

**"It doesn't matter what, it doesn't matter how..."
Mattia Moreni as seen by Italo Calvino
(towards AI)**

January 30th - April 11th, 2025

Spirited diabolical lunatic irrational capricious bizarre, many adjectives can be applied to this young painter of unbridled imagination and proud intentions, who matured in Turin, which is already a boreal city even if storks do not yet nest there and the roofs of the houses are much less sloping than in Ulm or Nuremberg.

From Buratti to Bosia, Damilano, Quaglino, several of our painters have derived a certain youthful manner from Nordic or more properly Flemish examples to keep it in an illustrative and folkloristic dialectal order, and then abandoned it for other experiences or retreats to less treacherous terrain: but far from the diabolical thresholds with so much splendour touched by the incomparable masters of the long Middle Ages up there.

Mattia Moreni, on the other hand, wants to tell us that he has gone far beyond into that world forbidden to mortals of little imagination, and that he has brought back venomous mandrakes, nests so full of birds that they ferment in a maceration of feathers, fruits enchanted by the

moon, a strip of Oberon's cloak.

We who love all fairy tales gladly listen to them, pretending to believe that waters coloured with harmless ingredients are really deadly; and even if we realise at once that Oberon's cloak is made of rayon and that it is dangerous to fly on certain cheap carpets, we do not cry mystification, but feel willing to encourage it as long as it becomes so skilful as to enchant us too. For now, the macabre carnival of his paintings does not drag us along, but leaves us interested spectators and even applauding the author's courageous determination; but some of his drawings really do tell us about insights that we have not yet seen explained by painters at home, such as the evil that feathers do when they grow, the anguish to get out of chaos, to disentangle, to metamorphose. And this is no small thing, in spite of tonal painting.

Italo Calvino

"Mattia Moreni" in "Agorà", II, 3, 1946, p. 26

*The exhibition dedicated to **Mattia Moreni** in the historic Bologna venue of **Galleria d'Arte Maggiore g.a.m.** not only celebrates the artist's research and innate non-conformist spirit, but also 'really tells us about intuitions that we had not yet seen', as **Italo Calvino** wrote in 1946 in the text that also accompanies this exhibition, as exceptional curator. To follow the developments of Moreni's artistic practice, visible in the exhibition, means retracing some of the fundamental junctions in the history of art of the last century that the artist always experienced as a protagonist and as an anticipator and that Galleria Maggiore has illustrated, under the scientific care of **Enrico Crispolti**, in the **General Catalogue**, which culminated the long work of Galleria Maggiore as the artist's Archive. The exhibition, curated by **Roberta Calarota**, dwells on some decisive moments of his continuous evolution: the great and fortunate informal season, the famous "watermelon" series up to the last part of his research dedicated to the 'Humanoids': a reflection on the impact of technology and information technology on our everyday life, which not only anticipates the current debate on **AI - artificial intelligence**, but also makes his work the first to be confronted with modern-day innovation. A cycle that consecrates Moreni as an authentic forerunner and a lucid visionary, who was able to understand as early as the 1980s the direction, not at all taken for granted at the time, in which our society would move at great speed in the following decades.*

The long and articulated artistic career of Mattia Moreni (Pavia, 1920 - Brisighella, 1999) began with an initial approach to the early 20th century currents of the fauve, expressionist and later cubist matrix, looking above all at Picasso and Léger. In 1952, he joined Gruppo degli Otto, founded by Lionello Venturi, with Birolli, Afro, Corpora, Morlotti, Vedova, Santomaso and Turcato, to which he adhered until his turn towards informal painting, in fact finding a solution to the precarious abstract-concrete balance typical of the Group of Eight. Some of the works in the exhibition belong to this period. Typical of the Informal production are a strong, almost violent graphic sign and an increasing focus on the theme of the relationship between man and nature - a constant in Moreni's production, which led art historian Francesco Arcangeli to include him among the last naturalists.

In the works of the informal period, Moreni produces apocalyptic visions in which the impetuous, deliberately barbaric sign disrupts nature. At the same time, the evolution of his style sees a thickening of the pictorial layer and a more pronounced emotional tension. If on the one hand he chooses to go against logical-rational principles, on the other hand he makes a return to the full concreteness of the linguistic process through the tools of painting and 'other' than reality. For the Informals, it becomes necessary to upset the traditional view of the world.

From 1964, Moreni devoted himself to the famous cycle of the Angurie, collected in a solo room at the 1972 Venice Biennale. Initially naturalistic, the watermelons undergo disturbing enlargements and metamorphoses over time, until they take on sexual metaphorical meanings.

Moreni's last artistic phase is marked by the progress of information technology and electronic technologies in the last decades of the 20th century, which greatly affected the artist. Between 1995 and 1999, he produced a series of paintings with humanoid figures characterised by a body integrated by technology with monstrous prostheses and an anthropomorphic appearance. In the Humanoid series, the colours, very bright in this phase, are sometimes applied directly from the tube onto the canvas. Explicitly expressionist in style, the canvases also often feature cryptic inscriptions that anticipate our times. Moreni sensed that in a world pervaded by technology, art, but also our own bodies, our minds, our approach to enjoyment, would no longer be the same.

In 1946, his first solo exhibition was organised at the La Bussola gallery in Turin. In 1948 he made his debut at the 24th Venice Biennale, where he exhibited regularly until 1956, and at the 5th Quadriennale in Rome. In 1953 he took part in the travelling exhibition of Gruppo degli Otto and in the São Paulo Biennale, and two years later he was invited to the first edition of Documenta in Kassel. 1956 was the year of his first solo exhibition at the 28th Venice Biennale, followed by the 1960 and 1972 editions.

Moreni's works are part of the permanent collections of numerous Italian and international museums, among them: the Museo del Novecento in Milan, the Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Turin, the Ludwig Museum in Cologne, the Mart in Rovereto, the MAMbo in Bologna, the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence and the Galleria d'Arte Vero Stoppioni in Santa Sofia (Forlì-Cesena), where some of his last works are kept.