

SANDRO CHIA
Through Fire, Into the Sign
29 May - 25 July 2025

*Galleria d'Arte Maggiore g.a.m. is glad to present at its Bologna venue a tribute to **Sandro Chia**—one of the most influential figures of the Transavanguardia movement—featuring a selection of ceramic works first shown in the exhibition “Sandro Chia. Ceramica vs Disegno 1:0” held at the MIC – International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza in 2011, alongside large-scale oil paintings. The exhibition highlights the artist’s technical versatility and undeniable mastery of materials, as well as his ability to successfully bring together contrasting worlds—whether in terms of material, technique, style, or subject matter.*

The works selected for the exhibition “*Through Fire, Into the Sign*” offer an intriguing perspective on Sandro Chia’s unique position within the Transavanguardia movement. Born in the 1980s and theorized by Achille Bonito Oliva, this artistic current aimed to recapture the viewer’s eye through a return to formalism—rooted in Italian tradition—and distanced itself from the abstraction that had dominated the previous decades. In line with these principles, Chia stands out for his openness to cross-disciplinary experimentation and his penchant for dialogue between various painting and sculptural techniques. The exhibition celebrates this distinctive drive for experimentation by focusing on two complementary poles of his research: painting and ceramics.

Frames, globes and gorilla heads—created at the historic Bottega Gatti in Faenza—inhabit the gallery spaces, showcasing a wide range of subjects that draw equally from high culture and popular imagery. Among them, the *Frames* are perhaps the most direct example of dialogue between two different techniques: these works are composed not only of a ceramic structure, but also of a drawing on paper placed inside the frame by the artist. What emerges is a “disturbing, explosive combination,” in the artist’s own words, as recounted in an interview with Franco Bertoni published in the Faenza exhibition catalogue. This combination becomes a true clash of titans, as Chia further explains: “Ceramics withstand fire; it is virtually indestructible. Drawing is paper—it fears even light, it dissolves in water, fire incinerates it. Because of its fragility, drawing must have earned its high reputation by other means [...]”. If ceramics, with its strength and resilience, triumphs in terms of physical endurance, drawing has asserted its authority along a different path—one of line and concept. This vortex of contrasting materials doesn’t stop at the ceramic-drawing dynamic, but also continues in the ceramic-bronze dialectic, as seen in the *Globes* series: bronze bases support ceramic hemispheres that appear to deflate, crystallizing the tension between permanence and fragility. The titles range from straightforward descriptions to more cryptic references, encouraging the viewer to return for a second look—such as the *gorilla heads* that become *Sorrowful Grandfathers*. From the Faenza catalogue: “As I was saying, the title or the text accompanying the painting serves to suggest a state of mind, to create a suspension, a doubt. After reading it, you look at the image again, even more astonished and more perplexed, but you see more.”

The large-scale canvases that complete the exhibition—such as *Catching the Stars* and *Happy Birthday* (both from 2011)—were chosen for their painterly quality, embodying the hallmarks of Chia’s mature style: corpulent, solitary, and central figures take on monumental roles in timeless scenes rendered in vivid, saturated colors, suspended between everyday life and heroism.

The exhibition thus offers a multifaceted portrait of the artist, emphasizing his eclecticism and his ability to reveal the unique strengths and vulnerabilities of different expressive mediums.