

Nouveau Musée National de Monaco – Villa Paloma

PIER PAOLO CALZOLARI Casa ideale

Villa Paloma
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56 boulevard du Jardin Exotique
Monaco



Nouveau Musée National de Monaco – Villa Paloma

Pier Paolo Calzolari – *Casa ideale*

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Press release

Pier Paolo Calzolari is known for the formal originality of his multi-faceted practice (painting and sculpture, but also performances he looks on as “acts of passion”), which has often made use of such organic materials as tobacco leaves, fire and frost to create “work-installations” that challenge the limits of contemporary art.

The exhibition at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco brings together works he produced between the late 1960s and 2014. Titled *Casa ideale* (Ideal Home) after a “text-manifesto” written in 1968, and spread across Villa Paloma’s three floors, the exhibition plays on the codes of interiors, that is to say the codes of the personal that echo the existentialism of the artist’s production. Through such works as *Luna* (Moon, 1979) and still lifes produced in the mid-2000s that combine monochrome painting and sculptural elements, the exhibition shows that, since 1972, the Italian artist has tackled the most important questions raised by contemporary painting. He has developed a form of figurative and metaphysical abstraction, as illustrated by the installation *Tiara con cera e chiodi* (Tiara with Wax and Nails, 2006). The unique resonance of the materials in his work can be linked to the principles of transmutation used in medieval alchemy, and also to the hermetism of the esoteric writings of Hermes Trismegistus. Calzolari’s work is striking on account of its infinitely poetic nature, and surprising owing to its long-acknowledged ability to regenerate itself by constantly producing new images attuned to the demands of the contemporary world.

A retrospective exhibition, *Casa ideale* is a rare opportunity to discover the world of Pier Paolo Calzolari, an artist who has made his mark on art history through his customarily unconventional approach to the various practices in the visual arts.

The show will be accompanied by a catalogue co-published by the NMNM and Humboldt Books, featuring exhibition views, an essay by Andea Viliani, an interview with the artist by Guillaume de Sardes, and texts by Valérie Da Costa, Didier Semin and Stéphane Vacquier.

Biography of Pier Paolo Calzolari

Born in Bologna in 1943, Pier Paolo Calzolari now lives and works in Lisbon. His grandfather introduced him to traditional painting techniques when he was still a child. He later studied at the academies of fine arts in Bologna and Rome but did not complete his courses. He began his artistic career as a painter influenced by American “germinal” painting, before quickly turning to other, freer forms of artistic expression, such as installation, sculpture and performance art.

His production first came to notice in Italy in 1967 with his performance installation *// Filtro e Benvenuto all'Angelo* (The Filter and Welcome to the Angel), which he created in his Studio Bentivoglio in Bologna. He rapidly became associated with Arte Povera, an Italian art movement of the 1960s and '70s distinguished by its use of humble materials and its emphasis on the dimensions of ephemerality and process in art. He became internationally known with exhibitions in New York and Paris mounted by the Galerie Sonnabend. In 1972, he broke the boundaries of a period of art that he considered already finished when he produced a reflection on painting with his composite work *Lasciare il posto*, which combined monochrome painting, frosted sculpture, elements of still life, and performance art embodied by Calzolari's physical and sonic presence.

Regularly exhibited around the world, Pier Paolo Calzolari's works are held in leading private collections, foundations and museums, such as the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Guggenheim Museum in New York. Today he is considered one of the most important and innovative artists of the post-war period. A major exponent of Arte Povera, Calzolari has been able to keep pace with the times. Today, at nearly 80 years of age, he continues to create works of disconcerting freshness and irony. He is rightly regarded as an influential figure in Italian and international contemporary art.

Exhibition layout

Texts by Didier Semin

The exhibition “Op Losse Schroeven”, held at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1969, is generally considered to have been one of the first expressions of what would come to be called contemporary art. Pier Paolo Calzolari took part in it and contributed to the catalogue with a text that has since become famous. Titled “casa ideale” (ideal house), the vocabulary he employed is characteristic of a manifesto: “I wish it to be known”, “I can confirm”, “I want” ...

But Calzolari’s ideal home was far from the often austere ideals of avant-garde architects: his manifesto was more a declaration of love to passion, pleasure, and the intelligence of the senses: “I wish it to be known that I want expansion, democracy, madness, alchemy, insanity, rhythm, horizontality. I wish it to be known that I do not want moments of knowledge, but that I want to be as alive as it is possible to be and as expanded as possible. I want to make clear just how important that is. That what matters most is the smile that floats around a cat’s face and skull.” His ideal house has nothing to do with the “*machines à habiter*” that Le Corbusier loved, and that Dalí hated (“to say that a house is a machine for living,” he said, “is the most frightful and masochistic thing there is. The only architecture possible can only be made by people who have a keen sense of pleasure”). Calzolari’s “*Casa ideale*” is a small world inhabited by works of art, those of his friends bound up in the Arte Povera adventure (the igloos he refers to are undoubtedly those of Mario Merz, the wire slippers those knitted by Marisa Merz, the paper ball the sphere of compressed newspapers that Michelangelo Pistoletto had rolled through the streets of Turin), as well as his own: “I imagine a house where I can live elementary and inventive, where I will live with five red-eyed albino animals, where I will have three leaning towers of ice that will constantly melt onto a strip of white felt, where a silver thread and three bells will be stretched between two sticks of glue, a house where I will find reality and the entrance with a doormat and a frost earpiece repeating the inscription/be crazy angel artist...”. Villa Paloma is an old private residence that has been turned into a museum: it was the perfect opportunity for Calzolari to create his ideal house.

First floor

In his “*Casa ideale*”, Calzolari celebrates ferns, the singing of crickets, three-dimensional writing, white cotton fleece, and alchemy, among other things. A heterogeneous list? Maybe, but no more so than the disorderly stream of thoughts that flows into our mind every day. Visitors who have read Calzolari will immediately find themselves in familiar territory. Not ferns in the strict sense of the word, but dried tobacco leaves, clover, roses, cotton fleece, and phrases like “handwritten in neon”, if we dare use that expression. Not real cricket song, but a banner made of lead and burnt salt (the alchemist’s materials) on which we can make out: “l’aria vibra del ronzio degli insetti” (the air vibrates with the buzzing of insects), conjuring up thoughts of the music of the Mediterranean coast that we love without admitting that it’s

actually music. And *still lifes* as well. Calzolari's works that are given this subtitle are like low reliefs, blocks of matter that project in front of a canvas, like those objects by Morandi attempting to escape from the picture in which they are painted. This in no way disparages the *Still Life* genre: Jannis Kounellis, another of Calzolari's friends, said (in the text *La Selvaggina* [Game]) that today, when it has sometimes become difficult to represent – in other words, to imitate – things, it is legitimate to present them, quite simply, in the small theatre represented by museums and galleries. Perhaps that's how we should understand the slightly mysterious claim of the person living in the "*Casa ideale*": "I'd like to say that I want my miming to be the democratic miming of things": not always delegating to painting and sculpture the poetry of forms and materials, but democratically giving those forms and materials a direct voice! Sometimes Calzolari titles his works *Valori Plastici* (Plastic Values), which may be surprising, given that "Valori Plastici" was the title of the magazine founded by Giorgio de Chirico and Carlo Carrà, which from 1918 to 1922 defended the notion of the return to Italian tradition and craftsmanship, and atmospheric painting. But let's be clear, Calzolari tells us: maybe "Valori Plastici" (the review) was just giving the wrong answers to some very good questions about reality and poetry, the present and the past. Evidently, Calzolari doesn't jettison our past and history; he holds them in high respect, even if in his own way. However, respect for the past, and its preservation in the forms of the new, do not entail either rigidity or a spirit of seriousness: you may be surprised to see a black door in Villa Paloma, one that opens onto nothing, but which a small, mechanical toy pig insists on passing through. The door is modelled on one in Pier Paolo Calzolari's house, and the kitsch toy pig was bought at the shop in a motorway service station, but perhaps he's come to listen to the sermon that St Francis (an important figure in Italian history and in Calzolari's imagination) once gave to pigs!

Second floor

Until the end of the 16th century, says Michel Foucault, the Western European vision of the world was founded on the idea of resemblance. The universe was explained through analogies, what could be seen on a small scale (the "microcosm" of the alchemists) provided an echo of large-scale phenomena (the "macrocosm"), blood vessels were the rivers of the human body, nuts were a cure for madness because a nut appeared like a small model of a skull that enclosed the two cerebral hemispheres. Science had already discovered many things before the Renaissance, but it happily mixed mathematics and metaphors, and did not shrink from obeying laws that, even if they were not just, were beautiful. In Calzolari's "*Casa ideale*", we find something of the poetry and mysteries of the astronomy from when the Earth was thought to lie at the centre of the universe. A large table called *Tolomeo* (Ptolemy) has been set up as a tribute to one of the West's first great astronomers. It is made from refrigerated copper so that a layer of immaculate frost is created on its edges by condensation. This melts gently to form a small pool inside: what we see is a tiny landscape, apparently unchanging but altering with time, and which, at the Villa Paloma, will reflect moonlight painted on a large wooden panel covered with paper. However, on leaving *Tolomeo*, the visitor will come before a large painting of a moonless night, a sumptuous assemblage of different types of charred wood (chestnut, Lebanese cedar, oak, walnut), no doubt a tribute to one of Calzolari's great predecessors – Alberto Burri – who often subjected his works to burning, but it is also a portrait of the

innumerable shades of black. For physicists, black is the absence of colour, for artists it is the richest of colours, the colour of light absorbed, waiting for the glance that will return it to life.

Third floor

What would an ideal home be like without beds, mirrors or maxims on the wall (or the ceiling, as in Montaigne's library)? Calzolari's house has all these. But don't expect a show-house designed for ordinary life. The metal-covered panel inscribed "portrait, gold and mirror" doesn't reflect an image. The mathematical sign for infinity is inscribed on a surface of salt that will never be used for cooking, while a painting proclaims "*il mio letto così come deve essere*" (my bed as it should be)... A curious aphorism it would seem, except in Calzolari's world, as on six beds – six white mattresses to be exact, lined up as though in a dormitory – words written in neon invite the viewer to think: "my work or my stubborn art/grasping/ my own hand my free hand/ the air vibrates with the buzzing of insects/ without other smells than mine, without other mutterings than mine". Where's the meaning in all that? It's in the very form of the question we sometimes ask, despite no one thinking of asking the meaning of a Bach suite, or translating Rimbaud's *Bateau ivre* into prose. There isn't just one meaning, there are a thousand of them. With Calzolari's work, we find ourselves confronted by a lexicon from which nothing is missing, but in which a facetious grammarian would enjoy shuffling the pages to produce a strictly poetical order, to which we must surrender without seeking to correct it, in the same way that we surrender to the alternative reality of dreams. The "*Casa ideale*" is a free republic where things always *have their say*. A republic cannot exist without flags: visitors to the "*Casa ideale*" will see that they have not been forgotten. They are flying up on the Villa Paloma's roof...

Public programme

The NMNM seeks to encourage encounters between audiences, works of art and creators. To this end, it organizes guided tours and events in connection with the exhibitions.

The NMNM is also developing, in close collaboration with specialized associations in Monaco and the region, tours for disabled visitors. A program adapted for visually impaired and blind visitors is available on reservation and visits in sign language are also possible. Groups from AMAPEI have been regularly welcomed for several years.

Guided tours

The museum's mediation team offers guided tours

Without reservation:

Thursday at 12:30 pm (30 min)

Saturday at 11am (45 min)

Sunday at 3pm (45 min)

Upon reservation

Every day for groups (from 10 people)

Rates:

6€ per person (free for children under 13, school groups, associations of the Principality) + entrance ticket

Family weekends

The *Ateliers en famille*: every Saturday at 3 pm during the exhibition periods, free of charge after payment of the entrance fee if applicable. Suitable for children aged 7 to 12. Reservation via mail public@nmnm.mc

The treasure hunt in the gardens of the Villas: Every weekend during the exhibition period, take the whole family on a treasure hunt to discover the works on display in the gardens of the Villa Paloma and the Villa Sauber. Self-guided activity, suitable for children between 7 and 12 years old

Children workshops

During the school holidays, the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco offers workshops for young people in connection with its current exhibitions.

Around the exhibition « Pier Paolo Calzolari – *Casa ideale* »

Tuesday November 28, 6 :30 pm

Présences réelles : le théâtre aux sources de l'Arte Povera, a talk by Didier Semin

Germano Celant, who popularized the term Arte Povera [Poor Art], was inspired by director Jerzy Grotowski's manifesto "Towards a Poor Theatre". Theater is thus, in itself, present at the bedside of poor art – and Pier Paolo Calzolari's ephemeral, evolving installations are exemplary testimony to this. We'll be looking to see how this movement has, in a general way, re-enacted in the contemporary age the age-old complicity between the "art of time" that is theater and the "arts of space" that are the visual arts.

Born in 1954, Didier Semin was successively curator at the Musée des Sables-d'Olonne, the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and the Mnam/Centre Pompidou, until 1998. He then taught art history at the Beaux-Arts de Paris, from 1998 to 2020. He is the author of numerous articles on contemporary Italian artists, and in 1992 published a comprehensive work entitled *L'Arte Povera* (Éditions du Centre Pompidou), reissued in 2016. He is also author of the catalog for the exhibition "Pier Paolo Calzolari – Casa Ideale", Nouveau Musée National de Monaco – Villa Paloma.

December 1 – 3, 2023, Villa Paloma's videoroom

As part of the "Pier Paolo Calzolari - Casa ideale" exhibition and the "Winter Video Days" program, the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco is screening an extract from *Identifications*, 1970, by Gerry Schum in the Villa Paloma video room, which presents six major Arte Povera figures (Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero Boetti, Pier Paolo Calzolari, Gino de Dominicis, Mario Merz, Gilbert Zorio) in the process of creating a work or a performance.

March 24 and April 7, 2024, Villa Paloma :

For the first time, the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco and the Festival du Printemps des Arts de Monte-Carlo are joining forces to create an event at the crossroads of the visual arts and music. Lara Morciano, Samir Amarouch and Éric Montalbetti have been given carte blanche to compose music inspired by Pier Paolo Calzolari's exhibition at the Villa Paloma.

Born in Bologna in 1943, Pier Paolo Calzolari is considered one of the most important artists of Arte Povera, the Italian art movement of the 1960s and 70s, characterised by the use of poor materials and the ephemeral and processual dimension of art. Calzolari made a name for himself with works marked by a poetic fragility, using unstable natural materials such as frost, water vapour and tobacco leaves.

But aren't fragility and ephemerality also characteristic of music? What remains of it once the instruments have fallen silent? Impressions, memories. These are what Frédéric Audibert (cello), Fanny Vicens (accordion) and Véronique Fèvre (clarinet) will help to leave in listeners' memories. Another tribute to the passage of time.

Acknowledgements

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Guest artist: Pier Paolo Calzolari

General coordination: Emmanuelle Capra, Clémentine Sassi and the whole team of the NMNM

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In conjunction with this exhibition, the **8 Flags** program presents an evocation of Pier Paolo Calzolari's work *Senza titolo* [Mercurial, Closed, Flutterings, Grasped, Dense, Intense, Encircled, Locked in], 1970.

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Exhibition dates : November 17, 2023 – April 7, 2024

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Opening hours

Exhibition open every day

10 am – 6 pm

Summer opening hours in July and August: 11am - 7pm

Entrance rates

NMNM ticket: 6€

Free for everyone under 26 years old, scholar and children groups, Monegasques, members ICOM and CIMAM, job-seekers, disabled people

Free entrance every Sunday

NMNM / Villa Paloma

56, boulevard du Jardin Exotique

+377 98.98.48.60

By bus

Line 2, direction Jardin Exotique, stop Rotondes

Line 3, direction Hector Otto, stop Villa Paloma

Line 5, stop Parc Princesse Antoinette , access through public lift

By car

Parking L'Engelin , Bd du Jardin Exotique

Parking Jardin Exotique, access through Bd. du Jardin Exotique et Bd. de Belgique

From the train station

Bus Line 2, direction Jardin Exotique, stop Villa Paloma

Or Ligne 5, stop Parc Princesse Antoinette, access through public lift

From Villa Paloma to Villa Sauber

Bus line 5

For Villa Paloma, stop Parc Princesse Antoinette, access through public lift

For Villa Sauber, stop Grimaldi Forum – Villa Sauber

The NMNM is a member of **BOTOX[S]** réseau d'art contemporain Alpes & Riviera and **Plein Sud** - le réseau arts visuels du Sud

Press images

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