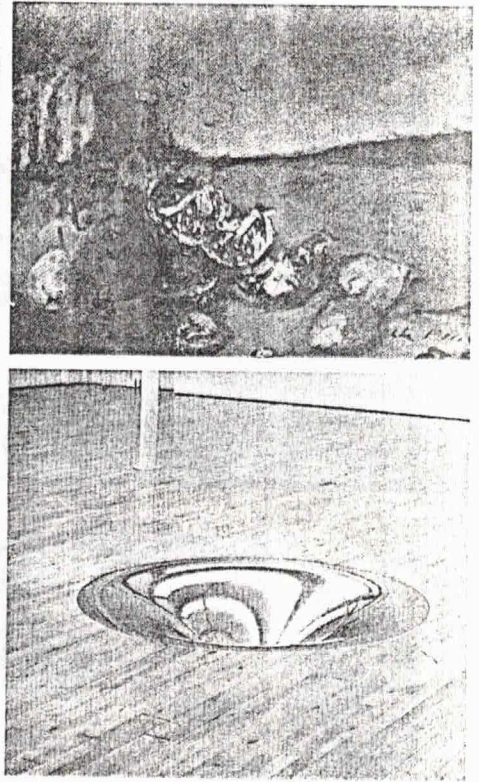
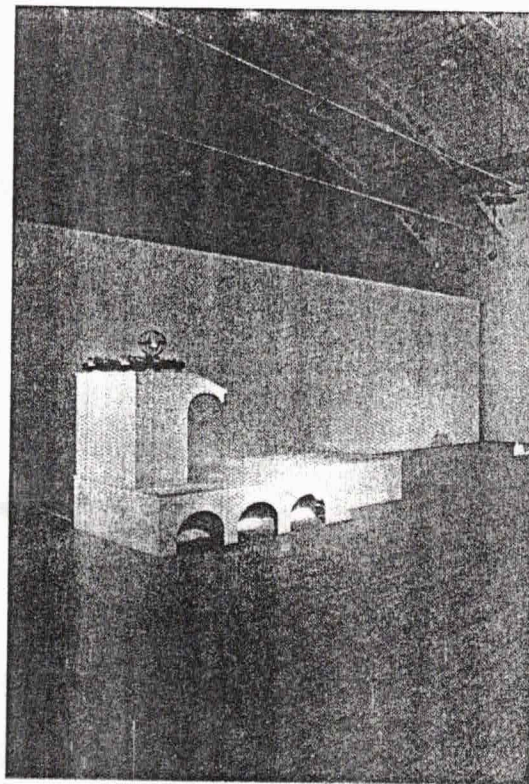
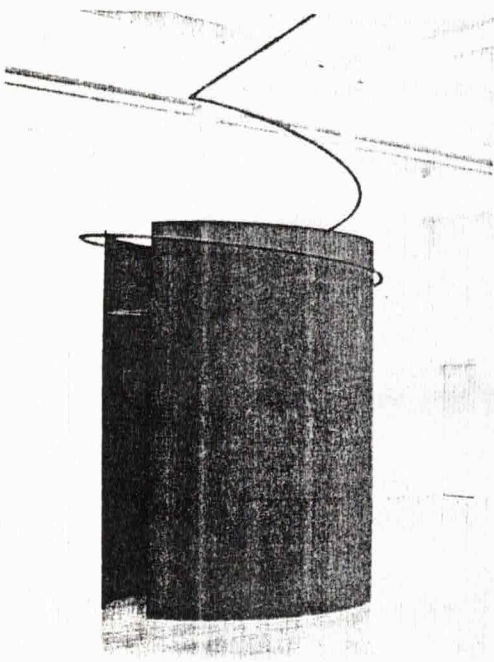
Over the long haul, the decline of Milan's civic support of the arts is reflected predominantly in the exhibition policies of its public spaces. During the corrupt Socialist era, large shows of

ancient and Modern art were mounted at the Palazzo Reale, next to the Duomo. Despite suspiciously inflated budgets, these were almost always favorably received by both critics and the public. However, the past three years have brought only scaled-down exhibitions of equally diminished significance. Even those devoted to masters such as Malevich and Giacometti put Milan in a bad light, since these artists received more exhaustive retrospectives elsewhere in Europe—at Paris' Musée d'Art Moderne, the Stedelijk, and Cologne's Ludwig Museum.

Meanwhile, a paltry exhibit of Enzo Cucchi's work, shown for the first time in a public space in Milan, was installed in a wing of the Palazzo Reale. And a recent survey of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painting at the same venue, sponsored by Giorgio Armani, got a very poor write-up from prominent art critic Albert Arbasino. In his amusingly harsh review, Arbasino asked Armani why the awful colors used for the exhibition walls—lilac and lemon yellow for Picasso and Van Gogh—don't turn up in the fashion designer's showrooms or on his

Left to right:  
Jonathan De Pa,  
Donato D'Urbino,  
and Paolo Lomazzi,  
"Blow," 1967,  
inflatable armchair  
in polyvinyl chloride  
Corradino D'Ascani  
Piaggio "Vespa"  
scooter, 1946.

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runways. In the end, Arbasino voiced a question many of us continually ask: Why can't Milan manage to successfully compete with Paris, London, and Berlin?

There are a few public institutions in Milan that function efficiently, or compare favorably with those abroad. The Triennale is responsible for a recent historical survey of the past thirty years of contemporary Italian design as well as a major exhibition of Giuseppe Terragni, a master of Rationalism. Under a new director, the Accademia di Brera has initiated a strong exhibition program (although the commissioner of culture refused to finance one important show, a survey of Milanese sculpture from Canova to Fontana). A school for museum curators similar to the one that used to exist at the Magasin in Grenoble was established this year. Of course, there is also the Teatro alla Scala. Indeed, one might say that La Scala has been responsible for the only truly noteworthy cultural event in recent years, one that has been written up in both the Italian and the international press: the discovery of a new *Traviata*. No soprano has come close to

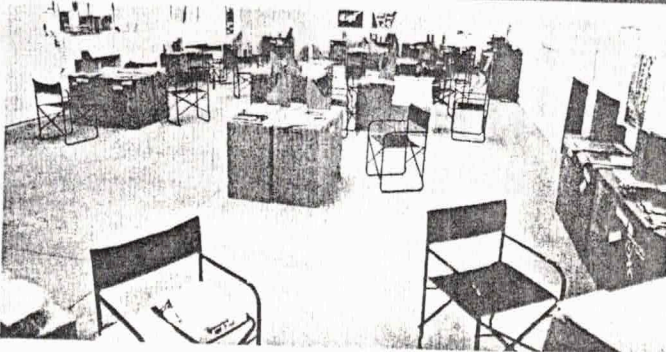
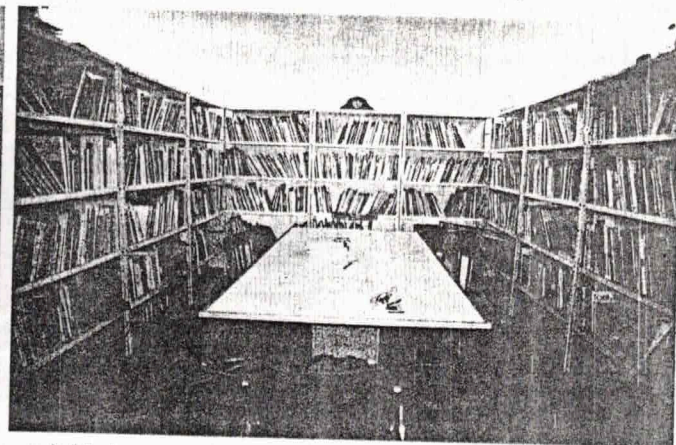
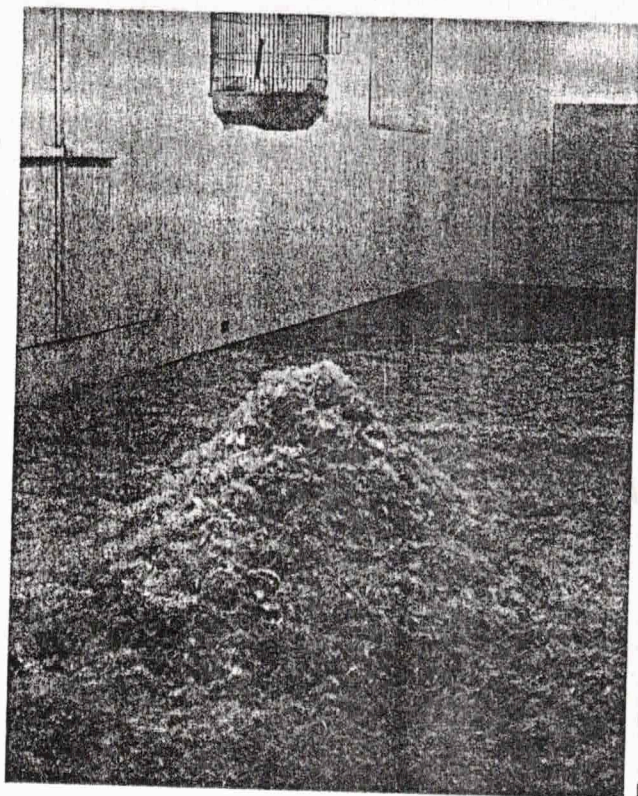
Maria Callas' legendary 1956 interpretation of the opera (directed by Carlo Maria Giulini, produced by Luchino Visconti), though Mirella Freni and Anna Moffo made valiant efforts in 1964. It was only in the early '90s that the young Tiziana Fabbricini was able to measure up to Callas in terms of both vocal range and interpretive capacity. Fabbricini was discovered by Giovanni Tenconi, a tireless organizer of musical events and president of the Associazione dei Loggionisti (members' association), which brings together the music lovers of Milan. Tenconi pointed her out to maestro Riccardo Muti. In 1990 Muti's passion for sticking to the original score resulted in the staging of a full-length version of *La Traviata* (which not even Callas had attempted) under the direction of Liliana Cavani. Fabbricini's performance was received with acclaim, and numerous repeat performances have been insufficient to satisfy public demand.

Still, what is said about Italy in general also applies to Milan: only those institutions managed by the private sector function properly. This is especially true of the visual arts, when one con-

siders the number of thriving nonprofit spaces, foundations, and galleries. Care of Viafarini, a computerized archive of young artists working in Milan that is especially helpful to critics and curators organizing shows of emerging artists, was conceived and organized by two existing nonprofit spaces—Viafarini, named for the street on which it's located; and Care of, in Cusano Milanino, on the outskirts of Milan. Elsewhere in Italy, similar initiatives to promote contemporary art and "local" culture are proving effective; and in some cities—Venice, for one—this sort of activity has received the encouragement it deserves. Yet Milan's cultural commission has refused to grant funding for the archive, although moneys have been found for the sports and youth commissions.

Private foundations for Modern and contemporary art are perhaps the most interesting innovation in Milan, and date back only a few years. Considering its small exhibition space, the Fondazione Antonio Mazzotta, directed by the publisher of exhibition catalogues, has already sponsored some ambitious events since its

Left to right, top to bottom: Ettore Mattiacci, *Catena spaziale*, 1992-93, Corten steel, installation view. Mario Airò, *Satellite of Love*, 1997, wood, turntable, mixer, CD player, and speakers, ca. 67 x 109 1/2 x 69", installation view. Filippo De Pisis, *Natura morta con i melograni (Still life with pomegranate)*, 1931, oil on canvas, ca. 19 1/2 x 25 1/2". Anish Kapoor, *Turning The World Inside Out*, 1995, steel, ca. 47 1/2 x 47 1/2 x 47", installation view.



Clockwise from left:  
 Alex Plnna, *Mi è sembrato di vedere un gatto (I think I saw a pussycat)*, 1997, dyed feathers and cage. Installation view. *Library of Care of*, Cusano Milanino (Milan).  
 "Interlace Access," 1996. Installation view. Vifarini, Milan.

founding in 1988. Shows have been devoted to Boccioni, never-before-shown works by Chagall, Andy Warhols from a private collection, the husband-and-wife team Mikhail Larianov-Natalia Goncharova, the Bauhaus, and most recently, the '60s as seen through visual art (design, architecture, and photography). The Fondazione Prada focuses exclusively on contemporary art, and the designer's showroom has featured exhibitions of work from Eliseo Mattiacci, David Smith, Anish Kapoor (a particularly beautiful installation that included some site-specific sculptures), and Michael Heizer, who radically transformed the space with his gigantic stone slabs.

As for the private galleries, they constitute the most positive and stimulating cultural force in the city, affording the art public firsthand information about the current international art scene. In recent months several galleries, including Salvatore Ala, have reopened; others, such as Gian Enzo Sperone, have inaugurated new spaces; and still others—Lia Rumma, for instance—plan to follow suit.

Claudia Gian Ferrari has completely reorga-

nized. Transforming the gallery inherited from her father into a Novecento archive, she has collaborated with public institutions to organize exhibitions of the works of Mario Sironi, Filippo De Pisis, and Arturo Martini, while devoting her own gallery space to the work of Julian Schnabel, Lawrence Carroll, and, soon, David Salle. Ferrari is also collaborating with Sperone on his new Milanese venture. The well-established Marconi galleries have been passed down from parent to child: Gio Marconi, who succeeded his father Giorgio, has exhibited recent work by Emilio Vedova and soon will present the work of Joan Miró, but he also shows the more provocative work of the Chapman brothers and early Robert Mapplethorpe. Christian Stein is now located in the Palazzo that houses Lucio Fontana's studio and the foundation named after the artist. In this new space we have been treated to a splendid show of Giulio Paolini's work and a selection of Antoni Tàpies' recent pieces.

A few less blue-chip venues merit particular mention, having changed the face of the city with an international perspective that public

institutions persistently ignore. Veterans such as Massimo De Carlo, Le Case D'Arte, and Studio Guenzani have brought us the work of Marlene Dumas, Felix Gonzales Torres, Paul McCarthy, Cindy Sherman, Matt Mullican, and Charles Ray, and recently have shown younger artists such as Lisa Yuskavage. It is thanks in part to these galleries that Italians Maurizio Cattelan and Mario Airò have received international recognition.

Recently, other galleries have followed their example. Monica De Cardenas quickly gained the necessary prestige to dedicate shows to Thomas Struth, Gabriel Orozco, Richard Wentworth, and Chiara Dynys, and Emi Fontana (who shows the work of very young artists, such as the Lovett-Codagnone team) exhibited Renée Green, Rirkrit Tiravanija, and Olafur Eliasson. Fontana must also be credited with mounting an especially significant solo exhibition of the work of Robert Smithson—the only private European gallery to have done so in many years. □

Giorgio Verzotti writes regularly for *Artforum*.

Translated from the Italian by Marguerite Shore.