

Books set free

**3 May — 6 July
2024**

**Biblioteca
Nazionale Braidense**

Baj. Books set free
Milan, Braidense National Library,
3 May–6 July 2024

Curated by
Angela Sanna, Michele Tavola,
and Marina Zetti

In partnership with
Archivio Baj, Vergiate
Supervisor | Roberta Cerini Baj

Exhibition organised by
Pinacoteca di Brera
and Braidense National Library
General Director | Angelo Crespi

Brera Academy of Fine Arts
President | Diego Maria Visconti
Director | Giovanni Iovane

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Brera Academy of Fine Arts

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Pinacoteca di Brera
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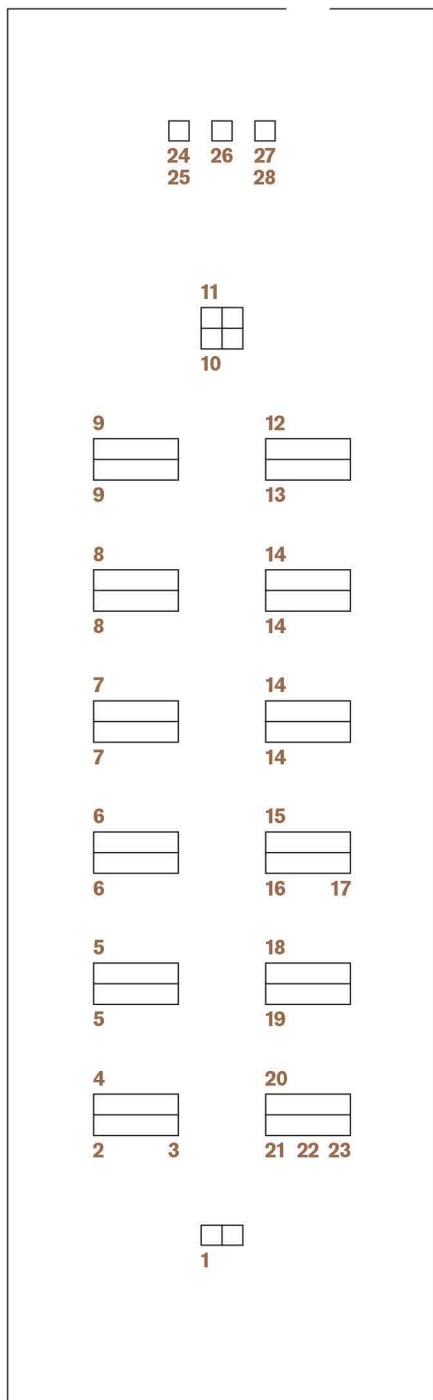


BIBLIOTECA NAZIONALE
BRAIDENSE



BRERA
ACCADEMIA DI BELLE ARTI

Library entrance



Pinacoteca entrance

Works on display

CLASSICS AND NUCLEAR

1

De Rerum Natura
Including a text by Roberto Sanesi
Thirty-six etchings
Schwarz publishers, Milan 1958
Printer: Carlo Vitale, Milan
Print run: 51 copies

2

Beniamino Dal Fabbro,
Descrizione di Orfeo
Two etchings
Epi Editrice, Milan 1954
Printer: Carlo Vitale, Milan
Print run: 65 copies

3

Marco Valerio Marziale, *Epigrammi*
Two colour etchings
Castiglioni e Corubolo Editori,
Verona 1967
Printer: Alessandro Corubolo
and Gino Castiglioni, Verona
Print run: 80 copies

4

Edouard Jaguer, *Enrico Baj*
Four colour lithographs
Edizioni Schettini, Milan – New York 1956
Printer: La Litografica Fornaroli, Magenta
Print run: 1000 copies

BRETON AND SURREALISM

5

Benjamin Péret, *Dames et Généraux*
Including a text by André Breton
Ten etchings and one *faux titre*
by Marcel Duchamp
Berggruen e Schwarz Editori,
Paris – Milan 1964
Printer Giorgio Upiglio, Milan
Print run: 125 copies

POETS IN PARIS

6

Jean-Clarence Lambert, *Limbo*
Five colour etchings
Edizioni della Quercia, Milan 1966
Printer: Renato Volpini, Milan
Print run: 65 copies

7

André Pieyre de Mandiargues,
Les Incongruités Monumentales
Thirty-three colour lithographs
Michel Cassé Editeur, Paris 1967
Printer: Michel Cassé, Paris
Print run: 110 copies

QUENEAU AND THE COMBINATORIAL METHOD

8

Raymond Queneau, *Meccano*
ou l'Analyse Matricielle du Langage
Seventeen colour calchographic prints
Sergio Tosi Editore, Milan 1966
Printer: Tosi and Bellasich, Milan
Print run: 174 copies

NUDES, CLOTHING, LACES

9

Yvon Taillandier, *L'homme, la femme*
et les vêtements
Four colour silkscreen prints
and seven collages
Sergio Tosi Editore, Milan 1966
Printer: Sergio Tosi, Milan
Print run: 46 copies

POETS IN MILAN

10

Alda Merini, *Baj Merini*
Two etchings and three multiples
Giorgio Upiglio Editore – Edizioni d'Arte
Grafica Uno, Milan 1998
Printer: Giorgio Upiglio, Milan
Print run: 53 copies

11

Giovanni Raboni, *Sull'acqua*
Two multiples and three collages
Proposte d'arte Colophon Editore and
Galleria Giò Marconi, Belluno – Milan 2003
Print run: 105 copies

12

Roberto Sanesi, *Alterego e altre ipotesi*
Five colour etchings
Castiglioni e Corubolo Editori,
Verona 1970
Printer: Gino Castiglioni
and Alessandro Corubolo, Verona
Print run: 93 copies

13

Guido Ballo, *I Ricatti*
Six colour etchings
Edizioni d'Arte La Pergola,
Pesaro – Milan 1969
Printer: Piergiorgio Spallacci, Pesaro
Print run: 125 copies

LA CRAVATE NE VAUT PAS UNE MEDAILLE

14

Enrico Baj, *La cravate ne vaut*
pas une médaille
Forty colour lithographs and silkscreen
prints and collage and six multiples
Editions Rousseau, Genève 1972-73
Printer: Coopì, Genève and Multirevol,
Milan
Print run: 200 copies

AWARDS AND HONOURS

15

André Pieyre de Mandiargues,
Chapeaugaga
Fifteen colour etchings
Giorgio Upiglio Editore – Edizioni d'Arte
Grafica Uno, Milan 1970
Printer: Giorgio Upiglio, Milan
Print run: 100 copies

16

Edoardo Sanguineti, *L'Intérieur*
Ten colour etchings
Giorgio Upiglio Editore – Edizioni d'Arte
Grafica Uno, Milan 1966
Printer: Giorgio Upiglio, Milan
Print run: 125 copies

BESTIARIES AND MONSTERS

17

Edoardo Sanguineti, *Alfabeto apocalittico*
One colour etching and twenty-one
inhabited letters photomechanically
printed from original drawings
Galleria Rizzardi Editore, Milan 1984
Printer: Giorgio Upiglio, Milan
Print run: 105 copies

18

Jorge Luis Borges,
Manuale di zoologia fantastica
Six etchings
Castiglioni e Corubolo Editori,
Verona 1973
Printer: Gino Castiglioni
and Alessandro Corubolo, Verona
Print run: 80 copies

19

Lewis Carroll, *La Caccia allo Snark*
Five colour aquatints
Giorgio Upiglio Editore – Edizioni d'Arte
Grafica Uno, Milan 1986
Printer: Giorgio Upiglio, Milan
Print run: 160 copies

REVIVAL OR THE ART OF REMEMBERING

20

Giovanni Giudici, *Salutz, I*
Five colour etchings and aquatints
and collage
Giorgio Upiglio Editore – Edizioni d'Arte
Grafica Uno, Milan 1986
Printer: Giorgio Upiglio, Milan
Print run: 125 copies

21

Enrico Baj, *Automitobiografia,
dai giorni nostri alla nascita*
One colour etching
Rizzoli Editore, Milan 1983
Printer: Giorgio Upiglio, Milan
Print run: 100 first deluxe editions

22

Colophon
One etching
Proposte d'Arte Colophon Editore,
Belluno 1999
Print run: 100 first deluxe editions

23

Raymond Queneau, *Picabaj e Bacasso*
Two colour etchings
Musée de l'Athénée, Genève 1990
Printer: Stamperia del Portico,
Gavirate (Varese)
Print run: 115 copies

SCULPTURES AND OBJECT-BOOKS

24

Joyce Mansour, *Ça*
One soft-paint and colour chalcographic
print, five colour silkscreen prints
and one multiple
Soleil Noir Editions, Paris 1970
Print run: 285 first deluxe editions
135 of which included in the multiple

25

Alda Merini, *L'uovo di Saffo*
One multiple
Proposte d'Arte Colophon Editore,
Belluno 1999
Print run: 40 copies

26

Edoardo Sanguineti, *The biggest
Art-book in the World with 137.952.460.800
colour Plates and 479.001.600 Pages
for musical Accompaniment*
One multiple
Gabriele Mazzotta Editore, Milan 1968
Print run: 600 copies

27

Maternità
Multiple in Meccano pieces and wood
Studio Marconi Editore, Milan 1973
Print run: 100 copies

28

L'idrogenione di Arrhenius
Hydraulic sculpture, 2002

Sources of works on display
Brera Academy of Fine Arts,
Biblioteca d'arte contemporanea
2
Archivio Baj, Vergiate
1/3/4/5/6/8/9/11/12/13/14/15/16/
17/18/19/21/22/23/24/25/26/27/28
Braidense National Library
4/7/10/17/20

CLASSICS AND NUCLEAR

In this atmosphere—recollecting my classical studies and the works of Lucretius that I had to translate in high school—to foster and give cultural content to the nuclear movement, I decided to ask for help to the first great poet who had focused on the structure of the matter, energy, atoms, and nuclei. In his *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius [...] also foresees the clinamen, that is, the atom's swerve, an idea evoked by physicists a few years ago.

Enrico Baj, in Nani Tedeschi,
Una conversazione con Enrico Baj
(I libri di Baj, 1990)

BRETON AND SURREALISM

Several transformations of the «general in full dress uniform» stand out, in the latest stages of Baj's work, which Péret memorably translated as «golden head in full misery». A mountain of authority which is only able to deliver a mental mouse, this freak show represents a dangerous kind of survival, especially since he prides himself of «psychological warfare» and that is the reason why he feeds his tiny rodent with Clausewitz and Mao Zedong.

André Breton, *Enrico Baj*, 1963

POETS IN PARIS

As regards figurative arts, I developed an idea linked to that Parisian cultural milieu that I found so congenial, since in France, poets, such as Lautréamont, Rimbaud, Baudelaire, and Apollinaire, have always accompanied modern art. In Paris, it was also easier to meet people, and poets were more available. Whenever he could, de Mandiargues [...] used to write against General De Gaulle and all the generals in the world. Hence, when I offered the image of one of my generals to him, he was obviously happy and inclined to write about this topic *illico et immediate*.

Enrico Baj, in Nani Tedeschi,
Una conversazione con Enrico Baj
(I libri di Baj, 1990)

QUENEAU AND THE COMBINATORIAL METHOD

In literature, the greatest pataphysical genius after Jarry, Raymond Queneau composed *A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems* [...] My favourite combinatorial system [is] Meccano; [...] in 1964 I used Meccano pieces to build large robots; in 1967, with Queneau, when we had to illustrate one of his studies on language matrices, we decided that the combination of Meccano pieces was the best solution to graphically decorate repetitive elements and pieces of the language.

Enrico Baj, *Enrico Baj, Ubu e meccanica combinatoria*, 1985

NUDES, CLOTHING, LACES

What turned the very limited edition of *L'homme, la femme et les vêtements* into such a valued book? Held into a flowery pink fabric box, this hand-printed and painted book—with his sepia nudes *fin de siècle* hidden under detachable covers in laces and passementerie, and its slightly pornographic handwritten text—appears as a bordello that can be enjoyed at home and, for this reason, it is extremely funny.

Jan van der Marck, in *Enrico Baj*,
Pictura ut poesis, 2003

POETS IN MILAN

During that very long period that we were able to spend together, we designed books, exhibitions, presentations, illustrations of contemporary classics and others, from Lucretius to Milton, Lewis Carroll, Kenneth Patchen, and Sanesi himself, collections of etchings, opportunities for meetings and lessons.

Enrico Baj, *Sodalizio con Roberto*,
in *L'interrogazione infinita. Roberto Sanesi poeta*, 2004

I also illustrated Guido Ballo's poems. After receiving the manuscript of his *Ricatti*, I created six colour etchings resulting in a beautiful edition, tasting like a box of chocolates because the inside was covered in tinfoil.

Enrico Baj, *Automitobiografia*, 1983

LA CRAVATE NE VAUT PAS UNE MEDAILLE

[Jean Petit] also made a second volume, in 1973, of the annotated catalogue of my graphic work: in that same year, he completed the publication of one of my best art books: *La Cravate ne vaut pas une médaille*. I conceived everything: text, images, collages, *découpages*, lithos, silk-screen prints and multiples: confetti—as a said—courtesy of Petit. Starting from a futuristic and Marinetti-style inspiration, I reach the conclusion that nothing is worthy more than a medal; nothing is as worthy as the awarding of honours.

Enrico Baj, *Automitobiografia*, 1983

AWARDS AND HONOURS

[Baj] a benefactor—who loves medals so much—would deserve to get his somehow Etruscan smile printed on a bronze medal so large to crash all the military academies in the world.

André Pieyre de Mandiargues,
Les Généraux, 1965

As regards *Chapeaugaga*, this is a burlesque poem, composed for my painter friend Baj, who loves bicorn hats and beautiful laces. Furthermore, as you know, I stutter a little [...]. There are words that come out of my mouth in a bad state.

André Pieyre de Mandiargues

BESTIARIES AND MONSTERS

Gradually, the *hautepâtes* (sic) of body-snatchers take recognizable biological and organic shapes again, blackish monsters resulting from the combination of magmas and tars become humanoids and, finally, show themselves for what they had to be: figures from the society we live in [...], disguised in space visitors at first, then [...] generals, dignitaries, cruel warlords, decorated dictators, *Ubu-esque* and dreadful oligarchs, and beasts. Beasts coming from the sea and Beasts coming from the earth.

Umberto Eco, *Un'Apocalisse critica*,
in *Enrico Baj, Apocalisse*, 1979

REVIVAL OR THE ART OF REMEMBERING

Time, slipping and sometimes creaking, deposits and builds up memory. A memory which, like dust or fine sand, flows from a remote hourglass. Approaching on tiptoes and turning it upside down, a fine line will begin to fall, from the last deposited grains going back to the first sediments. Just like a thread running from the outside of a ball of yarn to the starting point, we will try to gradually recover the past events and the people we have met.

Enrico Baj, *Automitobiografia*, 1983

ÇA

What does Ça mean?, Mansour asks herself and replies: «From now on, the fragments of blue metal mentioned by Nerval are placed around your face: wake, dreams and deep sleep. It is the Ça that tosses and screams in the end».

Luciano Caprile, *Lettere d'arte*,
in *I libri di Baj*, 1990

L'UOVO DI SAFFO

Deep is the chant lagoon
When I look into your eyes and you tremble
For the absolute noise of the leaves.
You are a woody god
And searching amongst the snakes
and the poets' pansies
You found the triple being
Of the egg containing the ant,
Hard-working servant of a noiseless
god,
Labourer of dreams.
You have devastated any forest
of our thought
With the modernity of sculpture

Alda Merini, *Per i settantacinque anni
di Baj*, 1997

THE BIGGEST ART BOOK IN THE WORLD

I had made many things with Baj: for example, I remember one beautiful thing which was a box with some cubes drawn by Baj in 1968, like children's toys, which formed I do not know how many combinations of drawings [...]. And he maintained that this box contained I do not know how many paintings, just like Que-neau who had written the *Hundred Thousand Billion Poem*. So, I wrote a poem, now included in the second edition of *Segnalibro*, which was made of national anthems in various languages, there again a way to make fun of the establishment, and called *Pièce en forme de cube*.

Interview with Edoardo Sanguineti,
curated by Tommaso Lisa, 2004.

MATERNITÀ AND HYDRAULIC SCULPTURE

In my childhood memories, Meccano was my first toy [...]. But I am lucky because I can keep playing. The playful and fun desire comes from the objects and the materials I keep working. Lately, the hydraulic period has been caused by a chance meeting, like the famous umbrella that meets the sewing machine on Lautréamont dissecting table. I have met old hydraulic pieces: floats, taps, locks, coils, drain pipes, heater valves, and I combined them by overlapping them to other previous materials, *passem-entierie*, ropes, ribbons, and so on.

Conversazione con Enrico Baj,
curated by Pietro Bellasi, 2002

BAJ. BOOKS SET FREE

Curated by Angela Sanna,
Michele Tavola, and Marina Zetti
In partnership with
Archivio Baj, Vergiate

The Braidense National Library and the Brera Academy of Fine Arts, in partnership with the Archivio Baj, organise an exhibition celebrating Enrico Baj in the centenary of his birth. The exhibition, which displays twenty-six out of roughly fifty-six artists' books created by Baj during the course of his life, begins with the first volumes created in the 1950s—the first one being *De Rerum Natura* in 1958—and ends with his final one, *Sull'Acqua* published in 2003. The exhibition itinerary highlights the fruitful relationship with literature and especially with poetry, which has always been one of his main focuses, and a steady inspiration for his work.

Enrico Baj (1924-2003) was born in Milan, where he attended the Brera Academy of Fine Arts, and earned his degree in Law. In 1951, he founded the Movimento Arte Nucleare (*Nuclear Art Movement*) with Sergio Dangelo and took part in avant-garde movements, with Lucio Fontana, Piero Manzoni, Asger Jorn, and the Phases group. Since then, he has been on the international scene, holding exhibitions in Paris on a regular basis. In more than fifty years, he never ceased to experiment and reinvent himself, his contents, and his pictorial and etching techniques. As author of books and manifestos, he also collaborated with newspapers and magazines.