

# XNL

Arte

Exhibition guide



## Sul Guardare – Atto 1° / Massimo Grimaldi / in collaboration with Galleria d'Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi

23.09.23

07.01.24

XNL Piacenza  
Centre of contemporary art,  
cinema, theatre and music

An initiative of Rete Cultura Piacenza



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# Sul Guardare – *Atto 1°*

The exhibition you are about to visit is the first in a series.

**Sul Guardare** (Ways of seeing) is in fact the title of a series of exhibitions focused on lesser-known works from the collections belonging to museums in Piacenza and the surrounding area that have been brought into dialogue with the work and experimentation of contemporary artists. The project takes its title from a famous television series, **Ways of Seeing**, four minifilms written and interpreted by the art critic, poet, essayist, writer, playwright and artist **John Berger** (1926–2017).

Broadcast in 1972 by BBC Two, four thematic episodes, each lasting about 30 minutes, provided an initial introduction to the narrative of Western visual culture, the concept of a point of view related to seeing, the notion of how men see the female body, the relationship between oil painting and the representation of social power, and an analysis of advertising as a new form of painting.

In the same year, the series was adapted by Berger into a highly esteemed seven-chapter book of the same name, which won the author the prestigious Booker Prize and became an international benchmark for understanding artworks from a socio-cultural perspective and the relationship between art and popularisation, a simultaneously complex yet accessible issue.

The TV series produced by Mike Dibb and the book published by the British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin books aimed at offering a critique of conventional cultural aesthetics by raising questions about the ideologies hidden behind visual images. The TV series in particular was in part a response to another television production called *Civilization*, devised and directed a few years earlier by the art historian Kenneth Clark for the same broadcaster, which represented a more conventional view of the Western artistic/cultural canon.

The series of exhibition we are initiating in this first act is freely inspired by the subject matter and narrative structure of this immense project by Berger.

The proposed dialogues between the modern and contemporary are supposed to be injections of subjectivity, the casting of a subjective gaze on artworks that transcends and decolonises our relationship with images, generates plurality and contemplates polyphonic, lateral and irregular narratives beyond the bounds of some allegedly objectified canon. The exhibitions are, hence, an invitation to reflect not only on looking per se, but also on “how to look” at works of art. The interweaving of media, timeframes and themes provide the starting point for *Sul Guardare*'s overview of the city's artistic heritage, both visible and invisible, in an inclusive manner that respects the complexity of discourse on the visual arts, inviting contemporary artists to cast their own gaze on historical works to open up fresh interpretations and reveal new and often surprising meanings and connections.

## *Atto 1°* / Massimo Grimaldi

**Massimo Grimaldi** (Taranto, 1974) has been invited to be the protagonist of the first episode.

A significant selection of his works from 2014 to the present day are displayed in one single space that also hosts two works on loan from neighbouring **Ricci Oddi Modern Art Gallery**: *Donna sudanese* (Sudanese Woman, 1936), a bronze sculpture by **Nardo Pajella**; and *Ritratto di Emma Gramatica* (Portrait of Emma Gramatica, 1911), an oil painting on canvas by **Lino Selvatico**. Works of great emotional force and, at the same time, hidden from the gaze of most, *Donna sudanese* and *Ritratto di Emma Gramatica* have been freed from their respective pedestals, frames, corners and walls to be de-contextualised from their traditional surroundings and offered to the general public as images to be processed.

The perturbing but very human encounter between the gaze of a Western man and the face of an anonymous African woman followed by the representation of the sinuous body of Emma the actress enveloped in a skimpy dress - which stands out against a black background as theatrical as it is photographic - are two sculpted or painted female figures generating overlaps and visual short-circuits around the poetics of a portrait and a representation of a human being that both dialogue at a distance with Massimo Grimaldi's own images.

# Massimo Grimaldi / exhibited works

The artworks that make up this exhibition belong to the final ten years of Massimo Grimaldi's career. The works, created from 2014–2023 (three of them specifically for this occasion), all consist of slideshows of photographic or pictorial-graphic images shown on iPads or video-projected on sets of carefully shaped screens; what emerges is both Grimaldi's desire to rethink human identity starting from a description of his reworked and 'recomposed' artistic bodies, as in the case of the reports he made in Sudan and Iraqi Kurdistan at the medical facilities of the humanitarian organisation EMERGENCY, and his desire to envisage startling new identities through figures assembled like iridescent, sentient scarecrows pointing towards a future most likely dominated by artificial super-intelligences.

The diptych of works entitled *Portraits, Shown on Two Apple iPad Air 2s, 2014*, and the three works all entitled *Scarecrows, Shown on Apple iPad Pro, 2017*, reveal Grimaldi's penchant for information technology that runs through all his work. These works are slideshows of faces created through the combined and progressively deforming use of a multitude of apps that digitally mimic pictorial effects or apply a variety of facial filters; they are portraits or self-portraits that are no longer reminiscent of the original face and have turned into residual human heads (which the artist describes as "scarecrows", mischievously alluding to the possibility that the public might be frightened by them), whose deformed features evoke a sort of 'pilgrimage' through the programmes of the Apple device on which they were made and then later exhibited.

*Tomorrow's Kiss, 2022*, and *Imaginary Friends, 2023*, reveal a further evolution of scarecrows. Here, the figures are composed with the aid of artificial intelligence tools with which Grimaldi interacts throughout the entire process of their composition. The figures are assembled piece by piece, and each intermediate compositional state is permuted by multiple variations of generative AI from which the artist chooses the most functional and unexpected to be integrated in a gradually unfolding graphic assemblage. The figures are then careened and given a shiny look, mixed with the most unlikely materials and actually begin to inhabit the artist's complex, layered imagery. They call to mind the gracefulness of Osamu Tezuka's characters, the chromatic collages of bodies painted by Pontorno, the silent horror pervading Ari Aster's films and even the disquiet characterising the post-atomic landscapes of the Japanese anime television series "Humanoid Monster Bem".

*Translucent Island, 2023*, the second in a trilogy of video installations on 'gleaming islands' that Grimaldi is making, is being presented at XNL Piacenza. This is, once again, the projection of translucent humanoids superimposed over the imaginative shores of a metaphysical island. Like melancholic Pierrots incapable of any kind of action, these figures seem condemned to be incapable of doing anything, barely able to even hint at those movements which, just like in Samuel Beckett's plays, they will never actually make. These images, which make references to primitivism and lots of 20th-century Italian painting from Mario Sironi to Carlo Carrà, look like tropical fantasies, a staging of the exoticism latent in so much of the work of an artist, who, hardly surprisingly, spends plenty of time in the Azores.

*Port Sudan, 2023*, consists of a selection of photographs taken from 2010–2016 in Sudan and shown as a slideshow on a latest-generation iPad (in accordance with the exhibition method the artist has adopted over so many years, whereby each new group of images he creates are only ever shown on the Apple devices actually on sale at the time of their creation). Grimaldi, winner of the *MAXXI 2per100* international competition in 2009, decided to donate the prizemoney to EMERGENCY for the construction of a Paediatric Centre in Port Sudan and subsequently documented the various stages in its construction and coming into operation; the photographs shown here are not part of the main work, which belongs to the permanent collection of MAXXI Museum in Rome, and are of a more intimate and less documentary nature.

*Kurdistan, 2023*, is a video installation of the report Grimaldi made last June–July in Iraqi Kurdistan documenting the operations of EMERGENCY's Rehabilitation and Social Reintegration Centre in Sulaymaniyah. Amputee patients undergo physiotherapy treatments and have prostheses fitted at the Centre, and they also receive financial and management aid for opening cooperatives and workshops. This is again a report that the artist himself describes as "emotional", casting a gentle gaze at the places he visited and the people he met; his emotional aesthetics point towards a poetic and already nostalgic look at the world around us.

# Massimo Grimaldi / Gallery

Scarecrows, Shown on Apple iPad Pro

2017

*Slideshow on Apple iPad Pro*

Courtesy the artist and ZERO..., Milano



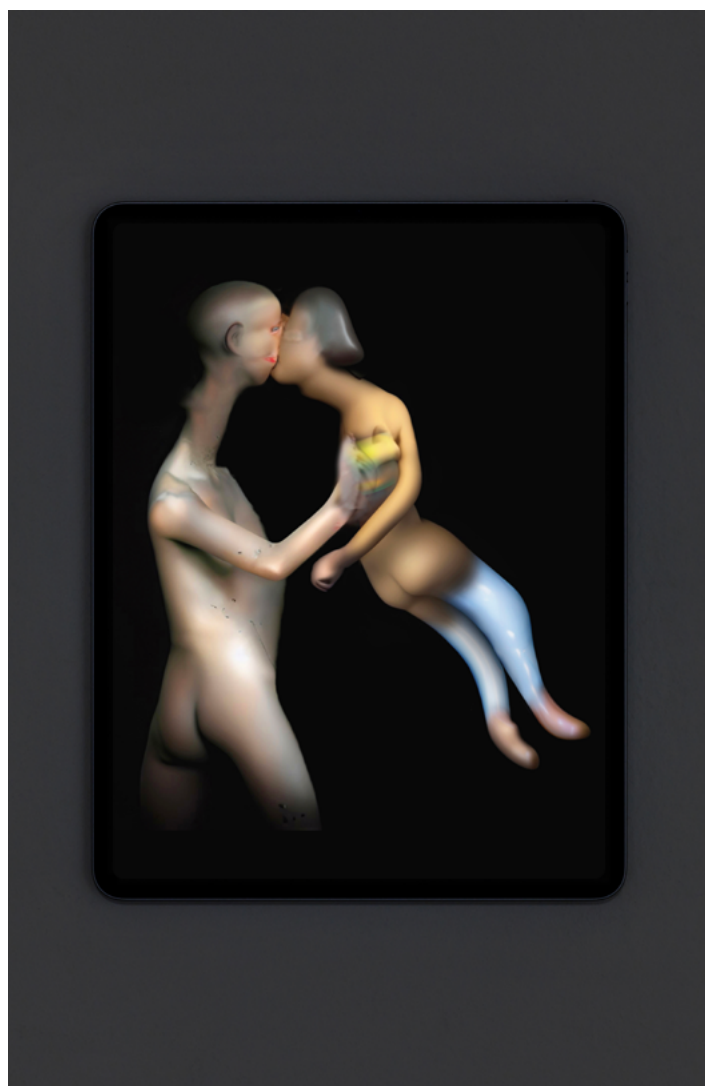
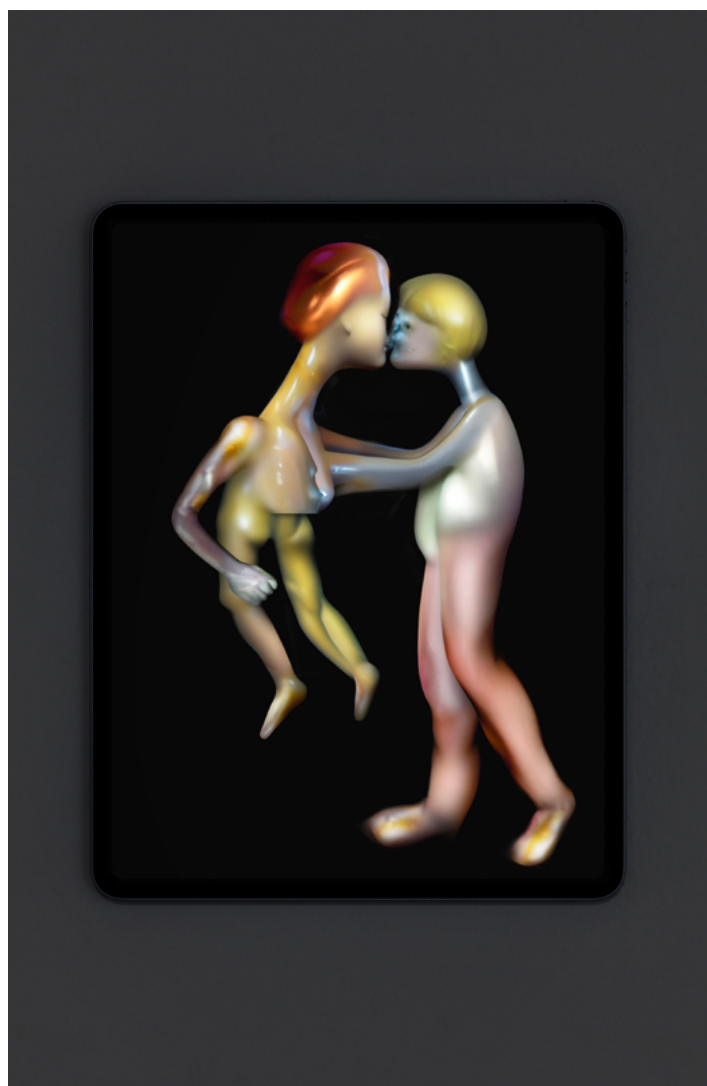
# Massimo Grimaldi / Gallery

## Tomorrow's Kiss

2022

Slideshow on Apple iPad Pro

Courtesy the artist and ZERO..., Milano



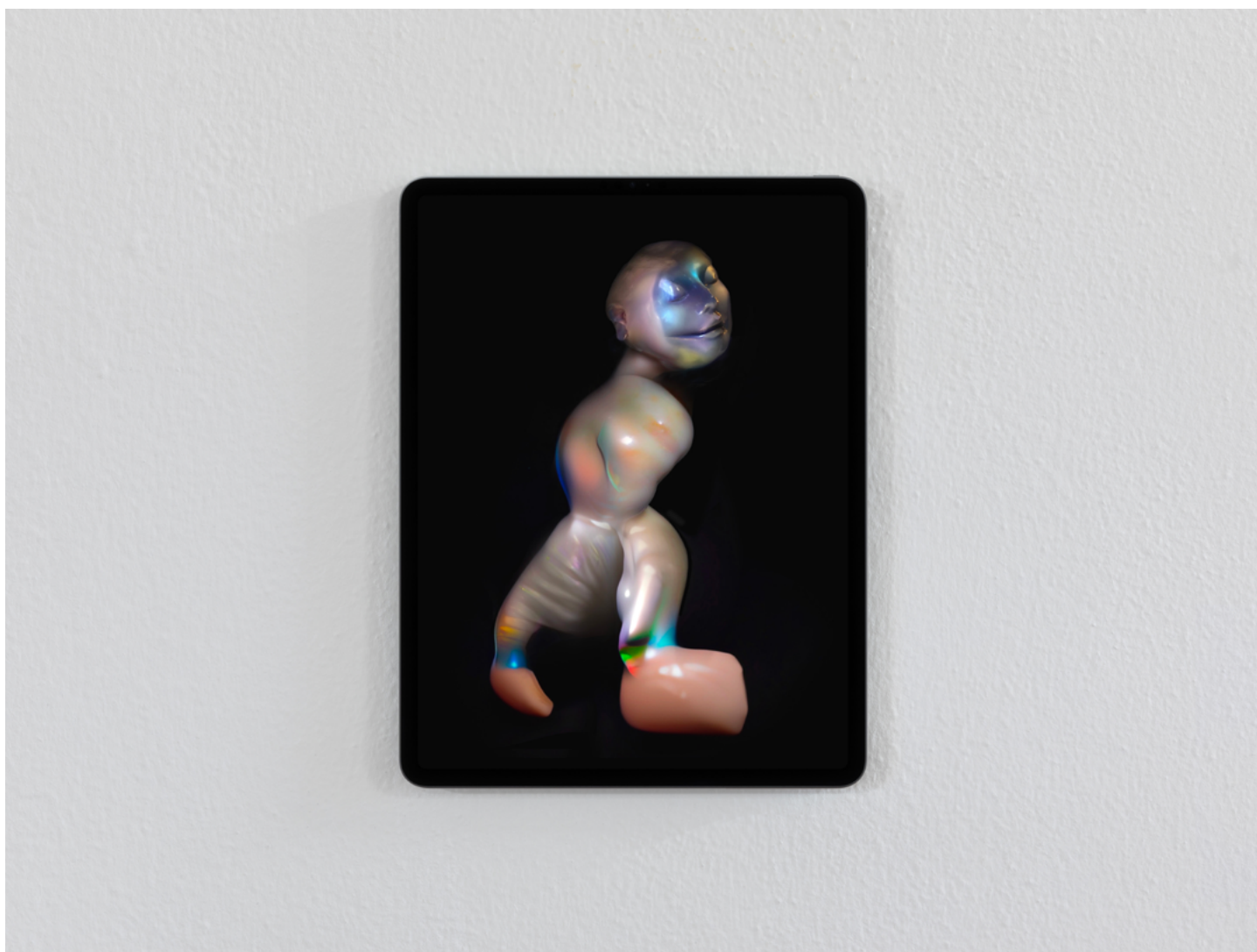
# Massimo Grimaldi / Gallery

## Imaginary Friends

2023

*Slideshow on Apple iPad Pro*

Courtesy the artist and ZERO..., Milano



# Massimo Grimaldi / Gallery

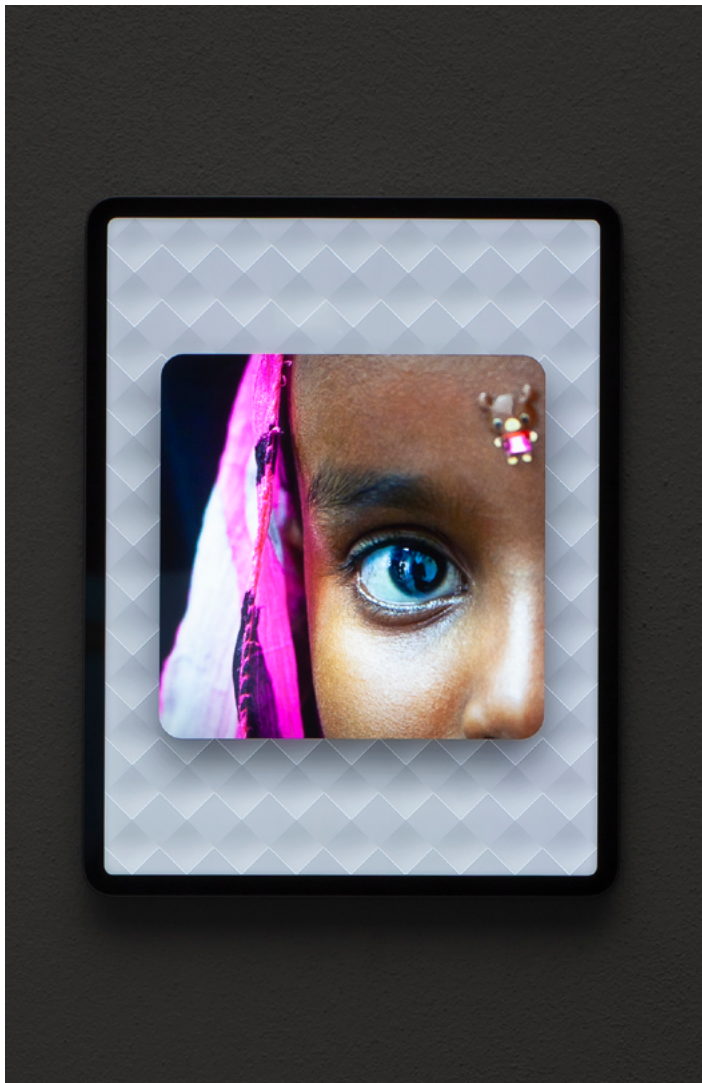
## In Port Sudan\*

2023

Video on Apple iPad Pro, 10'

Courtesy the artist and ZERO..., Milano

\* Artwork created for the exhibition *Sul Guardare – Atto 1°* / Massimo Grimaldi, XNL Piacenza, 2023



# Massimo Grimaldi / Gallery

## In Kurdistan\*

2023

Double screen video on two Communication panels, stainless steel tubes, 10'

Courtesy the artist and ZERO..., Milano

\* Realized on occasion of the exhibition *Ways of Seeing – 1st Act* / Massimo Grimaldi, XNL Piacenza, 2023





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# Massimo Grimaldi / Gallery

## Translucent Island\*

2023

*Double screen slideshow on two Communication panels, stainless steel tube*

Courtesy Marval Collection, Milano

*\* Realized on occasion of the exhibition Ways of Seeing – 1st Act / Massimo Grimaldi, XNL Piacenza, 2023*



# Massimo Grimaldi / Gallery

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Double screen slideshow on two Communication panels, stainless steel tube

Courtesy Marval Collection, Milano

\* Realized on occasion of the exhibition *Ways of Seeing – 1st Act* / Massimo Grimaldi, XNL Piacenza, 2023



# Massimo Grimaldi / Gallery

Portraits, Shown on Two Apple iPad Air 2s

2014

*Double slideshow on two Apple iPad Air 2s*

Courtesy the artist, West, L'Aia e ZERO..., Milano



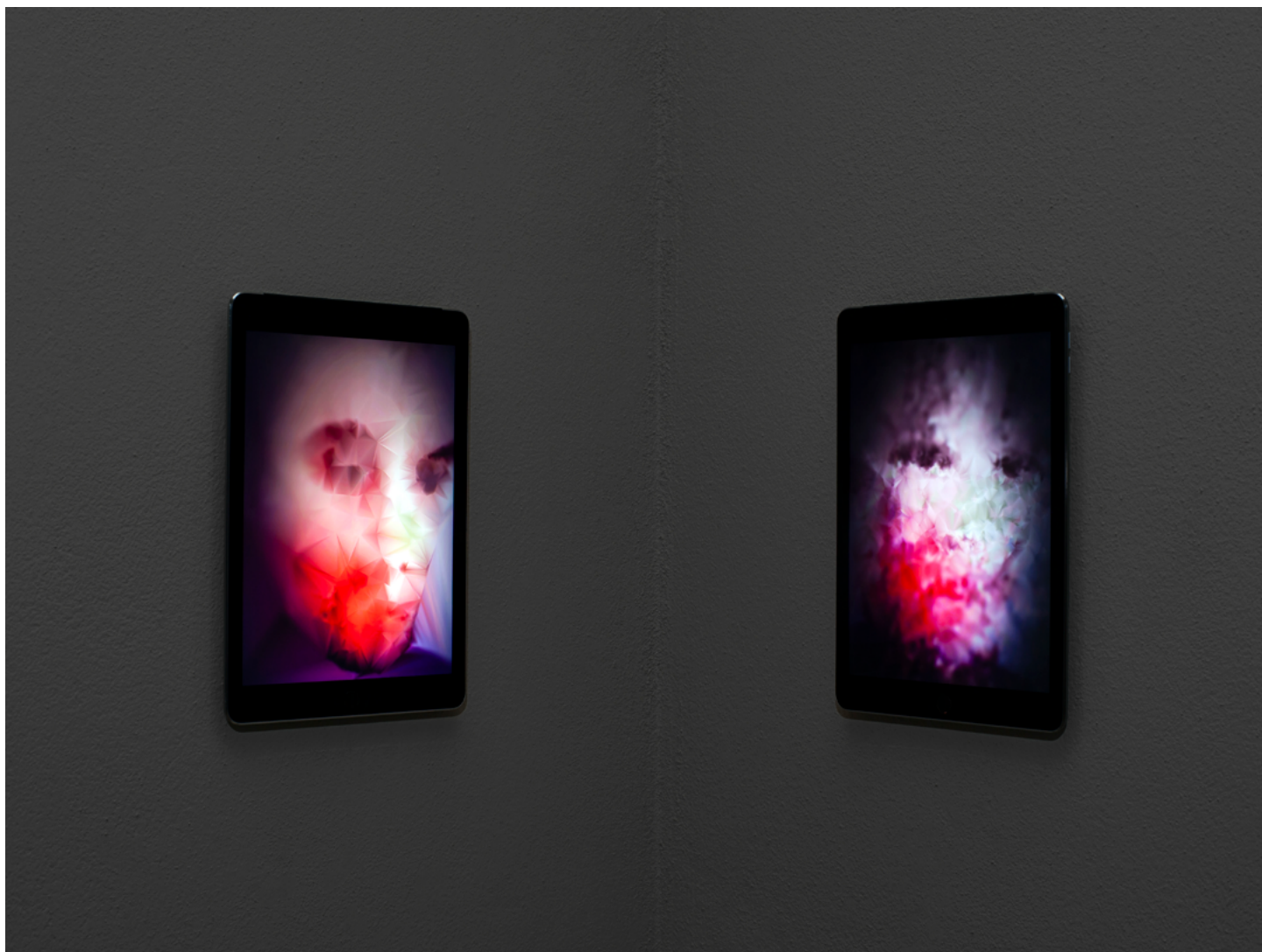
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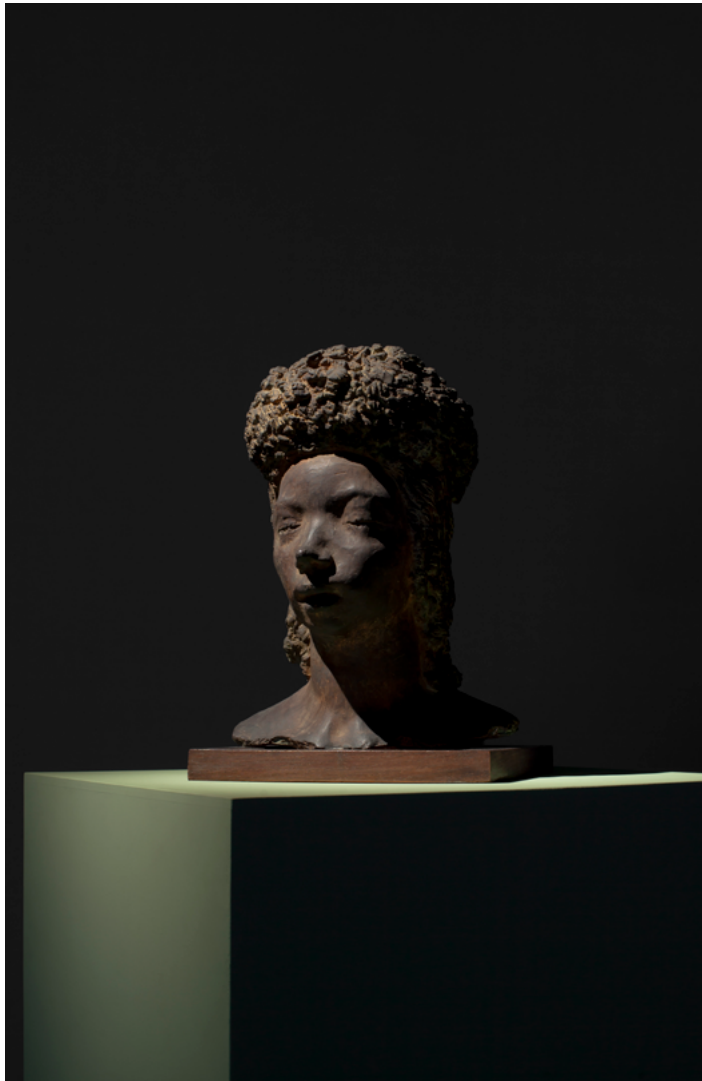
# Galleria d'Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi / Gallery

## Donna sudanese

Nardo Pajella, 1936

*Bronze, cm 45 x 32 x 27, Inv. 701*

Galleria d'Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi, Piacenza

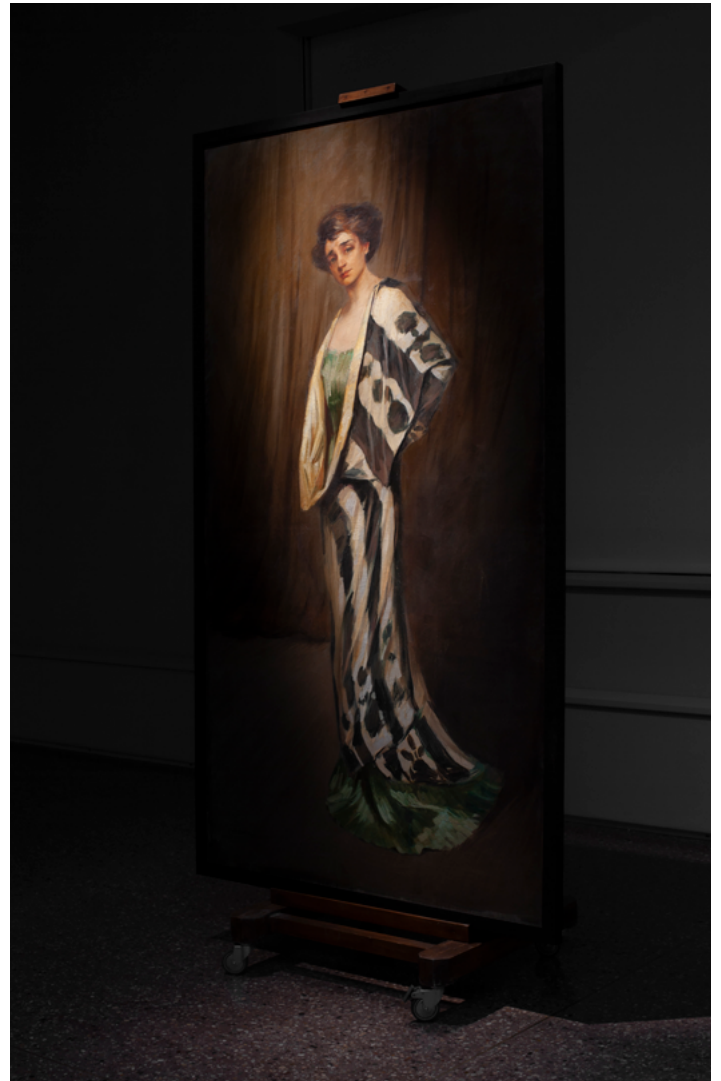


## Ritratto di Emma Gramatica

Lino Selvatico, 1911

*Oil on canvas, cm 217 x 119, Inv. 369*

Galleria d'Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi, Piacenza



# Galleria d'Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi / exhibited works

## Donna Sudanese

(*Sudanese Woman*)

Nardo Pajella, 1936

Nello Pajella was a prolific painter and sculptor from Piacenza (1905-1985).

For the exhibition entitled *Sul Guardare* (Ways of seeing), one of his bronze sculptures, normally displayed as part of the permanent works at Ricci Oddi Gallery, has been set on a simple coloured Lego base that is part of the special display props provided by XNL. As part of a sustainable reusage and re-purposing of props/supports operation, various fixtures created for the first exhibition (*La Rivoluzione siamo noi*, which was hosted in this space in 2020) and then later crammed away in the institute's storage room, have been reused several times.

Pajella's work is also part of Ricci Oddi Gallery's recent history, since it was purchased by the Gallery's Board of Directors in 1967 for an anthological exhibition dedicated to the artist organised by *Amici dell'Arte* in the same year.

So, we are dealing with many unknown stories that are being uncovered for the first time.

After studying at Gazzola Art Institute in Piacenza and Brera Academy in Milan where he had Adolfo Wildt as a teacher, Pajella set off as a volunteer in the African War in 1935-1937. The experience left a deep mark on him not only from a personal but also an artistic viewpoint. There are numerous drawings of soldiers at the front, Somali women and, in this case, a bronze bust of an anonymous Sudanese woman. The work, which visibly differs from the rest of the Gallery's collection, is striking due to its powerful modernity. It is basically a visual trope of a Western soldier looking at the face of an African woman, but the 'how' the man looks at the woman tells us he has deep feelings for her that can be seen in his eyes.

Haughty and full of self-control, the woman looks at us in a way that creates conflicting feelings.

Pajella has chiselled out her hair, lips, eyebrows, eyes and shoulders: the surface is rough and cold, yet the emotional temperature is soft and mild.

The same "projection of emotions" that can be found in Massimo Grimaldi's photographic reports, described by the artist himself as self-portraits of a sort in which the place being photographed takes in projections of itself at that very moment, reappears here in a different guise and, above all, using other artistic techniques to create a sculpture, which, for the first time, is bereft of Orientalist connotations so that we can 'de-colonise' the way we look at it.

## Ritratto di Emma Gramatica

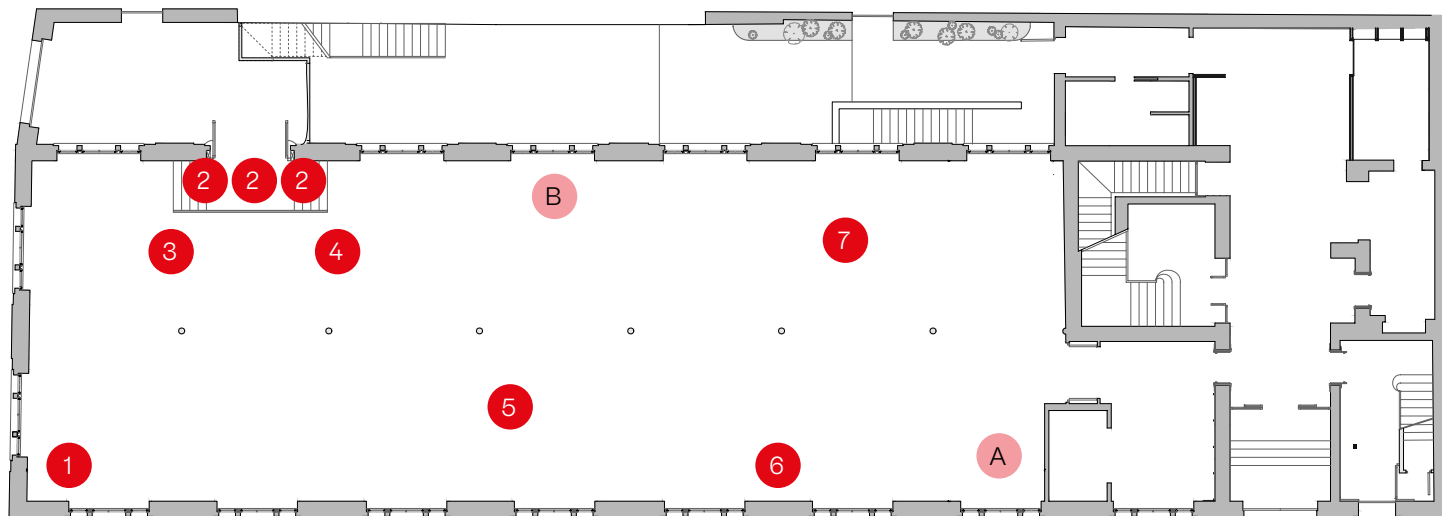
(*Portrait of Emma Gramatica*)

Lino Selvatico, 1911

'Painter of Great Dames' was the title of a monographic exhibition the city of Treviso dedicated to Lino Selvatico (1872-1924), an artist born in Padua but closely linked to the lagoon region.

Selvatico is the name of a family of artists who played a significant role in the glittering Venice of the turn of the century. Suffice it to say that Lino's father Riccardo, a lawyer, playwright and poet, was its mayor and founder of the Biennale. His son Lino was a renowned artist mainly interested in portraits, who was extremely popular with the Venetian aristocracy and upper middle class. More than capable of attuning himself to the lagoon's international ambience, his portraits of ladies display their social status as much as any emotional feel for the subject being portrayed. Worldliness and empathy also combine in the work on display here to create a non-radical style capturing a theatrical pose of a famous actress - originally thought to be Emma's sister Irma Gramatica - who had made her theatrical debut with Eleonora Duse in Gabriele D'Annunzio's *Mona Lisa* (in 1891). At the height of the art nouveau era, the feel of the portrait is somewhere between the theatrical and decadent. The painting's black background denotes the relationship between painting and photography on the cusp of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, a voluptuous, leaden textile curtain against which the figure stands out and seems to move slowly. Selvatico has designed a sort of set for portraying the woman and in doing so contributes to constructing an "actress" character, an unconventional figure who is projecting her body and image towards a new idea of free femininity. The experimentation into creating this image and the sequence of steps involved in completing the finished work - drops of paint can be seen at the base of the painting that have been left there deliberately to focus on the manual dexterity that went creating into the image - are leitmotifs that crop up in different ways and using different techniques in Massimo Grimaldi's portraits in which portraying is always a form of self-portrait.

# Sul Guardare – Atto 1° / Massimo Grimaldi / map of the exhibits



## Massimo Grimaldi

**1**  
**Portraits, Shown on Two Apple iPad Air 2s**  
2014  
*Double slideshow on two Apple iPad Air 2s*

*Courtesy the artist, West, The Hague and ZERO..., Milan*

**2**  
**Scarecrows, Shown on Apple iPad Pro**  
2017  
*Slideshow on Apple iPad Pro*  
*Courtesy the artist and ZERO..., Milano*

**3**  
**Tomorrow's Kiss**  
2022  
*Slideshow on Apple iPad Pro*  
*Courtesy the artist and ZERO..., Milano*

**4**  
**Imaginary Friends**  
2023  
*Slideshow on Apple iPad Pro*  
*Courtesy the artist and ZERO..., Milano*

**5**  
**Translucent Island\***  
2023  
*Double screen slideshow on two Communication panels, stainless steel tubes*  
*Courtesy Marval Collection, Milano*

**6**  
**In Port Sudan\***  
2023  
*Video on Apple iPad Pro, 10'*  
*Courtesy the artist and ZERO..., Milano*

**7**  
**In Kurdistan\***  
2023  
*Double screen video on two Communication panels, stainless steel tubes, 10'*  
*Courtesy the artist and ZERO..., Milano*

\*  
*\* Artwork created for the exhibition  
Sul Guardare – Atto 1° / Massimo Grimaldi,  
XNL Piacenza, 2023*

## Galleria d'Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi

**A**  
**Donna sudanese**  
Nardo Pajella, 1936  
*Bronze, cm 45 x 32 x 27, Inv. 701*  
Galleria d'Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi, Piacenza

**B**  
**Ritratto di Emma Gramatica**  
Lino Selvatico, 1911  
*Oil on canvas, cm 217 x 119, Inv. 369*  
Galleria d'Arte Moderna Ricci Oddi, Piacenza



# Information and booking [info@xnlpiacenza.it](mailto:info@xnlpiacenza.it)

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[www.xnlpiacenza.it](http://www.xnlpiacenza.it)

Information

*Dates*

From 23rd September  
2023-7th January 2024

*Opening hours*

From Friday to Sunday -  
10:30/19:30  
For special bookings for  
schools and groups

Free entry

*Access*

The exhibition spaces and  
auditorium are accessible  
to visitors with walking  
difficulties via lifts and  
ramps. During events  
and opening hours, the  
entrance is guarded by  
our staff, who are on hand  
to welcome visitors, assist  
them in any way they can  
and facilitate entry to the  
Centre and its facilities.

*For bookings*

[info@xnlpiacenza.it](mailto:info@xnlpiacenza.it)

Getting here

*From Milan*

50 minutes by train /trains  
depart every half hour

1 hour from city centre / A1  
motorway

37 minutes from  
Melegnano / A1 motorway

*By train*

From Piacenza railway  
station

18 minutes on foot

11 minuti by public  
transport

*bus lines 1/6, 4, 16, 8*

*By plane*

50 km from Milan Linate  
Airport

50 km from Parma Airport

69 km from Orio al Serio

Airport

*By car*

From the A1 / take either  
Piacenza Sud or Basso

Lodigiano exit

From the A21, coming from  
Tourin / take Piacenza

Ovest exit

From the A21, coming from  
Brescia / take Piacenza

Sud exit

*Parking*

Parking Cavallerizza

400 m - paid parking

*Stradone Farnese 39*

Parking Politeama

110 m -paid parking

*via San Siro 7*

Parking Pubblico

Passeggio

850 m - paid parking, 8/19

*viale Pubblico Passeggio 12*

Visit nearby

*Galleria d'Arte Moderna*

*Ricci Oddi*

[www.riccioddi.it](http://www.riccioddi.it)

*Teatro Municipale*

*and other local theatres*

[teatripiacenza.it](http://teatripiacenza.it)

*Civic Museums of Palazzo*

*Farnese*

[www.palazzofarnese.](http://www.palazzofarnese.)

[piacenza.it](http://piacenza.it)

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For information on what to  
see, what to do, where to  
eat, and where to sleep in  
Piacenza, please visit the  
local Tourist Information  
Office located in the main  
square, 5 minutes' walk  
from XNL.

Piazza Cavalli, 7 - Piacenza

+39 0523 492001

[iat@comune.piacenza.it](mailto:iat@comune.piacenza.it)

[visitpiacenza.it/piacenza](http://visitpiacenza.it/piacenza)

*Opening hours*

*Off-season*

*01/11 – 28-29/02*

Monday closed

From Tuesday to Sunday:

10:00/17:00

*Peak Season*

*01/03-31/10*

Monday: 10:00/16:00

From Tuesday to Sunday:

10:00/18:00

Open on the following  
public holidays, 10:00/16:00:  
6th January Easter, Easter  
Monday, 25th April, 1st May,  
2nd June, 4th July, 15th  
August, 8th December