

ITALIAN WAVE

10 June - 24 September 2025

Opening: Tuesday, 10 June 2025, 5 - 8pm

Tornabuoni Arte Roma | Via Bocca di Leone 88

«Today, the artist faces once again a condition of bewildering freedom. There are no longer any aesthetic canons. Who can now decide for everyone what, in our poly-aesthetic universe, can still be considered art? There is only a vast, boundless, diffused energy. The challenge lies in harnessing it.»

— Francesca Alinovi, *The Italian Wave*, 1980

Tornabuoni Arte Rome presents **ITALIAN WAVE**, an exhibition that traces the transformations and pluralism of artistic languages, the expressive explorations, and the strong tendency toward multidisciplinary that characterized a vibrant and pivotal period between the mid-1970s and the early 1980s.

Recalling in its title the significant group show curated by **Francesca Alinovi** (Parma, 1948 - Bologna, 1983) in 1980 in New York, the exhibition showcases the work of eight leading figures from the Italian scene: Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Nicola De Maria, Aldo Mondino, Luigi Ontani, Mimmo Paladino, and Mario Schifano.

Alinovi, a pioneering researcher and among the most innovative critics of her generation, described in the text accompanying the New York exhibition the notion of the Italian Wave as an artistic and cultural moment—Italian, yet also international—marked by a renewed emphasis on individual creativity: *a universality that celebrates the subject, and nurtures the **idea of the individual** by valuing the inner world [...] a condition of free and mutually rewarding coexistence of **all possible material means**.*

In open reaction to the dominance of Conceptual, Minimalist, and Arte Povera practices, the artists return to traditional mediums—such as painting, mosaic, printmaking, and textile work—reviving them through personal expression, gesture, symbolism, and a free use of color. **Tradition** thus becomes **material to be reinvented**: from art history to pop culture, from mythology to religion, from literature to the visual archaeology of everyday life, and even distant traditions, in a constant interplay between figuration and abstraction.

Within this narrative framework emerges the return to painting marked by the **Transavanguardia** movement, which gained international recognition at the 1980 Venice Biennale in the “Aperto 80” section curated by Achille Bonito Oliva and Harald Szeemann. Yet two figures had already anticipated the experimental energy of the coming decade during the 1970s—with some early signs appearing in the late 1960s: **Aldo Mondino** and **Mario Schifano**. Both defy rigid categorization, embracing cross-disciplinary trajectories that go beyond painting in the strict sense, opening up to diverse media, cultural references, and imaginative dimensions.

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Schifano was not only a painter but also a filmmaker, photographer, and musician. He crossed the second half of the Italian twentieth century with a pop, visionary, and feverish spirit. In the exhibition, his work is accompanied by the sounds of **Le Stelle di Mario Schifano**, the psychedelic and experimental music group that, on December 28, **1967**, presented **Italy's first multimedia live show** at the **Piper Club** in Rome. Their record becomes the exhibition's soundtrack, stimulating interaction between image and sound and evoking an expanded conception of art—one in which the work is never self-contained.

Mondino moves between **irony and sophistication**. He reinterprets tradition with a postmodern taste for playfulness and pastiche, in a constant cross-contamination between high and popular culture (*Arlecchino storico e il suo strumento 75*, 1971, and *Calpestare le uova*, 2003).

Within this plurality of languages, the exhibition is enriched by the presence of artists' books and editions produced by the historic **Litografia Bulla** in Rome. Among these is *Prisca* (2012) by **Enzo Cucchi**, which—together with the exhibited works ranging from painting (Fiori di Luce, 1996) to drawing and sculpture (*Untitled*, 1987)—expresses this **fluidity across genres and worlds**.

Similarly, *Bestiario* (1980) by **Sandro Chia**—seventeen poems about animals, birds, and fish by Roberto Triana Arenas, illustrated in a way that highlights the similarities between animals and human beings—appears alongside his paintings and mosaic in the exhibition, in a continuous dialogue between narrative and visual memory.

In **Nicola De Maria's** large-scale painting *La Russia Sovietica* (1981), art turns inward, reconnecting with its internal drives and imaginative core—what Achille Bonito Oliva described as “the labyrinth,” a space of introspective exploration and invention (*La Trans-Avanguardia Italiana*, Flash Art, 1980). The artwork thus becomes capable of reflecting the anxieties of the present and giving shape to the complexity of reality (N. Rosenthal, C. Joachimides, N. Serota, *A New Spirit in Painting*, 1981).

Meaningless Stone (1990) by **Francesco Clemente** enters into dialogue with the works of **Mimmo Paladino**. Blending archaic symbolism and contemporary languages in a visual lexicon shaped by paper, canvas, bronze, wood, and pieces of bread (*Porta d'oriente*, 1989), Paladino's works evoke a spiritual and mythical universe where classicism and modernity, silence and matter coexist.

The exhibition opens with **Luigi Ontani's** video *Ombrofago* (2008). Ontani, the “devourer of shadows” (Alinovi, *Photography: Illusion or Revelation?*, 1981), constructs a baroque and theatrical universe in which myth, mask, fable, and eroticism merge into a sophisticated, ambiguous, and metamorphic visual narrative. His own image (*Dafne e Deficiente*, 1986) becomes both expressive medium and mythological figure, in a practice that stages an ongoing reflection on identity, disguise, and representation.

On view until September 24, 2025

Opening hours:

Tuesday - Saturday h 10.00-13.00 / 14.00-19.00

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