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All: Maurizio Cattelan's Infernal Comedy

Christine Poggi

The idea is to talk about the highest form of human art and in my opinion the highest form of human art is tragedy. Because we are, maybe, the only creatures who are intimately aware of the fact that we're going to die, even when death is not imminent.
[…] I think that, most of all, I'm interested in the tragic-comical element: there's humor and there is humility.

Maurizio Cattelan[1]



Fig. 1: *Maurizio Cattelan: All*, installation view, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, November 4, 2011–January 22, 2012. Photo: Courtesy Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

Death hung in the air, suspended from the ceiling of the Guggenheim Museum's cavernous rotunda, in Maurizio Cattelan's 2011–12 retrospective titled *All* (fig. 1).[2] The very attempt to sum up the work of Cattelan, an artist from Padua who has repeatedly stunned the art world with

[1] Maurizio Cattelan, in "I Want to Be Famous—Strategies for Successful Living—Interview with Barbara Casavecchia," (1999), repr. in Francesco Bonami et al., *Maurizio Cattelan,* rev. ed. (London: Phaidon, 2003), 138-39.

[2] Cattelan was born in 1960, the son of a truck driver and a house cleaner. His mother, who had lived with lymphatic cancer for twenty years, died when Cattelan was twenty-two. Francesco Bonami addresses Cattelan's response to the economic conditions that prevailed for the lower working class in Italy during the period of the "boom" in "Static on the Line: The Impossible Work of Maurizio Cattelan," in Bonami et. al., *Maurizio Cattelan*, 40-89.

provocative and controversial projects, was itself a challenge. Cattelan has always assumed the pose of a slacker, a loser, a juvenile delinquent, whose primary goal is to avoid the drudgery of the kinds of labor that were expected of him as a working class youth. While in high school, Cattelan took a job as an apprentice gardener; he sold religious trinkets in the shop at his local parish until he was fired for drawing moustaches on statuettes of Saint Anthony; he worked at a laundry, until he was dismissed for washing his own uniform while on the job; later he was a nursing assistant in a morgue, until he found a way to take a six-month medical leave by paying a doctor to write the required diagnoses. Art seems to have provided an escape from all of this, but Cattelan's oeuvre reveals an obsessive return to themes of failure, guilt, death, and moral judgment.[3]

In this essay, I propose that the Guggenheim retrospective provided the artist with an occasion to assemble his wildly divergent works so that they assumed new valences within an overarching, more or less coherent structure, despite the apparent chaos of the site-specific presentation. And indeed, the installation seemed to explode into a riotous configuration that defeated the Museum's usual retrospective structure based on temporal progression through an artist's life work. Ostensibly calling for critical judgment of the totality of Cattelan's artistic oeuvre, the show assumed greater finality when he declared that he would retire from the art world at its conclusion. He even had himself photographed carrying a tombstone inscribed with the words "THE END" under his arm (fig. 2). Not just the end of Cattelan's career as an artist, but "The End."



Fig. 2: Maurizio Cattelan, *Untitled*, 2011, ©Maurizio Cattelan.
Photo: Pierpaolo Ferrari, Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery

Seen in this light, the exhibition seemed to offer an apocalyptic vision of the end of time. This may explain the chaotic simultaneity of the artist's entire oeuvre in the installation's time of the Now. Suspended from heavy cables, Cattelan's individual pieces hung in the balance, presided over by a series of observant eyes. The works, many addressing controversial themes

[3] On Cattelan's memories of his youth in Padua and his attitude toward work, see "Maurizio Cattelan. Interview Back to the Future," interview by Caroline Corbetta, *Klatmagazine*, Spring 2010, http://www.klatmagazine.com/art/maurizio-cattelan-interview-back-to-the-future-02/7857.

and traumatic events, appeared to await judgment like so many resurrected bodies (some falling or cast down, others rising with arms outstretched). The uncanny appearance of hundreds of taxidermied animals, which seemed both dead and strangely alive, enhanced the impression that visitors were witnessing a perverse afterlife. My hypothesis then, which I will develop in what follows, is that this retrospective can be read through a religious, indeed a popular cultural, Italian Catholic lens, as a delirious Last Judgment infused with references to the Inferno, a call to judgment at once personal and social, satirical and serious.

Cattelan is notorious for his lack of respect for authority and for cultivating the persona of an underachiever and petty criminal. Yet the Guggenheim exhibition revealed him to be a workaholic with an ability to produce unforgettable images and tableaux, many of which convey an incisive response to political and social crises. *All* comprised 128 of Cattelan's works: some critics saw them as strung up like salamis in a crowded butcher shop or like marionettes in an abandoned theater.[4] And indeed, many of the pieces presented are literally stuffed skins, while others take the form of puppets or carnival figures, with large, mask-like papier-mâché heads and small bodies rendered with disturbing realism. There were numerous taxidermied animals, including pigeons, dogs, cats, donkeys, horses, a cow, a rabbit, a rooster, an ostrich hiding its head in a hole, a family of mice sitting in a tiny beach chair, and a squirrel who has committed suicide on a miniature yellow kitchen table, with the sink full of dishes and the pistol still on the floor (fig. 3).[5]

[4] For an example of the recurring strung-up salamis metaphor, see Maria Cristina Didero, "*Maurizio Cattelan*: *All*, at the Guggenheim," *Domus*, November 7, 2011, http://www.domusweb.it/en/art/2011/11/07/ maurizio-cattelan-all-at-the-guggenheim.html. For the abandoned marionette theater metaphor, see Linda Yablonsky, "Maurizio Cattelan Gives His All," *T Magazine* (blog), November 4, 2011, http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11/04/artifacts-maurizio-cattelan-gives-his-all/. See also Daniel Baird, "Maurizio Cattelan: All Things Considered," review of *Maurizio Cattelan: All*, *Canadian Art,* November 24, 2011, http://www.canadianart.ca/reviews/2011/11/24/maurizio_cattelan/.

[5] Cattelan gives a biographical account of the diminished table and its relation to the cartoon-derived squirrel in "Nancy Spector in Conversation with Maurizio Cattelan," in Bonami et al., *Maurizio Cattelan*, 25: "So I started thinking about putting together two different worlds: the human world and the cartoon world. The squirrel reminded me of Chip and Dale, the two Disney chipmunks who were always playing with Donald Duck. I wanted to put this squirrel into a kitchen, but I didn't know which kind to use. I thought about something really shabby, and the first image that came to mind was my family's kitchen." He goes on to recount the time his mother forgot a hot iron on the Formica top of the kitchen table, burning an iron mark into it. Cattelan explains that his father repaired the table by cutting off the part that was burned, reducing the table by about 15 centimeters. He concludes: "So from that time on our family served all their meals on this shrunken table. That image has stayed with me forever." Cattelan's recurring strategy of shrinking an object as a means of revealing its shabbiness, or deflating its imaginary power, may be traced, at least in part, to this memory.



Fig. 3: Maurizio Cattelan, *Bidibidobidiboo*, taxidermied squirrel, ceramic, Formica, wood, paint, and steel, 1996, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, ©Maurizio Cattelan. Photo: Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery

Surrogates of the artist himself surface in many works: coming up through a tunnel originally excavated in the floor of the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, in an untitled self-portrait of 2001, as if he were breaking into the museum from below only to be amazed at the Dutch landscape paintings and portraits he beholds there (fig. 4);



Fig. 4: Maurizio Cattelan, *Untitled*, wax, pigment, human hair, fabric, and polyester resin, 2001, The Dakis Joannou Collection, installation view Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 2002, ©Maurizio Cattelan. Photo: Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery



Fig. 5: Maurizio Cattelan, *Mini-me*, resin, rubber, synthetic hair, paint, and clothing, 1999, Collection of Karen and Andy Stillpass. ©Maurizio Cattelan, Photo: Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery

looking down as a 12-inch *Mini-me*, awkwardly "shelved" a bit out of alphabetical order, in a series of art texts and catalogues beginning with the letter "C" (fig. 5);[6] and staring forward as the child Charlie, who sits obediently upright with his hands "penciled" to his school desk. Perhaps this Charlie makes a sly reference to Charlie Bergen, the dummy of ventriloquist Edgar Bergen—*Charlie* is also the title of one of Cattelan's magazines.

[6] Verne J. Troyer, an American actor who is 2 ft. 8 in. tall, appeared as the comedic evil villain Mini-Me in the Austin Powers film series in 1999, the year Cattelan first made his self-portrait with this title.



Fig. 6: Maurizio Cattelan, *La rivoluzione siamo noi*, polyester resin, wax, pigment, felt suit, metal coat rack, 2000, Solomon R. Guggeheim Museum, ©Maurizio Cattelan.
Photo: Courtesy Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

In one especially striking work, Cattelan appears as a living effigy dangling helplessly from a hook on a tubular steel coat-rack designed by Bauhaus artist Marcel Breuer (fig. 6). The small-scale, wax Cattelan, wears a shrunken version of the grey felt suit that German artist Joseph Beuys made famous in a series of shamanistic performances during the 1970s (fig. 7).



Fig. 7: Joseph Beuys, *Felt Suit*, 1970. Photo: Art Resource, New York

This mise-en-scène bears, with evident irony, the title of another of Beuys's works, *La rivoluzione siamo noi*. The latter was a silkscreen poster that Beuys made for an exhibition held in November 1971 at the Neapolitan gallery, Modern Art Agency. In a characteristic gesture, Beuys asked cinematographer Giancarlo Pancaldi to take a photograph as he strode forth from the entrance of the Villa Orlandi on the island of Anacapri (fig. 8).



Fig. 8: Joseph Beuys, *La rivoluzione siamo noi*, silkscreen, ink, and stamp on paper, 1971.
Photo: Art Resource, New York

In the photograph, which served as the basis for the silkscreen, Beuys advances toward the viewer with calm determination, as if he expects to be followed by revolutionary masses. As one commentator has observed, this staged pose recalls that of the insurgent workers marching toward the viewer in Pellizza da Volpedo's 1901 painting, *The Fourth Estate*.[7] Beuys inscribed the phrase "La rivoluzione siamo noi" at the lower right on the larger-than-life silkscreen, as well as on a photograph of a Neapolitan boy, Peppino, which he also marked with a cross, an emblem he adopted as a sign of spiritual healing. Both works were sold as multiples, the silkscreen in an

[7] Beat Wyss, "Selbstporträt des Hitler-Jungen Joseph Beuys," *Cicero* 25, November 25, 2012, http://www.cicero.de/salon/selbstportraet-des-hitler-jungen-joseph-beuys/52384.

edition of 180, the photograph of Peppino in an edition of 60. According to the art historian Beat Wyss, the former work appeared as a poster in the communal living spaces of numerous German leftist groups during the seventies.[8] By appropriating Beuys' heroic, indeed aggrandizing title, *La rivoluzione siamo noi*, while diminishing the scale of the work, Cattelan points to the failure of the German artist's self-promotion as an agent of social and spiritual revolution. Yet he also lampoons the earlier idealism of Breuer's Bauhaus aesthetics (evident in the coat rack's clean, functional lines and the use of new materials such as metal tubing), another form of modernist utopian thinking that did not achieve its revolutionary goals. For Breuer's furniture and lighting designs, intended for mass production and wide distribution, remained luxury items for the few. (Here it is worth noting that in the mid-1980s, Cattelan had a brief career as a designer of unorthodox, highly inefficient furniture made with cast-off or repurposed materials, including a chair with a barbed wire seat, back, and side arms.)[9] The unlikely juncture of contrasting aesthetic principles in the appropriation of works by Breuer and Beuys (who nonetheless shared the aspiration to make art for the masses) sets the goals and failures of each artist into high relief. There may even be a nod to Marcel Duchamp's famous readymade *Trébuchet* or *Trap* of 1917, a coat rack nailed to the floor of his New York studio where it was likely to trip unsuspecting visitors. In Cattelan's *We are the Revolution*, it is the artist himself who has been caught by the collar and left hanging, like a Duchampian readymade whose expected function has been bracketed or suspended. (And indeed, Duchamp suspended some of his readymades from the ceiling in his studio—including *In Advance of the Broken Arm* and a version of *Fountain*—to divorce them from the possibility of normal use.) In this and other works by Cattelan, miniaturization produces an uncanny effect, deflating the power of an overvalued object or image, including the image of the artist as heroic revolutionary. Rather than advance utopian ideals, Cattelan explores an alternative but also familiar narrative of modernist artists' many defeats and blockages, as well as his own fear of inadequacy and desire to escape or hide. A self-deprecating, subversive humor flows through these self-portraits and the Guggenheim exhibition at large, appearing especially in the many pieces that take failure and guilt as themes.[10]

The Guggenheim Museum seems to have provided an excellent site from which to project a comedic point of view, the view from below, into tragedy, which often entails an Olympian perspective, and vice versa. A clear indication of this strategy can already be observed in the artist's contribution to a group show held at the Guggenheim in 2008. Cattelan's *Daddy Daddy* recreates the well-known Italian puppet Pinocchio (based on the 1940 Walt Disney animation), and makes him float in the pool on the rotunda's ground floor as if he had suffered a tragic fall from the ramps above (fig. 9). This installation

[8] Wyss, "Selbstporträt."

[9] For a reproduction of Cattelan's barbed-wire chair, see *Maurizio Cattelan is Dead: Life & Work, 1960-2009*, ed. and design Triple Candie, Shelly Bancroft, Peter Nesbett, and Steve Dettman, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Triple Candie, 2012), n.p. Working in the spirit of Cattelan, the authors reproduce pre-existing wall texts in their timeline, including any errors they may contain.

[10] Nancy Spector discusses Cattelan's "aesthetics of failure" in her catalogue essay for the Guggenheim exhibition. See *Maurizio Cattelan: All*, exh. cat. (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2011), 23-41. See also Cattelan's comments on failure in his interview with Bob Nickas: "Maurizio Cattelan," photographed by Anders Edström, *Index*, 20 (1999), http://www.indexmagazine.com/interviews/ maurizio_cattelan.shtml.



Fig. 9: Maurizio Cattelan, *Daddy Daddy*, polyurethane resin, steel, and epoxy paint, 2008, installation view: theanyspacewhatever, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, October 2008, ©Maurizio Cattelan. Photo: Courtesy Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

captures the scene in the animation when Pinocchio is discovered lying face down in a tidal pool by his father Geppetto and his friend Jiminy Cricket after they have all washed up onto a beach following their escape from the belly of a whale. Later the dead Pinocchio will be mourned and then revived as a "real boy" by the Blue Fairy who praises him for being "brave, truthful, and unselfish."[11] Floating face down in the Guggenheim's rotunda pool, however, the figure evokes not only Pinocchio, but also Icarus, whose hubris in believing he could fly to the sun with wings attached with wax led to his tumble into the sea. The artist himself gives the work a religious meaning, stating that it refers to Jesus's famous cry of desperation while he was hanging on the cross, as recorded in the gospels of Matthew and Mark: "Father, Father, why have you abandoned me?"[12] As curator Nancy Spector notes, the fact that Pinocchio lands with his arms outstretched strengthens this correlation.[13] *Daddy Daddy*, like much of Cattelan's work, addresses a serious, elevated subject through the comedic vehicle of a character stolen from the entertainment industry; employing the Disney version of Pinocchio literally brings the high low. As reinstalled in the retrospective *All*, the emphasis shifts from the moment of (provisional) death in the pool to the act of falling itself; Pinocchio appears caught as if plunging downward, arms flailing, eyes wide open, calling to his father (fig. 22, lower right). As such, he exemplifies a dynamic that runs through the retrospective and in Cattelan's work generally. For the artist,

[11] Walt Disney Productions, *Pinocchio* (1940), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uU6od16-8dQ, at 1:35:07-12. Slightly earlier in the animation, while seeking to save his father from the wrath of the whale, Pinocchio calls out "Father Father," at 1:34:20-28.
[12] Nancy Spector reports this commentary by Cattelan in *Maurizio Cattelan: All*, 65.
[13] Ibid., 65.

falling, which entails being subjected to the pull and deformations of gravity, often stands in tragicomic opposition to modernist dreams of flight, transcendence, and sovereignty over time and space. Dangling from a coat rack, string, cable, or even a noose, Cattelan's hyperrealist or embalmed figures are deprived of autonomy, freedom of movement, and often, of life. In Cattelan's work, being suspended, falling, or even cast down, points to our always already fallen state, our presumed guilt, from which no father, puppeteer, or omniscient author, can rescue us. It also makes visible the way in which, to use Martin Heidegger's terminology, as mortal entities (Dasein), we are constituted in our capacity for "being-toward-death," that is, entities who are (and continue to be) "thrown into the world."[14]

For many critics, it is not certain that Cattelan should be taken seriously or that there is more to his work than a series of comic one-liners. In interviews, he usually assumes a naïve, innocent pose, declaring that his works are not meant as political or social critique. They are the result, he tells us, of his desire to escape work, of the fact that he has no ideas, that he wants to hide (like the ostrich with its head in the ground), or that he is afraid of failure. For the sake of expediency, he executes his works by ordering them over the telephone, although he also explains that this can be an extremely complex, difficult, time-consuming process.[15] Perhaps that is why, at times, he simply steals works, or even entire exhibitions, or in other cases, pretends that they have been stolen from him. In one of his most notorious gestures, for example, Cattelan and some of his assistants broke into the Galerie Bloom in Amsterdam one night in 1996, and carried off its entire contents, including the furniture and office supplies. He intended to reinstall these objects as his own show at the nearby De Appel Foundation, but police tracked the vehicle and he was forced to return the stolen goods. Galerie Bloom responded to the publicity by offering Cattelan an exhibition. On another occasion when he supposedly failed to come up with an idea for a show, Cattelan filed a police report claiming, with some ambiguity, that the work "INVISIBLE," wrapped in a package and left in his girlfriend's unlocked Volkswagen Golf, had been stolen. According to the report, Cattelan further declared that the car was not insured and there were no suspects. He then exhibited this framed report as his work (fig. 10).[16]

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[14] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), especially 169-88, 218-24, 279-311. For Heidegger, "[t]his 'movement' of Dasein in its own Being, we call its '*downward plunge'* [*Absturz*] […] Thrownness is neither a 'fact that is finished' nor a Fact that is settled. Dasein's facticity is such that *as long as* it is what it is, Dasein remains in the throw" (Ibid., 223). See also Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

[15] Cattelan, in "Nancy Spector in Conversation with Maurizio Cattelan," 12: "In some ways I'm lazy. I use my head only if I really have to. My creative process, as they say, usually starts with a phone call. I call a gallery, ask for an exhibition date, and only then do I start thinking of a project. […] After all this, I start looking for people to produce the work. I never touch the work myself; it's out of my hands."

[16] This work was exhibited in 1991 in a group show at Galleria Luciano Inga-Pin in Milan. It is likely the Questura di Forlì assumed that the stolen work was titled "INVISIBLE." Most commentators, however, have asserted that Cattelan's police report declared that an invisible work had been stolen, an interpretation that Cattelan's ambiguously worded report makes possible. For example, Diana Kamin observes that Cattelan "inserts a whimsical idea into a nonart system through an encounter with municipal functionaries" in which the idea of an invisible work of art being stolen is not as absurd as the bureaucratic paperwork produced. See Kamin's entry for "Untitled, 1991," in Spector, *Maurizio Cattelan: All*, 190.

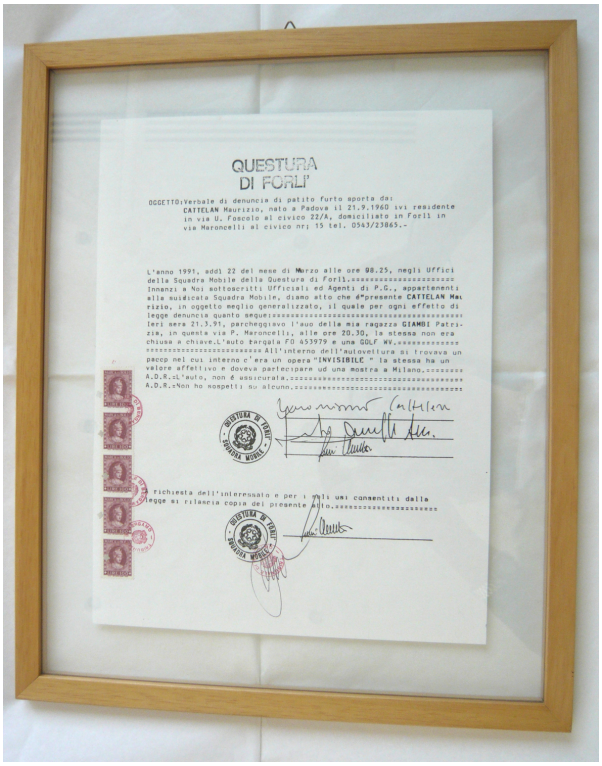


Fig. 10: Maurizio Cattelan, *Untitled*, typewriter paper with ink additions, 1991, Private Collection, ©Maurizio Cattelan. Photo: Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery

For his first solo exhibition at the Galleria Neon in Bologna in 1989, he simply hung a Plexiglas sign reading: "Torno subito" (I'll be right back) on the locked gallery door. The bad boy of the art world, Cattelan plays the role of clown, charlatan, and provocateur. The use of buffoonery to speak truth, as if through a ventriloquist, is a venerable tradition in Italy, however, and several critics have associated Cattelan with the work of author Luigi Pirandello, comedian and playwright Dario Fo, and actor Roberto Benigni.[17] The artist is lying in wait for anyone who attempts to provide an interpretation of his work based exclusively on his intentions, especially as revealed in interviews and published statements. Ironically, it is in an interview that Cattelan declares that he fears having nothing interesting to say in interviews, and that he prefers simply to pilfer the interesting parts of other artists' interviews. He has also used a surrogate, the critic and curator Massimiliano Gioni, to stand in for him in several interviews. Cattelan assures us that, "The meaning of my work is really out of my control. I prefer to borrow someone else's interpretation. After all, you shouldn't be interviewing me. You could ask different people to come up with an interpretation of my work. They would know better."[18] He echoes Andy Warhol here, an artist he esteems and to whom he is often linked. Yet for Cattelan, Warhol is important, not for his presumed indifference, but precisely for his ability to respond to the world through art that is never didactic or propagandistic. According to the Cattelan,

[17] For analyses of Cattelan's deliberate performance of the character of the fool or trickster, see Laura Hoptman, "Prickster," in *Maurizio Cattelan*, exh. cat. (Basel: Kunsthalle Basle, 1999), n.p.; and Spector, *Maurizio Cattelan: All*, 41.
[18] Cattelan, "Nancy Spector in Conversation with Maurizio Cattelan," 12.

> there are three different kinds of revolutionaries: those who want to change things; those who are into the fight but couldn't care less if things change or not; and those who work following their instinct, responding to a situation in a personal way that can end up having collective results—and that can affect the world a lot more. That last model is possibly the one I'm interested in most. Look at Gerhard Richter. Or Andy Warhol. Warhol was proof that you can be revolutionary without being militant.[19]

Despite these difficulties, or perhaps because of them, the exhibition *ALL* solicits interpretation from its viewers. It was the artist's idea to hang his works from the central rotunda, rather than to display them in chronological order along the Guggenheim's ramps. In the words of Giorgio Verzotti, Cattelan lives and works "in situ."[20] Indeed, Cattelan's pieces are usually site-specific, that is, they take cues from or respond to the specific physical, social, or political characteristics of a given location and time. Exhibited in a new context, they will assume new resonances, address different spectators, and accrue a more complex history. So, we might ask, what new meanings might have been generated by the displacement of (nearly) his entire oeuvre into the Guggenheim museum?

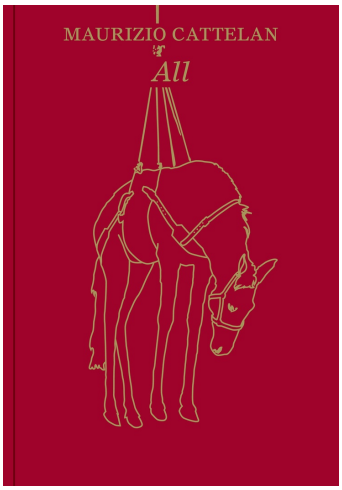


Fig. 11: *Maurizio Cattelan: All*, exhibition catalogue cover, 2011

The exhibition catalogue establishes a framework: it assumes the form of a bible, with gold letters set into a dark red cover (fig. 11). Although this format clearly spoofs the quasi-sacred character of the increasingly monumental, authoritative tome we know as the contemporary exhibition catalogue, it also provides a revealing context for the interpretation of Cattelan's collected work. The cover image, also embossed in gold, presents the outline of a work titled *Novecento*, a taxidermied, suspended horse–a multi-valent figure whose distended legs emphasize its submission to death and the forces of gravity (fig. 12).

[19] Maurizio Cattelan, in conversation with Michele Robecchi, "Maurizio Cattelan," *Interview* 39, no. 5 (2009): 64.
[20] Giorgio Verzotti, *Maurizio Cattelan*, exh. cat., rev. ed. (Turin: Castello di Rivoli, 1997; Milan, Edizione Charta, 1999), 52.



Fig. 12: Maurizio Cattelan, *Novecento*, taxidermied horse, leather saddle, rope, and pulley, 1997, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rivoli Turin, ©Maurizio Cattelan. Photo: Courtesy Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

In contrast to the equestrian monument of Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, sited heroically in the Piazza del Campidoglio in Rome, or Donatello's *Gattamelata*, which dominates the piazza before Saint Anthony's Cathedral in Padua, Cattelan's horse embodies failure and defeat.[21] It shares the name *Novecento* with Bernardo Bertolucci's 1976 film about the rise of Italian fascism, as well as with the aesthetically traditional, pro-fascist art group that emerged in Milan during the 1920s. Perhaps more broadly, the title refers to the entire twentieth century, with its utopian ideals of progress and triumph over the constraints of nature, ideals that were so often realized in totalitarian states, imperialist wars, and other catastrophes. In a version from 2009, this horse, now fallen, is accompanied by the Latin letters INRI [Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews] scrawled crudely on a board that is attached to a stake and driven through the horse's body, making it a symbol of sacrifice and suffering. In format and cover image, then, the catalogue casts the exhibition in a biblical light, although here, too, tragic and comedic overtones are difficult to disentangle.

[21] Cattelan cites Donatello's *Gattamelata*, which was inspired by the equestrian monument to Marcus Aurelius in Rome, as a forerunner of *Novecento*. This information is provided in Spector, *Maurizio Cattelan: All*, 61.



Fig. 13: Maurizio Cattelan, *All*, Carrara marble, 2007, installation view Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria, ©Maurizio Cattelan. Photo: Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery

Cattelan borrowed the title *All*, given to this retrospective, from a disturbing sculptural installation he created in 2007 (fig. 13). The work comprises nine slab-like sculptures, which he had carved in Carrara out of white marble. As usually installed, the series depicts a set of shrouded dead bodies placed directly on the floor in a row. Representing anonymous individuals as if they were awaiting identification, these corpses are covered by sheets that evoke, at some distance, neo-classical drapery. Cattelan explained to Nancy Spector that this work was inspired by his memories of Giuseppe Sanmartino's *Veiled Christ* of 1753, commissioned for the Cappella Sansevero de' Sangri in Naples (fig. 14).[22]

[22] Ibid., 81.



Fig. 14: Giuseppe Sanmartino, *Veiled Christ*, marble, 1753, Cappella Sansevero de' Sangri, Naples

However, whereas Sanmartino's delicately carved *gisant* conveys a vivid image of Christ's suffering and death through a seemingly translucent, agitated surface that both reveals and hides the martyred body, Cattelan's *All* is opaque, cold, and hard. It resists delivering a legible image of the individual bodies beneath their sheets. Rather than being laid out in state, some of these bodies seem to have been covered as they fell; others appear to be mangled or to have missing parts.



Fig. 15: Luciano Fabro, *The Deceased*, marble, 1968–1973

Cattelan also told Spector that, even more importantly, *All* is an homage to Arte Povera artist Luciano Fabro's sculpture *Lo spirato* [The Deceased] of 1968-1973 (fig. 15).[23] (Fabro passed away in 2007, an event that may have occasioned Cattelan's *All*.) In Fabro's *The Deceased*, a sharp rupture runs across the width of the marble surface, creating an absence where we would expect the gisant's head to lie; rendered metaphorically acéphale by death, the figured body reverts to an objectified state, while still evoking its previous status as living. According to an inscription on the base of the work, it represents death as an abrupt transition "from fullness to the void without a solution of continuity."[24] By contrast, in Cattelan's *All*, fragmentation is not primarily a metaphor for discontinuity in the fullness of self-presence, or death as void, but directly signifies the trauma suffered by the hidden body; consequently it generates a far more disturbing effect. *All* suggests that some of the covered bodies may have been victims of torture, war, or other catastrophe. Despite the use of white marble and the traditional medieval funerary format of the recumbent gisant, Cattelan's work is decisively anti-monumental and anti-heroic; spectators look down on this low, horizontally displayed series whose separate elements have not been dignified by a plinth or base. Again, comparison with Fabro's *Lo spirato* is revealing, for despite its seemingly materialist inscription, the latter gestures toward spiritual transfiguration through the sensitive carving of a singular body, the beauty of the veined grey marble, the placement of the gisant on a carved, slightly elevated bed, and the textual fiction that the deceased speaks to us from beyond the grave.

In its far more resolute approach to the representation of death, Cattelan's *All* also seems to fissure the cool aesthetic of the industrially manufactured, deliberately inexpressive, serial works of Minimalist artists such as Carl Andre or Donald Judd. If Judd's works achieve power through relentless repetition, literal scale, and materials that reveal their facticity, while ostensibly refusing all anthropomorphism and illusion, *All* reintroduces the body and its brute materialism. Judd's works mimic the serial production of raw materials and objects under industrial capitalism—one thing after another, laid out in rows or in stacks on the wall; but Minimalism's rigid, geometric forms are also meant to be seen as impervious to time rather than to register the effects of planned obsolescence. In this regard, Cattelan's *All* is closer to Andy Warhol's *Disaster Series*, which shows us the deadly side of consumerism in the United States, as well as the numbing repetition of media imagery, especially when it concerns spectacular deaths. Rather than emulate the factory assembly line, or the mechanically reproduced media image, however, *All* presents its nine component sculptures as if they were arranged in a morgue, as captured in news photographs of victims of war, or in a cemetery. This is a fate, the title makes clear, that is not only for others; it awaits us all. In the Guggenheim installation, the marble slabs of *All* were given supporting platforms, elevated, and dispersed, so that they floated among the other suspended works. As such they provided an explicit reminder of Cattelan's obsession with death. They also revealed his concern with altering vantage points, as a means of blurring the line dividing tragedy from comedy.

[23] Ibid.

[24] The inscription on Fabro's *Lo spirato* reads as if it were spoken in the first person by the dead figure: "Io rappresento l'ingombro dell oggetto nella vanità dell'ideologia. Dal pieno al vuoto senza soluzione di continuità."



Fig. 16: *Maurizio Cattelan:All*, installation view, top of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum ramps, 2011-2012

Viewers entering the Guggenheim Museum are generally encouraged to take the elevator up to the sixth floor, and then to follow the circular ramp down through seven levels to the floor. Those who did so for Cattelan's retrospective would have exited the elevator to encounter a dramatic view from above, featuring hundreds of taxidermied pigeons perched on the upper support structure of the cables, along with the pigeons' faux droppings (fig. 16). Cattelan first conceived this piece, titled *I turisti* (The Tourists) as his contribution to the Italian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of 1997. In that setting, the pigeons provided a humorous reference to the Piazza San Marco, only a kilometer away, with its crowded flocks of tourists who seem to have become part of the local habitat. He recreated an expanded version of the work, retitled *Gli altri* (The Others), for the Venice Biennale of 2011, scattering over 2,000 pigeons and their droppings throughout the exhibition, from the top of the marquee above the main pavilion in the Giardini to the rafters of the Arsenale. Reinstalled on the upper struts and girders of Cattelan's Guggenheim retrospective later that year, they seemed to me like a surrogate gathering of feathered angels, presiding in mock majesty over the assembled works in the absence of a single, omniscient divine artist/maker or heavenly judge. They recalled, albeit at an ironic remove, the angels who appear in the upper register in Giotto's *Last Judgment* in the Arena Chapel, in Cattelan's hometown of Padua (fig. 17).



Fig. 17: Giotto, *Last Judgment*, fresco, 1305, Arena Chapel, Padua, Photo: Art Resource, New York

Proceeding down the Guggenheim Museum ramp, viewers encountered many famous and even notorious historical figures, some in ambiguous attitudes of martyrdom or repentance. Most striking was the hyperrealist wax effigy of Adolf Hitler, titled simply with the pronoun *Him*, as if his name, known to everyone, were too horrifying to be uttered (fig. 18).



Fig. 18: Maurizio Cattelan, *Him*, polyester resin, wax, pigment, human hair, and suit, 2001, Danielle and David Ganek, ©Maurizio Cattelan. Photo: Courtesy Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

The figure appears in shrunken form, at the scale of a child, wearing the clothing of a schoolboy of the mid-1930s. In earlier displays, where *Him* appeared kneeling directly on the floor, this miniaturization introduced an element of uncertainty. Adult viewers loomed over an apparently praying Hitler, his hands crossed and eyes cast upwards, but whether he assumed this posture sincerely or in mockery remained in doubt. The work seems to ask the unthinkable, whether forgiveness for *Him*, the very image of "evil incarnate" to use Cattelan's words, could ever be possible.[25] But the effigy also points to the link between Catholic attitudes of religious piety and the rise of fascism during the interwar period and into the present, a theme that runs throughout Cattelan's oeuvre. In most exhibitions, Cattelan positions *Him* facing away at the end of a long corridor, as the work was sited at the Warsaw Ghetto in 2012, for example, so that the discovery of his identity will contribute to the effect of shock. Suspended from cables in the Guggenheim, *Him* acquired a different, if equally startling mode of appearance; he could be viewed from above, straight on, or below, but now faced his viewers more directly. Visitors to the exhibition responded to the intensity of this encounter by gathering in small groups on the Guggenheim's ramps—at all levels where the work could be seen—to stare back at this now diminished but still potent *Him*.



Fig. 19: Maurizio Cattelan, *The Ninth Hour*, polyester resin, wax, pigment, human hair, fabric, clothing, accessories, stone, glass, and carpet, 1999, ©Maurizio Cattelan. Photo: Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery

In a similarly unforgettable and highly charged work from 1999, titled *The Ninth Hour*, Cattelan presented an effigy of the then current and conservative, Pope John Paul II, struck by a

[25] Cattelan, cited in Spector, *Maurizio Cattelan: All*, 97.

meteorite that apparently crashed through the skylight (evident above), so that shards of glass lie scattered on a sumptuous red carpet (fig. 19). The artist produced this highly theatrical work for an exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Basel. The Pope appears in full regalia, ferula in hand, eyes closed but with a pained and shocked expression on his face. His posture can be read simply as that of a man knocked down, but it also evokes Jesus, stumbling as he carried the cross. The title, which refers to the moment just before his death when Christ called out to his father in anguish, makes this reference explicit. As such, it evokes Pinocchio's cry, "Father, Father," thereby generating an unexpected relation between these visually dissimilar works.[26] Both dramatize the son's sense of helplessness, of his suffering and sacrificial death on behalf of his father. Rather than suggest a clear analogy between the stricken Pope and Christ's death, while also invoking Cattelan's own sense of abandonment by his father, the presence of the meteor instead seems to establish the Pope's guilt: "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." This extraordinary mise-en-scène was regarded as blasphemous by many of its early viewers, particularly those who saw it in the Pope's native Poland where it was presented in 2001. Two right-wing members of Parliament attempted to right the fallen figure, and as a result of the controversy that ensued, the director of Warsaw's Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Anda Rottenberg, was forced to resign. For his part, Cattelan declared in his typically contradictory manner that the work was "certainly not anti-Catholic, coming from me, who grew up singing in the church choir between saints and altar boys. The pope is more a way of reminding us that power, whatever power, has an expiration date, just like milk."[27] Most audiences perceive *The Ninth Hour* as an image of traditional absolute authority unmasked. Indeed the Pope's pretensions to infallibility and moral truth must have been laid low by God himself, who has cast the first stone. Insofar as *The Ninth Hour* intimated Pope John Paul II's guilt before God, it took on a further ironic significance in May 2011, only months before the Guggenheim retrospective, when he was beatified owing to the cure of a nun with Parkinson's disease, officially deemed a miracle. A second miracle was recognized in July 2013 and John Paul II was subsequently canonized on April 27, 2014. As installed in the Guggenheim, however, *The Ninth Hour* appears (perhaps fortuitously) in the lowest circle of the artist's comedic inferno.

[26] Nancy Spector notes the connection between these two works in *Maurizio Cattelan: All,* 93.

[27] Cattelan, in Andrea Bellini, "An Interview with Maurizio Cattelan," *Sculpture Magazine* 24, no. 7 (2005), http://www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag05/sept_05/webspecs/cattelanenglish.shtml.



Fig. 20: Maurizio Cattelan, *Now*, polyester resin, wax, pigment, human hair, clothing, and coffin, 2004, The Dakis Joannou Collection, installation view, Chapelle des Petits Augustins, École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, 2004, ©Maurizio Cattelan. Photo: Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery

Other works also conjure forth memories of scandalous events and tragic deaths. A work from 2004 titled *Now* offers an effigy of President John F. Kennedy, lying peacefully in state in an open coffin with bare feet exposed as if he were a humble saint (fig. 20). His serenity, in conflict with the violence of his death, is itself disturbing. This tranquil posture, like that of the many martyred and resurrected saints who calmly display their attributes in Italian Renaissance and Baroque painting (Saint Lucy holding her gouged out eyes on a plate, Saint Sebastian pierced by arrows), suggests the repose of an eternal afterlife. *Now* was first exhibited in a seventeenth-century chapel at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-arts in Paris, a setting that—with its many sculptural tombs and gisants—enhanced its solemn and beatific aura. For the artist, the mise-en-scène represented "a *spettro*, the ghost of something missing" even if what is missing—the myth of the United States as a force of moral good in the world—was always imaginary.[28] The work may be understood both as evoking this myth of American exceptionalism, figured in the saintly effigy of Kennedy, and as giving it a proper burial. As such it also asks how we understand the ideals Kennedy seemed to exemplify now, that is, in 2004, in the wake of September 11 and the war in Iraq. But the title *Now* also refers to the eternal present of Kennedy's death, which remains a continuing subject of popular fascination and media hypothesis.[29]

[28] Cattelan, cited by Calvin Tomkins in "The Prankster," *New Yorker* 80 (October 4, 2004): 88.

[29] Bonami, writing in the first person as Cattelan in his biofiction, expresses a desire to put an end to the cycle of hypotheses about Kennedy's death and to bury him once and for all. See *Maurizio Cattelan: Autobiografia non autorizzata* (Milan: Mondadori, 2011), 112.



Fig. 21: Maurizio Cattelan, *Untitled* (upper center), photocopy and spray paint, 1994, Private Collection, ©Maurizio Cattelan. Photo: Courtesy Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

Equally resonant and disturbing is an untitled work of 1994, an enlarged image of the front-page story of the kidnapping of Prime Minister Aldo Moro, as published in the newspaper *Avvenire* in 1978 (fig. 21, upper center). In this infamous photograph, published the world over, Moro was posed before the banner of the Brigate Rosse (Red Brigade), the radical leftist group responsible for many kidnappings and assassinations in northern Italy during the seventies. In retrospect, of course, we know that Moro, one of the architects of the "historic compromise" between the Christian Democrats and the Communist Party, would be murdered after fifty-five days of captivity. The artist turns his satirical eye toward the Red Brigade's logo, the Communist star with a circle around it, transforming it with the addition of a few crude red marks into a shooting star drawn in a style that all Italian children learn to replicate, and that appears most commonly on Christmas cards. (And indeed Cattelan did make a parodic Christmas card out of the motif of the shooting star, employing it as the middle letter of a bright red neon sign spelling "B[A]R," one of a series of cards he produced in the nineties.) The work provokes uncertainty: should we see the conversion of the Communist star into a childlike emblem as implying the tragic naiveté of the Red Brigades, or of the Italians who imagined they were the harbingers of a revolutionary society? Does the shooting star operate as a cartoonish sign of messianic evangelism, announcing the advent of political salvation through the violent action of the Red Brigades? Or does it question the way Moro's death became an almost mythic, sacrificial event in Italian history, through an oblique association with the nativity scene?

In a related piece titled *Lullaby*, also from 1994, Cattelan gathered the rubble from a 1993 bombing in Milan that killed five people and nearly destroyed the Padiglione d'arte contemporanea, bringing the violence of the moment close to home for an artist. In a gesture that recalls Warhol's projected show in Paris of silk screens from the early 1960s—titled "Death in America," it was to have included "the electric-chair pictures and the dogs in Birmingham and car wrecks and some suicide pictures"—Cattelan sent *Lullaby* to London and Paris for his first exhibitions outside of Italy.[30] He viewed this piece as a "snapshot" of his country, wrapped in a blue industrial bag as if it were "an official shipment," or like the "contaminated laundry" hospitals must transport (fig. 18, top left).[31] The title, *Lullaby* (somewhat like the naïve drawing of a shooting star over the image of Moro) operates in explicit contrast to its morbid contents that have been shrouded like the bodies in *All*. This title, which for me gives Cattelan's "snapshot" its *punctum*, evokes a Warhol-like disjunction between the grim reality of death and its seemingly innocuous, veiled presentation, although Cattelan targets childlike innocence and the ability to be lulled into complacency more than a machine-like absence of feeling.[32]

[30] Warhol described the contents of "Death in America" in Gene Swenson, "What is Pop Art? Answers from 8 Painters, Part I," *Art News* 62, no. 7 (1963): 26. On Warhol's projected exhibition, see Hal Foster, "Death in America," *October* 75 (1996): 37-59. Cattelan sent somewhat different versions of *Lullaby* to London (Laure Genillard Gallery) and Paris (Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris) in 1994; the former was wrapped in plastic, the latter in a large, blue industrial bag.

[31] Cattelan, in "Nancy Spector in Conversation with Maurizio Cattelan," 18.

[32] Roland Barthes defines the *punctum* as that element or detail in a photograph that pierces the individual viewer, as opposed to the *studium,* which depends upon the rational intermediary of ethical or cultural understanding. The *punctum*, a kind of sting, speck, or little hole, punctures the *studium*. Although Cattelan's title is not an accidentally captured, photographic detail, its effect of disturbance is closer to the *punctum*, for me, than to the *studium*. See *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981), 26-28 and passim.



Fig. 22: *Maurizio Cattelan: All*, installation view, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2011–2012, with *Cesena 47–A.C. Forniture Sud 12* at upper middle left, *Ave Maria* at upper middle right, *Daddy Daddy* at lower right, and *L.O.V. E.* at middle top. Photo: Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery

Cattelan's works also engage the fraught issue of immigration and growing xenophobia in Italy, as North African and Eastern European refugees began entering the country in the seventies and eighties. In 1991, following the foundation of the Northern League, an ultra-conservative political party opposed to immigration, Cattelan created *Southern Suppliers FC (Football Club)*. Managed by Cattelan, the team included eleven North African players, each of whom was given a uniform emblazoned with the name of an imaginary transport company sponsor: RAUSS—an explicit reference to the Nazi slogan "Juden raus" [Jews Get Out]. This slogan, which Cattelan remembers from his youth during the sixties and seventies in Padua, was also the name of an infamous Nazi board game published in Germany by Günther & Company in 1936 (and reissued in 1938). The game featured figurine pieces wearing pointed dunce-style caps on which were drawn grotesque caricatures of Jews. Rolling dice, players took turns moving these pieces across the game board map toward "collection points" for deportation "[a]uf nach Palästina!" (off to Palestine!). An inscription on the board declared players who managed to move six pieces off the map to be "winners, without a doubt."[33] Although this game was not part of official Nazi propaganda, nor a great commercial success, it does point to the nexus of nationalist ideology and games or sports as modes of promoting collective identification through the exclusion or ban of those deemed outside the community. Ethnic "purity" is thus, purportedly, secured through the removal and erasure of outsiders, the *extracomunitari*, who

[33] For more information on this board game, see "Juden raus" (blog), February 19, 2013, http://riowang.blogspot.com/2013/02/juden-raus.html and "'Juden raus': Nazi-Era Anti-Semitic Board Game Where You Deport the Jews," *Dangerous Minds* (blog), March 21, 2014, http://dangerousminds.net/comments/juden_raus_nazi-era_anti-semitic_board_game_where_you_deport_the_jews.

continue to belong to the collectivity through their very exclusion. Cattelan's *Southern Suppliers FC (Football Club*) and its "transport" company sponsor render the link between Nazi anti-Semitism and contemporary xenophobia and racism in Italy perspicuous. In order to make money for his team of Senegalese players, the artist set up an illegal stand—a performance titled *Stand abusivo*—at the 1991 Art Fair in Bologna, where he sold Rauss products. The team participated in regional competitions in Emilia-Romagna, but also played an exhibition match with multiple balls on an elongated, narrow foosball table, with the Southern Suppliers facing off against an all-white team of Italians. In *All*, large photographs of this game, *Cesena 47 – A.C. Forniture Sud 12*, along with the foosball table titled *Stadium*, hung on a precarious diagonal, took their place among the other works in the Guggenheim's atrium, like so many avatars of Italian fascism and racism (fig. 22, middle left and middle upper section).



Fig. 23: Maurizio Cattelan, *Ave Maria*, polyurethane, paint, clothing, and metal, 2007, ©Maurizio Cattelan. Photo: Attilio Maranzano, Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery

Indeed, incisive references to fascism, in both its historical and contemporary forms, abound in Cattelan's work. A work titled *Ave Maria* of 2007 comprises three male, suit-clad arms extended on a diagonal directly from a wall in a rigid fascist salute (fig. 23, and fig. 22, middle right). It was first displayed in the Museum of Modern Art in Frankfurt as part of a project to install a series of six Cattelan works (in the Museum and the nearby Portikus Museum) over several months, without any announcement of an exhibition by Cattelan or other publicity.[34] Yet the title alone might have been enough to arouse controversy: *Hail Mary,* (as opposed to Heil

[34] See Udo Kittelman (Director of the Frankfurt Modern Art Museum), "The Frankfurt Project: Artists Lead, the Museum Follows," *Flash Art* (International edition, Milan) 40, no. 257 (2007): 77-79, http://147.123.148.222/interno.php?pagina=articolo_det&id_art=73&det=ok. The lack of publicity was intended to allow spectators to encounter the works without preconceptions.

Hitler), evokes prayer and an attitude of devotion, endowing the work with an aura of religious reverence and belief. But who is praying? Should we read the saluting arms, installed high on the wall, as making a gesture to be conflated with humble prayer and willing subjection to a higher (feminine) authority? Or is it those who behold this piece from below who should pray to this image of power? The threefold repetition of the gesture points to the historical blurring of such distinctions, its collective dimension recalling images of marching Fascist battalions or of the crowds that acclaimed Hitler and the Duce with a kind of religious fervor. One might even see an unexpected association in the repeated chant, "Duce, Duce, Duce," and the daily repetition of Ave Maria among devout (or merely obedient) Catholics, although here the work's subterfuge depends upon the (apparent) incongruity of yoking together a masculine gesture of affirmation and a prayerful appellation to the mother of God. The title links the sacralization of pre-war fascist ideology to contemporary politics and the pursuit of power and wealth, rendered visible in the business suit attire and emphatic virility of the three saluting arms, yet as Spector observes, the words of the prayer "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death" can also be understood as an admission of guilt, a recognition of earthly finitude, and a plea for benediction.[35] Cattelan's commentary intensifies the ironic sting of piece: "[a]s soon as you enter the space with *Ave Maria* in it you are getting into a complicated situation, because unexpectedly, the work offers consolation. And think of the prayer called Ave Maria. Are we not frequently faced with moments in life where only prayer can help?"[36]

If *Ave Maria* provoked no outrage in Frankfurt, a related work, titled *L.O.V.E.* and installed in Milan's Piazza Affari in front of the Stock Exchange in September 2010, produced so much controversy it was threatened with removal.[37] The oxymoronic title stands for "Libertà, Odio, Vendetta, Eternità" (Liberty, Hatred, Revenge, Eternity), but it also reads as the acronym of a commercial entity, or perhaps the rallying cry of a neo–fascist political party. Others have proposed "Leoni, Oche, Vipere, Elefanti" (Lions, Geese, Vipers, Elephants) or the Italian zoo of our times.[38] This Carrara marble sculpture features a hand with an erect middle finger placed on a twenty-foot travertine pedestal so that it rises high in a kind of mock-heroic Roman salute before the fascist style Stock Exchange designed by architect Paolo Mezzanotte in 1931 (fig. 24).

[35] For an interpretation of Fascism as a modern political religion, see Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Italian Politics in Fascist Italy*, trans. Keith Botsford (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); for a multi-valent reading of the title *Ave Maria*, see Spector, *Maurizio Cattelan: All*, 53-54.

[36] Cattelan, cited in Udo Kittelman, "The Frankfurt Project."

[37] Cattelan conceived the installation of *L.O.V.E.* in conjunction with an exhibition of his work held at the Palazzo Reale in central Milan (September 25-October 24, 2010). He agreed to the show on the condition that *L.O.V.E.* be realized and displayed in an outdoor location and Piazza Affari was one of several potential sites the artist was offered. The mayor, Letizia Moratti (an important art collector), initially consented to have the work on view only during the ten days of Fashion Week, but it has remained in situ despite continuing controversy. See the discussion of *L.O.V.E.* in Spector, *Maurizio Cattelan: All*, 54-57.

[38] For this interpretation, see Bonami, "Introduction," *Maurizio Cattelan: Autobiografia non autorizzata*, 7.



Fig. 24: Maurizio Cattelan, *L.O.V.E.*, detail, marble figure, 2010, installation view
Piazza Affari, Milan, ©Maurizio Cattelan. Photo: Zeno Zotti, Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery

As some bloggers noted, the hand is turned so that it faces the viewers, leading them to read it as the bankers giving the finger to the rest of us in the wake of the financial crises of the period. Cattelan complicated the power of the gesture by breaking off the other fingers, turning the marble hand into a gigantic classical fragment, a partly ruined colossus that evokes the 4th-century remains of Emperor Constantine's sculpted marble head, arm, and right hand. Severing the fingers of the saluting hand, however, has the paradoxical effect of intensifying its violence and authoritarianism. For Cattelan, such an image is charged with ambiguity. As he explained to Helena Kontova, "The raised arm is for me an extraordinary symbol of power, an erection in potential but also the absolute suspension of judgment. No one has ever succeeded in understanding where the Roman salute comes from and who invented it, but the doubt hasn't divested it of its force throughout time."[39] As in so many of Cattelan's works, it is this collision of opposites fused into a single striking image—here a symbol of erect, virile power that also announces the suspension of judgment in favor of absolute obedience—that makes the work so memorable.

[39] Maurizio Cattelan, "No Cakes for Special Occasions," interview by Helen Kontova, trans. Chris Sharp, *Flash Art* (International edition, Milan) 40, no. 257 (2007): 76.



Fig. 25: Maurizio Cattelan, *L.O.V.E.,* polyurethanic rubber, 2010, installation at the Menil Collection, Houston, 2010 ©Maurizio Cattelan

L.O.V.E. exists in multiple versions, as a public monument, in photographs of the work, and as an 8-inch model in flesh-colored polyurethanic rubber, created in a limited edition, and sometimes hung upside down, as it was in a 2010 exhibition at the Menil Collection in Houston (fig. 25).[40] Removed from the context of the Piazza Affari in Milan, and inverted, the significance of the pointing hand also shifts, from a Roman salute affirming absolute allegiance to fascism or to corporate and banking interests, to a wrathful hand of moral judgment signaling condemnation. Made into a diminutive series of pointing hands that might be hung or positioned in a variety of contingent ways, the gesture, however, loses some of its authority. As the artist remarked of Warhol's use of repetition, "serial repetition acts as a depowering or destabilizing force."[41] Of the various versions, it is the image, whether captured in a photograph or held in the mind, that Cattelan finds most resonant. Now installed permanently in Piazza Affari owing to the conditions of Cattelan's gift of this work to Milan, *L.O.V.E.* has again been in the news: beginning in April 2014, Instagram photos of the work with a figure of King Kong attempting to scale its height have flooded the Internet.[42] In *All,* the small rubber version of *L.O.V.E.* was hung upside-down from the end of a cantilevered pole not far from a reproduction of the larger white marble prototype; seen together, these diversely pointing hands encapsulated the polarity between the gigantic public monument, which began to look like a memorial, and the privately-scaled work that retained a semblance of living human flesh, as well as between the upward,

[40] At the Menil Collection, an eight-inch rubber *L.O.V.E.* was hung inverted from a chandelier, an object associated with the glitter of the art world in Cattelan's first New York gallery exhibition. See note 50 below. More recently, the Museum of Modern Art in New York has offered a small version of *L.O.V.E.* encased in a snow globe for purchase. This version deliberately shrinks the scale of the monumental original, further mocking the fascist salute by putting it in a bubble and turning it into kitsch. See http://www.momastore.org/museum/moma/ProductDisplay_Maurizio-Cattelan-LOVE-Snow-Globe_10451_10001_183568_-1_26674_11526.

[41] Cattelan, in conversation with Robecchi, "Maurizio Cattelan," 65.

[42] See http://milano.corriere.it/foto-gallery/cronaca/14_aprile_09/piazza-affari-scimpanze-mercatino-by-cattelan-84f5e9e8-bfef-11e3-a6b2-109f6a781e55.shtml.

thrusting gesture of the authoritarian salute/popular insult, and the equally vehement downward vector of moral condemnation (fig. 22, top center and middle right).



Fig. 26: Francesca Woodman, *Untitled*, gelatin silver print, 1977–78, Rome, Italy. Photo: Courtesy George and Betty Woodman

In a few cases, *All* resurrects and reconfigures the works of others with strong connotations of death or martyrdom. A photographic self-portrait by Francesca Woodman, an artist who committed suicide in 1981 at the age of twenty-two, inspired an untitled work of 2007. In the photograph, taken in Rome in 1977-78 as part of her "angel" series, Woodman captures herself in a white nightdress with arms outstretched, hanging from the upper molding of a doorway with her face averted (fig. 26).[43] The image offers a spectral Woodman, dangling precariously in what may be read as a failed attempt to fly or vanish. As Isabella Pedicini observes, the photograph reinterprets the atmosphere of domestic simplicity, architectural purity, and silence of much Italian Quattrocento religious painting.[44] It is within a similarly unadorned but luminous setting that Woodman enacts her transformation.

[43] For a discussion of Woodman's photographs and their relation to death, see Peggy Phelan, "Francesca Woodman's Photographs: Death and the Image One More Time," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 27, no. 4 (2002): 979-1004.

[44] Isabella Pedicini, *Francesca Woodman: gli anni romani tra pelle e pellicola* (Rome: Contrasto, 2012), 74-75.



Fig. 27: Maurizio Cattelan, *Untitled*, resin, paint, human hair, clothing, packing tissue, wood, and screws, 2007, ©Maurizio Cattelan. Photo: Zeno Zotti, Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery

Cattelan reworked Woodman's image as a sculptural tableau, securing the woman's arms, back, and legs with wooden restraints, and piercing her out-turned hands with plugs (fig. 27). Facing away from us, she nonetheless conjures forth the image of a female crucifixion, rendered with remarkable realism, including visibly dirty feet that, as in Caravaggio's paintings, remind us of her humanity. In the Guggenheim retrospective, the taxidermied pigeons that perched on the crate that contains and frames the figure lent her a saintly aura, reminding one of the birds that became emblems of the Franciscan friar and patron saint of Padua, Saint Anthony.

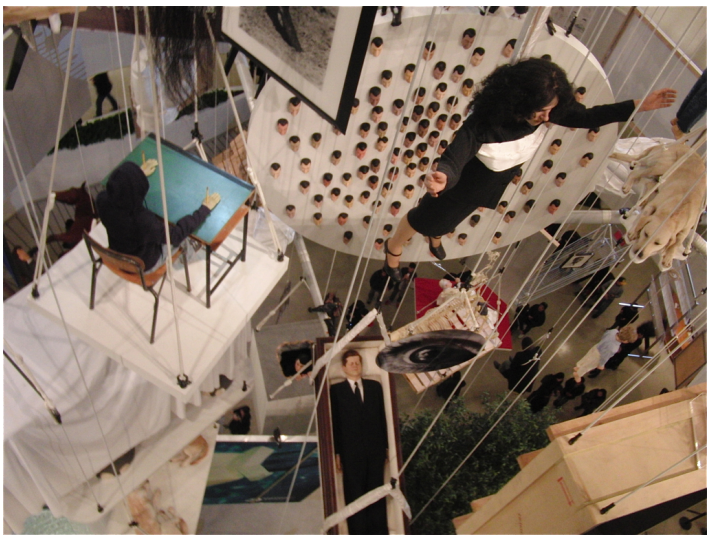


Fig. 28: Maurizio Cattelan, *Frau C.,* polyester resin, paint, human hair, clothing, and shoes, 2007, Private Collection, as installed at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (upper right), ©Maurizio Cattelan

In the same year, Cattelan also created *Frau C*., a lifesize wax effigy of an ordinary, working class woman based on a scene from Pier Paolo Pasolini's film *Teorema* of 1968, (fig. 28).[45] In the film, Emilia, the housemaid of a northern Italian bourgeois family, is transformed by her epiphanic encounter with an unnamed, mysterious, angelic visitor, who seduces the whole family. Returning to her rural home, she leads an ascetic life, works miracles, and experiences an ecstatic levitation above a roof while a group of villagers gather below. Reinterpreting the film's presentation of this latter moment, Cattelan perched his *Frau C* high in the trees of Portikus (the Frankfurter Kunstakademie's exhibition hall), near the Frankfurt Cathedral, her arms outstretched as if interceding with God for the salvation of the people below. She wears an ordinary black dress and shoes, like Emilia in *Teorema*, and perhaps in remembrance of his mother, Frau C(attelan), a deeply religious woman who worked as a house cleaner and who died when the artist was twenty-two. *Frau C's* posture and miraculous levitation implies that the sacred manifests itself in those of humble station. In response to a query about whether she is rising or descending to the earth, the artist replied:

> I don't know how much Frau C. is trying to save the human race or is trying to make us understand to what extent we are damaged. She seems like a revelation to me, a religious apparition. To tell you the truth, I still haven't entirely understood if she is rising up to the sky or is slowly descending to the ground as if somebody had knocked her down. It is certainly a unique event, like one of those moments, as if by miracle, you suddenly realize how absurd what you have always eaten is and how useless what you have been saying for years is. Sometimes salvation comes from where you least expect it.[46]

Hovering between Earth and Heaven, *Frau C* exemplifies the revelatory power of those who have been knocked down and yet rise up, trespassing into the realm of the transfigured,

[45] For a film still of the scene in *Teorema* in which Emilia rises above a building in her village, compared to the first presentation of Cattelan's *Frau C*, see Luca Fiore, "An Appearance: Pasolini and Cattelan," *No Name* (blog), May 11, 2012, http://noname.associazionetestori.it/en/2012/05/unapparizione-pasolini-e-cattelan.html.
[46] Cattelan, "No Cakes for Special Occasions," 75.

resurrected body while still wearing their everyday, inglorious clothing. As such she delivers an unexpected message to those who remain below. Shown at Portikus in 2007 in the context of Cattelan's unannounced show, *Frau C*'s orans pose (an early Christian praying posture with arms extended to either side, hands raised up) and humble attire could be compared to the gesture of prayer assumed by the three saluting arms of *Ave Maria* in the nearby Frankfurt Museum of Modern Art. At the Guggenheim retrospective, *Frau C* was one of the few figures who seemed to me to have the power to ascend, however ambiguously.



Fig. 29: Maurizio Cattelan, *Super Us*, detail, 50 acetate sheets, Private Collection, Paris, 1998, ©Maurizio Cattelan. Photo: Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery

Within his pantheon of sinners, the artist does not exempt himself from accusations of guilt, whether internal or projected by others. One salient group portrait of Cattelan comprises fifty drawings produced by forensic artists who create images of suspected criminals based only on verbal descriptions. Titled *Super Us*, this project depended on descriptions given to the artists by Cattelan's friends and acquaintances, thus offering a cartoonish view of how others see him cast in the form of a supersized commodity. He appears as a suspect, a wanted man, perhaps in homage to Andy Warhol's notorious display of silk screens titled *13 Most Wanted Men* on the New York State Pavilion at the World's Fair of 1964.

Many of the works in *All* have titles that call attention to subject positions: *Mini-me, Super Us, We* (a double portrait of Cattelan lying on a bed, one much older than the other), *Him, The Others, All*. The enlarged, cut-out photographs of eyes that float throughout the exhibition, a work titled *Reflections in His Eyes* of 1997, were purloined from the artist Carsten Höller and first presented in a Parisian exhibition titled "Moi-même, Soi-même" (Myself, oneself) next door to Höller's own show, which included works titled *Reflections in His Eyes* and *Moi-même, Soi-même*.[47] These identical exhibitions, and in particular the images of eyes—bearing impossible reflections of figures from alternate points of view and distant historical periods—raise questions

[47] Cattelan presented his exhibition at the Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin. Carsten Höller's exhibition took place next door at the gallery Air de Paris.

about authorship, real and imaginary conditions of viewing, and the mirroring (or missed) encounter with the self/other. As in Dante's repeated evocation "vidi" (I saw) in the *Divine Comedy*, the series *Reflections in His Eyes* stages the reality of what is, or has been, seen, even if the image is historically remote, miraculous, fictive, or drawn from the world of comics, animated cartoons, films, or puppetry.[48] The many embalmed animals also seem to hold up a mirror to the viewers—showing us to be comfortably asleep, on vacation, hiding our head in the ground, stuck in a wall, or in other cases, already dead, or risen again. As Catherine Grenier has astutely observed of Cattelan's practice, "What the mise-en-scène denounces is not the system, nor the dysfunction of the system; it is the indifference of values."[49] The artist does not critique the image, spectacle, or institutions as such; rather he draws on the power of familiar visual culture and spectacular scenarios, often appropriating popular, Hollywood, or religious sources, in order to provoke a startling encounter with the ignored or forgotten "real" of our everyday lives. The religious themes and references that abound in his oeuvre take Catholicism and its artistic expression as elements in a well-known image repertoire, ranging from souvenir statuettes of Saint Anthony to the Christmas star, from postures of prayer to the dead Christ, from photographs of the Pope to a scene of ecstatic ascension drawn from a Pasolini film. Other images and tableaux ask us to consider mafia violence, xenophobia, and the resurgence of fascism and racism in Italy and elsewhere. Conceived as a new work of art, the exhibition *All* constellates these "snapshots" within the domed, spiral structure of the Guggenheim where Cattelan's pieces are suspended via a ponderous apparatus of visible chains from the metal truss above, like the flying angels, lamps, and crucifixes that hang in so many Italian churches, as so many vivid specters appearing "retrospectively" in the here and now, to await our judgment.

[48] I am grateful to my colleague Kevin Brownlee for discussing the role of vision in Dante's *Divine Comedy* with me. He pointed out that the term *vidi* occurs more than 500 times in the text and referred me to Charles S. Singleton's well-known observation that, "[t]he fiction of the *Divine Comedy* is that it is not fiction." Charles S. Singleton, *Dante Studies I: Commedia: Elements of Structure* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), 62. Similarly, Cattelan's installation serves to establish the fiction that what the viewer sees is real, even hyper-real, despite the fact that so many of his figures and tableaux are historical, or are drawn from popular media, animation, or fairy tales.

[49] Catherine Grenier, "Maurizio Cattelan o la Potenza scandalosa della vita/Maurizio Cattelan or the Scandalous Power of Life," *Work: Art in Progress*, no. 8 (2004): 28-31, http://www.guidasicilia.it/ita/main/news/speciali/maurizio_cattelan_o_la_potenza_scandalosa_della_vita.html.



Fig. 30: Maurizio Cattelan, installation view of *Maurizio Cattelan: All*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2011-2012. Photo: Courtesy Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

When viewed as a totality, *All* presents Cattelan's oeuvre from the uncanny perspective of the end of time—a time that has already occurred—mirrored in the deaths and strange afterlives of his reinstalled works; the exhibition suggests that it is from this optic that we can take stock of ourselves and our often lulled, dormant, mythified, or indifferent relation to violence, xenophobia, and greed, or to the sacralization and abuse of political power. For Cattelan, death is not only a recurring thematic obsession, but also a vehicle with which he reminds us of our material finitude and defamiliarizes the world. Some of his taxidermied or animation-inspired animals—such as the cartoonish donkey, an animal associated with foolery and stubbornness and with whom Cattelan identifies—gaze at their human counterparts with innocent stupefaction (fig. 30, upper middle).[50] These animals have been endowed with human attributes, including the capacity to turn away, hide, fall asleep, suffer, die, and potentially, to see the world in all its

[50] Cattelan has identified with the foolish, braying donkey since childhood. For his first exhibition in New York, at the Daniel Newburg Gallery in 1993, he presented a live donkey within a fenced-in space, illuminated by a splendid crystal chandelier. This scenario realized his feelings of uncertainty and impotence in the illuminated cage of the New York art world. As Francesco Bonami notes, in contrast to the use of live animals in the earlier work of Richard Serra and Jannis Kounellis, where the animals disrupt the space of the gallery, here the artist visualizes a state of mind, in which "the artist in the form of the donkey and the art world in the form of the chandelier are completely alien to one another." See Bonami, "Static on the Line," 78-81.

strangeness, "as such."[51] It seems we are all implicated in the apocalyptic ending Cattelan has imagined—a catastrophe whose epic proportions can only be rendered through a blurring of the line dividing tragedy and comedy.

Coda

Shortly after the Guggenheim exhibition closed, the Italian critic and curator Francesco Bonami published an unauthorized autobiography of Cattelan. The text concludes with a set of reflections on the inverted spiral of the Guggenheim building and a mock epiphanic vision of the artist's future retrospective while it was still in the planning phase. Speaking through Bonami's voice, which may or may not express Cattelan's own ideas, the artist remarks that it is as if Frank Lloyd Wright, in designing the museum, had wanted to overturn the Tower of Babel: "[t]he architect did not want to reach the sky but wanted the artists who entered there to know the Inferno." Echoing Dante's famous line in the *Inferno*, he continues: "[a]n artist who enters in the spiral of this building loses every hope of leaving alive." Cattelan then remembers the moment he confronted the void of the exhibition space, and begged pardon for all of his sins and transgressions, his eyes wet with the tears he always carried in his pocket. The artist claims he looked up towards the sky and saw nothing, until finally he witnessed the slow ascension of all of his works:

> Slowly, they began to rise into the air like souls in the Universal Last Judgment or saints during the ascension, all the works of art that I had made during the course of my twenty or so years as an artist. All, without order, without hierarchy, all seemed to have lost their weight. They were not my works, but their souls that were rising into the sky. They were being redeemed of their original sin of being dead things, heavy, useless, fruits of the vanity and voraciousness of the world of images into which they had been condemned.[52]

The artist observed as each work took its predestined place, and he began to wait to rise along with them. But nothing of the kind happened. Cattelan remained firmly on the ground, looking up into the cavernous void that quickly reappeared, from below.

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[51] Cattelan's many works employing animals—whether alive, taxidermied, or reproduced from animated cartoons, fairy tales, or other media—not only operate on the threshold of reality and fiction, life and death, but also serve to undermine the metaphysical distinction between humans and animals. Heidegger attempted to establish the latter distinction by arguing that animals do not properly die, but simply perish; that they are poor in world; and that, as a result, they do not have the capacity to apprehend something "as" something, to have access to entities "as such." See: Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 188-203, and *Fundamental Concepts*, Part Two. For some key texts in the contemporary debate on the increasingly indistinct and contested border dividing humans from animals, see Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, trans. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Id., *The Animal that therefore I Am*, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans. David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); Id., *The Beast and the Sovereign I*, ed. Michel Lisse et al., trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Id., *The Beast and the Sovereign II*, ed. Michel Lisse et al., trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); and Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004). Kevin Attell provides a critical analysis of these and related works in *Giorgio Agamben: Beyond the Threshold of Deconstruction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 167-212.

[52] Bonami, *Maurizio Cattelan: Autobiografia non autorizzata*, 119-21.

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