

Nanni Balestrini Study Day (New York, 12 Jun 24)

Center for Italian Modern Art, New York, Jun 12, 2024

Deadline: Apr 14, 2024

Nicola Lucchi

CIMA's Winter-Spring 2024 exhibition, "Nanni Balestrini: Art as Political Action. One Thousand and one Voices", curated by Marco Scotini, is the first retrospective exhibition in the United States of Nanni Balestrini (1935-2019), an Italian experimental visual artist, poet, and novelist known for his revolutionary artistic practice and passionate involvement in the social-political movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

Keynote speaker: Prof. Gian Maria Annovi, University of Southern California

The show focuses on two crucial decades in the career of Balestrini, the 1960s and the 1970s. It includes over 70 works by the artist, along with a range of documentary material. The works from the 1960s illustrate a creative phase when Balestrini shared research interests with Luigi Nono, one of the most important 20th-century experimental composers, and when the neo-avant garde literary movement Gruppo 63 was also founded. The creative relationship between Balestrini and Nono lasted an entire decade, and the exhibition sheds light on the search for the disalienation of the word pursued by both, as well as on their use of technology as a way to seize and subvert the means of industrial production and explore their artistic potential. The final works in the exhibition date back to the late 1970s; some of them were conceived in connection with a poem dedicated to the New York City electricity blackout of 1977. Planned as an "action for voice" to be performed by Greek-Italian lyricist and vocal experimenter Demetrio Stratos in May 1979, the work was never performed due to the premature death of Stratos and Balestrini's indictment surrounding the political movement Autonomia Operaia. The exhibition also includes a reconstruction of Balestrini's Tape Mark I (1961), one of the earliest examples of computer-generated art. A combinatorial poem produced by an algorithm written in the Unix programming language on a massive IBM mainframe computer, Tape Mark I anticipates many of the contemporary questions surrounding Artificial Intelligence, and was featured in the 1962 edition of the Bompiani Literary Almanac, which was dedicated to "the application of computers to ethics and literature", a theme of utmost relevance today. To provide context to Balestrini's work, the show features a selection of early words-in-freedom works by Futurist artist Carlo Carrà, a form of avantgarde visual poetry that liberated words and letters from the conventions of grammar and syntax, making them part of visual and performative compositions. This technique was co-opted by the Italian Neoavanguardia in the 1960s, due to the revolutionary potential of the early Futurist movement.

Taking cue from the stimuli this exhibition offers and from current scholarship in the fields of History, Art History, Italian Studies, Gender Studies, and Media and Cultural Studies, the 2024 CIMA Research Fellows invite proposals for a conference that, departing from Balestrini's example,

examines the intricate relationships between art and activism during and beyond the Years of Lead. The all-day conference will take place at the Center for Italian Modern Art, on Wednesday, June 12, 2024.

Some of the possible research subjects include (but are not limited to):

- The counterculture movements of the 1960s and 1970s in Italy and globally, examining their artistic, social, and political impacts.
- The role of art as a vehicle for political resistance and revolution.
- The workerist movement in Italy and its relationship to the visual arts and literature.
- Feminist artistic and/or theoretical approaches within the context of the social and cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s.
- The early days of computer art and its evolution into contemporary practices and debates.
- Relationships, parallels, and differences between Futurist words-in-freedom poetry and other experimental poetry forms (calligrammes, concrete and visual poetry, collage, word painting, etc.)
- Neoavanguardia and its international counterparts: aspects and interpretations of verbovisual experiments.
- The landscape of experimental music in postwar Italy and beyond.
- Monographic approaches to Balestrini and Nono's work, across all media.
- The contemporary relevance of experimental artistic and political practices, considering their significance and evolution in modern society.

Please send an abstract (250–300 words), title, and a short biography (100–150 words) in English to info@italianmodernart.org with the subject line "Nanni Balestrini CFP" by Sunday, April 14, 2024. Please send the requested material in a single PDF document. Please do not send multiple attachments.

Reference:

CFP: Nanni Balestrini Study Day (New York, 12 Jun 24). In: ArtHist.net, Mar 4, 2024 (accessed Aug 3, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/41364>>.