

**MARISA MERZ SHILPA GUPTA VISIBILEINVISIBILE
EAST AND WEST MEET AT MAXXI L'AQUILA
AS PART OF THE DOUBLE SOLO EXHIBITION OF TWO UNDISPUTED
PROTAGONISTS OF INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY ART**

2 April 2023 > 1 October 2023

Opening: 1 April at 4 pm

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L'Aquila, 1 April 2023 – Two worlds, two histories, two eras meet in the rooms of **Palazzo Ardinghelli** – home of MAXXI L'Aquila – as part of the works of two artists born 50 years apart in places as distant as Italy and India.

Today, **Saturday 1 April**, the Museum is inaugurating the 2023 exhibition season with **Marisa Merz Shilpa Gupta. visibileinvisibile**, a double solo exhibition of two undisputed protagonists of international contemporary art, i.e. **Marisa Merz** (1926-2019) and **Shilpa Gupta** (Mumbai, 1976); the event has been organised in collaboration with the **Fondazione Merz**, with the support of **Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (CDP)** and the patronage of the **Municipality of L'Aquila**.

The exhibition, the title of which is inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's famous unfinished text, *The Visible and the Invisible*, which came out posthumously in 1964, features around **50 works** by the two artists, establishing a dialogue suspended in time and space between their works, overcoming distances and giving them new perspectives and meanings. Eastern and Western culture meet and confront each other in the Museum's Baroque rooms, which privilege the intimate and private dimension, as part of a tense and precise conversation on the themes of the visible and invisible, the said and the unsaid, the concrete and the abstract, suggesting and evoking unexpected artistic, philosophical and political reflections.

In the words of **Bartolomeo Pietromarchi**, Director of MAXXI L'Aquila, "I am very proud to inaugurate this exhibition dedicated to two extraordinary artists, whose works invade the rooms of Palazzo Ardinghelli, modifying its spaces as part of an intense and tense dialogue between the visible and the invisible. A meaningful dialogue is established between Gupta's banned and exiled poets and the subtle angelic presences that permeate in Merz's works on the meaning of seeing and showing, as well as on our relationship with being, as addressed by two profoundly different yet dialoguing cultures."

Fanny Borel, who curated the exhibition together with Director Pietromarchi, added, "In Marisa Merz's work, the distance between private and artistic life is overcome; viewers are invited to move away from a rational vision to favour an inner gaze, delving with their imagination beyond the visible to access the invisible. In the exhibition, the artists' bodies become a yardstick for measuring reality, a basis from which to create their works. Shilpa Gupta, who observes, analyses and responds with her own sensitivity to socio-political themes, starts from her physical possibilities, developing a narrative that builds upon her personal experience to activate reflections that make the audience an active part of the work."

visibileinvisibile devotes ample space to the works of **Marisa Merz** (Turin, 1926-2019), the only female representative of Arte Povera and a protagonist of the Italian art as of the late 1960s; a winner of the Golden Lion for Lifetime Achievement in 2013, she exhibited her works in the world's most important museums, such as the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

The exhibition conveys the variety of means and inspirations of the artist, who deliberately escapes any kind of definition in order to express the intimacy of the artistic gesture, far from fashions and trends. Witness the large drawings evoking angelic and spiritual figures whereby the artist invites us to turn our gaze towards the inner self, the works in woven copper wire through which she proposes a reflection on the boundaries between art and craftsmanship, and those in fabric and nylon – which, like all the materials used by Merz, refer to a profound search for tactile quality, as well as a relationship with her

physicality, often sought in a domestic context as also witnessed by the video *La Conta* (1967), featured in the exhibition.

Shilpa Gupta (Mumbai, 1976) lives and works in Mumbai, India and is one of the most important artists of her generation, boasting appearances in many of the world's most prestigious events and museums, from the Venice Biennale and the Gwangju Biennale to the Tate Modern and Serpentine Gallery in London. Her multidisciplinary practice, which is widely represented in *visibileinvisibile*, encompasses a wide range of media and processes such as writing, sculpture, videography, photography and sound design, through which the physical boundaries of the body and the ideological limits of history are explored. The artist is interested in human perception and the way information, whether visible or invisible, is transmitted and internalised in everyday life. In her work, themes such as gender and class barriers, religious differences, the power of repressive state apparatuses and their negative effects emerge.

Shilpa Gupta's works in the exhibition – drawings, installations, sculptures, projections – interact with the audience, which becomes an integral, active part of the works. Witness *Shadow3*, an immersive video installation in which visitors are involved in a surprising and changing play of shadows, or *I Will Die*, a mirror covered by a curtain that people have to open to discover a hidden message.

In *24:00:01*, consisting of one of those old railway station signs that display train schedules, a stream of the artist's thoughts flows between concepts linked to personal experience and reflections on the social and political life of citizens. In *Spoken Poems in A Bottle*, Gupta tells of banned, exiled and censored poets, while in *100 Hand Drawn maps of Italy* she focuses on the borders imposed by power in an attempt to make nationality prevail over multiculturalism and to impose social control. In *Map Tracing #9 – Italy*, a sculpture created for this exhibition, Italy is outlined by a thin copper wire, alluding to the fragility of the concept of nationhood and its nature as an artificial construct.

The ties established between the works of the two artists in the luminous rooms of Palazzo Ardinghelli, in the heart of L'Aquila, activates paths that overcome every limit and boundary, breaking free towards other spaces from the inside. Through art, the act of 'seeing' - traditionally favoured by western culture - and that of 'feeling' - typical of eastern culture - lead to a rethinking of the fundamental categories on which these cultures are based.

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Marisa Merz Shilpa Gupta. visibileinvisibile | Curated by Bartolomeo Pietromarchi and Fanny Borel

The duo solo show *Marisa Merz Shilpa Gupta. visibileinvisibile*, whose title is inspired by the unfinished text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty *The Visible and the Invisible*, features two key figures on the international art scene: Marisa Merz and Shi/pa Gupta. The exhibition, under the artistic direction of Bartolomeo Pietromarchi and the curatorship of Fanny Borel, showcases the work of two artists, creating a dialogue between two worlds - the East and the West - between two stories, between different generations. The show is a conversation about visibility and invisibility, the image and the word, the political and the philosophical, while the pieces mutually charge one another with ethical and poetic tension and complete each other.

Merleau-Ponty wrote: "Nothing, no side of a thing, shows itself except by actively hiding the others, denouncing them in the act of concealing them. To see is as a matter of principle to see farther than one sees, to reach a latent existence. The invisible is the outline and the depth of the visible."

Gupta's works on poets who were banished and exiled to prevent them from speaking, on invisible borders and definitions that limit individual freedom which are implied but never obvious along with the angels and subtle themes that surface like absent presences in Merz's works together form an intense, pregnant dialog about what it means to see and show, on our relationship with being, addressed by two cultures that are so deeply different yet in dialog. Through painting, and by extension through art, these two artists deeply explore the enigma of "seeing", which Western culture prioritizes, and "feeling", which Eastern culture prioritizes, far more deeply than any other means of perception, inspiring us to reconsider the basic assumptions these two cultures are founded on.

In relation to the context and their host city, these two artists activate paths that open freely into other places and times and end in the here and now, with their essential, necessary and unavoidable presence.

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