

IN THE BEGINNING WAS COLOUR. A TRIBUTE TO FRANCO SUMMA

In collaboration with Fondazione Franco Summa, MAXXI L'Aquila is inaugurating a focus exhibition on the Abruzzo master with an exhibition itinerary that also includes the Abruzzo Regional Council and Fondazione Giorgio De Marchis Bonanni d'Ocre Onlus.

From 15 December 2022 to 29 January 2023.

Saturday 17 December at 4:30 pm: *Rainbows and Ladders* family workshop

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L'Aquila, 14 December 2022 – MAXXI L'Aquila is paying homage to Franco Summa, the artist from Abruzzo who passed away in January 2020, with an exhibition that starts at Palazzo Ardinghelli and reaches the Abruzzo Regional Council and Fondazione Giorgio De Marchis Bonanni d'Ocre Onlus.

On display from 15 December 2022 to 29 January 2023 in the three venues, *In principio era il colore. Omaggio a Franco Summa* (In the Beginning Was Colour. A Homage to Franco Summa) is a project conceived by MAXXI L'Aquila, curated by Maria Alicata and realised thanks to the collaboration of Pescara's Fondazione Summa and Fondazione Giorgio De Marchis Bonanni d'Ocre Onlus, under the patronage of the Regional Council and the Municipality of L'Aquila. Lecturers and students from the Restoration, Decoration and Stagecraft courses of the L'Aquila Academy of Fine Arts also collaborated on the various phases of the set-up.

The focus exhibition intends to highlight fundamental passages of the artist's artistic career through an exhibition itinerary designed to restore the variety and complexity of his language, with particular attention to the elements that constitute its foundation, namely form and colour – from the studio works of the early 1960s, which are characterised by essential shapes and colours, to the interventions on urban environments redefined through chromatic and participatory operations.

The exhibition itinerary begins in the project room of MAXXI L'Aquila, which hosts a selection from the series of paintings *Segnaletica Spirituale* (Spiritual Signs, 1971), in which the artist explores the symbolic, spatial and emotional components of colour.

In the rooms of Fondazione de Marchis, a focus will be dedicated to the documentary material of Summa's interventions in cities – the places of choice for his actions and installations – which entail rethinking urban space with a view to sharing, discussion and debate. An exemplary instance of this practice is the collective action *Sentirsi un arcobaleno addosso* (Feeling a rainbow on you, 1975) in which the artist gave 24 prominent Italian critics, artists and gallery owners as many shirts that reproduced the colour scale he had conceived. The exhibition itinerary ends at Palazzo dell'Emiciclo in L'Aquila, i.e. the seat of the Regional Council of Abruzzo, where Summa, after the renovation following the earthquake of 6 April 2009, created the permanent work *I giorni e le opere* (The Days and the Works) – a stained-glass window in which colours and geometric shapes seem to wish a bright future for the city counterpointed by the complete series of sculptures *Fanciulle d'Abruzzo* (Abruzzo Maidens, 2008-2016).

In the words of Bartolomeo Pietromarchi, Director of MAXXI L'Aquila, "MAXXI L'Aquila's tribute to the great artistic personalities of the area continues. After Ettore Spalletti – whose *Colonna nel vuoto* (Column in the Void), conceived and realised for the chapel of Palazzo Ardinghelli, will remain in the Museum as a

permanent work – and Marcello Mariani – the subject of last year's December focus exhibition – we are now deepening our reflection on the work of Franco Summa. This testifies to the Museum's attentive listening to the area and its commitment to highlighting its most significant expressions. Once again, we have worked in concert with other institutions, and I would like to thank the L'Aquila Municipality – with Mayor Pierluigi Biondi – the Regional Council – with President Lorenzo Sospiri – Fondazione Summa and Fondazione Giorgio De Marchis Bonanni d'Ocre Onlus, which enthusiastically accepted our proposal and contributed to its success. I would also like to thank the Academy of Fine Arts for involving its students in the various phases of the exhibition set-up. This is proof of how strong and fruitful MAXXI L'Aquila's link with the area is."

The exhibition can be visited during the different opening hours of the three venues available at www.maxxilaquila.art

THE EXHIBITION PATH The Project Room of MAXXI L'Aquila hosts *Segnaletica Spirituale* (1971), a series of canvases that re-propose the posters produced by Summa starting from 1966 and conceived to be affixed on the streets of Abruzzo towns through the technique of acrylic and oil painting; exemplary in this sense is *Ipotesi di galleria comunitaria* (Hypothesis of a Community Gallery), a participatory intervention that took place in 1971 in San Donato, a suburban district of Pescara, which envisaged the installation of the posters on the façade of the area's covered market. The works, originally conceived as posters, perform an urban and democratic function, because they are able to transfigure the profile of the town and give the work of art a public function, transforming it into an engine of social change.

The second stop along the exhibition route is the headquarters of Fondazione Giorgio De Marchis Bonanni d'Ocre Onlus, which houses works and documents that explore the design dimension of the artist's work. In addition to original documents from the Fondazione Summa archives, which restore the links, relationships and contexts of the artist's activity, the four *Studi dell'arcobaleno culturale* (Studies of the Cultural Rainbow) made between 1973 and 1975 are exhibited for the first time – a rainbow obtained from a double series of twelve colours in a pictorial-architectural composition, symbolising life and its potential. Since 1973, this chromatic sequence has been a recurring element in Summa's work, as in the urban intervention *Un arcobaleno in fondo alla via* (A Rainbow at the End of the Street) or in the action *Sentirsi un arcobaleno addosso*, in which the artist utilised 24 critics, artists, gallery owners as 'living brushes', playing a fundamental role in the environmental redevelopment of the city.

Finally, the itinerary concludes in the spaces of the Abruzzo Regional Council, where, against the backdrop of *I giorni e le opere*, the stained-glass window created by Summa in 2018 to complete the post-earthquake restoration of the Palace, the *Fanciulle d'Abruzzo* – painted ceramic sculptures whose forms seem to allude to an archaic imagery and call to mind ancient idols of a cult rooted in the area – and the *Amare Progettare Essere* (Loving, Planning, Being) canvases – a triad of terms developed by Summa in the context of a public intervention in 1994 – are exhibited. Implemented for the first time on the external wall of a former oil mill in Pescara, the formula now seems to sum up the artist's own approach to design and creation, i.e. practices considered as transformative of reality and the environments inhabited by humans.

Completing the exhibition are *Pastor Angelicus*, a cassock that is transformed into a symbol of luminous transfiguration and asceticism through the use of colour, works from the series *De pictura*, which can be understood as a true reflection on the history of art – and, more specifically, of the medium of painting – and some evidence of monumental projects, such as the model of *Eden futurista* (Futurist Eden), an installation realised in 2017 for the Valagro company in Pescara, and the preparatory drawings for *La Porta del Mare* (The Door to the Sea, 1993) in Pescara, now destroyed, whose colours suggest the possibility of peaceful coexistence between different peoples and cultures.

FAMILY WORKSHOP On Saturday 17 December 2022, 4:30 pm, families with children aged 5 to 11 will be able to participate in the *Rainbows and ladders* workshop, as part of which, inspired by Franco Summa's work, they will make decorations with coloured paper that will then be hung as decorations on the MAXXI

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L'Aquila tree. EUR 5 per child + reduced entrance fee for the accompanying adult. Booking compulsory at www.maxxilaquila.art or at the ticket office until full capacity.

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