

Breasts

Apr 18 — Nov 24, 2024 | ACP Palazzo Franchetti, Venice, Italy

Curator, Carolina Pasti, is delighted to present *Breasts*, an exhibition during the Venice Biennale 2024, at ACP Palazzo Franchetti. *Breasts* showcases the diverse works of more than thirty emerging and established artists from around the world, spanning the realms of painting, sculpture, photography, and film from 1500 until modern day. Works in the exhibition explore how breasts have been understood and represented in art across cultures and traditions. Reflecting on a range of themes from motherhood, empowerment, sexuality, body image and illness, the presentation investigates how breasts act as a catalyst to discuss socio-political realities, challenge historical traditions and express personal and collective identities.

Breasts will be comprised of five distinct rooms as well as an immersive and site-specific entryway designed by Buchanan Studio. The first room examines the historical representation of breasts and the construction of narratives related to the female body, showcasing how modern and contemporary artists have intervened in these established precedents. The focus of this exploration is the Old Masters of the Renaissance, specifically examining the iconography of the Madonna del Latte (Madonna Breastfeeding the Child). This iconic portrayal is not only influenced Cindy Sherman's 'History Portraits' but also highlights how contemporary artists like Richard Dupont, Teniqua Clementine Crawford, and Sherrie Levine incorporate Renaissance elements into their figurative paintings. A figurative painting by Giorgio de Chirico showcases the artist's metaphysical period, drawing inspiration from ancient art and the renowned masters of the past.

In the second room, Pasti explores breasts as an inspiration for sculptural practices. The space includes surrealist artworks by Marcel Duchamp, *Prière de toucher* (Please Touch), featuring a foam-rubber breast affixed to the cover of the book 'Le Surréalisme en 1947' and Salvador Dalí's *Nude with Snail Breasts* which embodies his fascination with women - a mysterious, fetishised, and otherworldly muse subjected to the peculiar imagination of Dalí and his surrealist contemporaries. Prune Nourry, who is a breast cancer survivor presents a sculpture of a breast made of Venetian glass and bronze.

Through the lens of photography, the third room examines the impact of digital media on the representation of breasts. The Surrealist photography of Robert Mapplethorpe and Irving Penn explores unconventional and symbolic representations of the body, moving beyond traditional and literal depictions. Instead, they employ dreamlike, symbolic, or abstract elements to evoke subconscious emotions. Breasts were sometimes portrayed as mysterious landscapes or abstract forms, detached from their usual context. The intention was to evoke a sense of wonder, desire, or discomfort, prompting viewers to question conventional perceptions of the human body and sexuality.

The third room also showcases how breasts have been employed as a commercial device in marketing and advertising. This room delves into how fashion photographers, including Oliviero Toscani, have challenged and subverted the conventional role of advertising, intentionally making the viewer feel uncomfortable or confused.

Tetrarch (Claudia Schiffer) by Christopher Bucklow is showcased in this exhibition, featuring the body of fashion icon Claudia Schiffer as his muse. By employing the pinhole photographic technique, Bucklow crafts this captivating photograph by projecting silhouettes onto aluminium foil, tracing them with over 25,000 pinholes and exposing the foil to sunlight on photographic paper. Lakin Ogunbanwo photograph *Untitled (2 girls)*, is inspired by fashion models in Nigeria. His work straddles fashion photography and traditional portraiture, imbuing this photograph with defiant, vibrant and erotic undertones.

The fourth room features artists who fragment, abstract, and deconstruct breasts in their art, establishing connections with consumer culture, materialism, and contemporary society. Two distinctive themes become evident in this space. Playfulness emerges as a distinct theme, challenging the male gaze and reclaiming agency. By infusing a sense of humour, artists challenge rigid notions surrounding the female form, disrupting conventional ideals, which leads to a broader conversation about body positivity and self-acceptance.

Allen Jones's mannequin resonates with historical influences such as armour and religious vestments, whereas Charlotte Colbert's Mastectomy Mameria is a monument to the power, regenerative nature, and potential of the body. Artists including Louise Bourgeois and Aurora Pellizzi contribute to a conversation about identity, consumer culture, and the evolving representation of breasts in art. Laura Panno, whose work has been inspired by breasts for most of her career spanning 40 years, joins this dialogue, alongside Chloe Wise, whose work was exclusively created for this show.

A film by Laure Prouvost entitled Four For See Beauties will be shown in the fifth room. Shot in 2022, the fifteen minute-film depicts three women and the artist's newborn child alongside an array of sea creatures recalling the stages of human life transformation.

The curator has partnered with Fondazione IEO-MONZINO, dedicating 30% of the catalogue funds to support the foundation's cause and essential research. The mission of this exhibition is to promote awareness of breast cancer to a broader public through the channel of art. Featuring leading lingerie and intimate clothing Italian brand, Intimissimi, as the main sponsor.

At the entrance of the exhibition, Buchanan Studio will present Booby Trap a pink passage inspired by the colour of breast cancer awareness and featuring a ceiling of 35 breast lights. The cartoonish and uniform appearance of the breast lights belies the complexities that surround the female breast and what it represents in symbolism, motherhood, disease, and sexuality.