

metafisica/ metafisiche

modernità e malinconia

a cura di

Vincenzo Trione

Everything has two aspects: one that is immediate, the one we almost always see and that people in general perceive; the other is spectral or metaphysical, visible only to rare individuals in moments of clairvoyance and metaphysical abstraction—just as certain bodies, concealed by matter impenetrable to solar rays, can appear only under the power of artificial lights, such as X-rays.

Giorgio de Chirico, Sull'arte metafisica, 1919

A major exhibition at Palazzo Reale and three exhibition “chapters” hosted by three major Milanese museums, accompanied by a multidisciplinary programme of initiatives across the city: Metafisica/Metafisiche is the project curated by Vincenzo Trione, which brings the masters of Metaphysical art into dialogue with their international “heirs” and with the “followers” of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Promoted by the Italian Ministry of Culture and the Municipality of Milan, the project is produced by Palazzo Reale, Museo del Novecento, Grande Brera–Palazzo Citterio and Gallerie d'Italia, in collaboration with the publishing house Electa, and forms part of the cultural programme of the Milan Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The exhibition *Modernità e malinconia* at Palazzo Reale is realised with the scientific collaboration of the Giorgio and Isa de Chirico Foundation and the Museo Morandi, with the participation of the Alberto Savinio Archive and the Carlo Carrà Archive.

At Palazzo Reale, more than 400 works are on display, including paintings, sculptures, photographs, drawings, design objects, as well as architectural models and maquettes, illustrations, comics, magazines, videos and vinyl records. The exhibition features national and international loans from over 150 public and private institutions, galleries, archives and prestigious private collections.

From the protagonists of the historic group founded in Ferrara in 1917—Giorgio de Chirico, Alberto Savinio, Carlo Carrà, Filippo de Pisis and Giorgio Morandi—to the artists in Europe and America who absorbed the movement's atmospheres and formal solutions, and on to contemporary echoes in the works of various authors inspired by Metaphysical poetics across the fields of art, photography, architecture, cinema, theatre, design, fashion, literature, graphic novels and music. From Mario Sironi to Felice Casorati, from René Magritte to Max Ernst, from Salvador Dalí to Andy Warhol. And further still, from Mimmo Paladino to Giulio Paolini, from Jannis Kounellis to Francesco Vezzoli, from Aldo Rossi to Gio Ponti, from Paolo Portoghesi to Frank Gehry, from Mimmo Jodice to Gabriele Basilico, from Giorgio Armani to Fendi, from Paolo Sorrentino to Tim Burton, through to David Bowie and many others besides.

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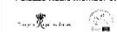
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“Distant and disparate episodes, which seem to have nothing in common, born of the imagination of artists far removed from one another in generational, cultural and linguistic terms,” explains the curator. “And yet, albeit along secret paths and not always in a fully intentional manner, these voices share a common stance: a distinctive *manière de voir*, inspired by a lateral, clandestine and perhaps marginal poetic experience, which took shape more than a century ago in a provincial city, situated outside history.”

“From Piazza Duomo to Brera there are two thousand steps of art: the route that begins on 28 January with *Metafisica/Metafisiche* in the rooms of Palazzo Reale will take in the Museo del Novecento and the Gallerie d’Italia in Piazza della Scala, before concluding at Palazzo Citterio,” states the Councillor for Culture, Tommaso Sacchi. “A sentimental map at the heart of Milan, connecting physical spaces and works of art, and evoking an idea of the city as a diffuse museum, one that can also be explored on foot and is capable of bringing past and present, great masters and contemporary perspectives into dialogue. An ambitious and collective project that restores Metaphysical art to its generative force and invites citizens and visitors alike to rediscover Milan as a place of thought, imagination and vision.”

At the Museo del Novecento, within the Ettore and Claudia Gian Ferrari Archives, a section is devoted to an in-depth exploration of the relationship between Metaphysical art and Milan. It examines the in some respects surprising bond between certain protagonists of the group led by de Chirico and the city itself—an artistic and intellectual crossroads, but also a laboratory for experimentation and dialogue between the arts.

Within the exhibition space, visitors encounter a selection of drawings, maquettes, costumes, archival materials and photographs, bearing witness to the activity of de Chirico, Savinio and Carrà in the Lombard capital and to their collaboration with some of the city’s most important artistic and cultural institutions. Particular emphasis is placed on set and costume designs produced by the artists between the 1940s and 1950s for Teatro alla Scala, as well as period photographs and preparatory drawings for *Bagni Misteriosi*, created for the Triennale di Milano.

A further focus is dedicated to *Ascolto il tuo cuore, città* (1944) by Alberto Savinio, a work that encapsulates “all the ‘carnal’ love that a man can feel for a city”. This documentary novel is the subject of a series of ten plates by Mimmo Paladino, entitled *Disegni per Savinio*, in which the artist extracts situations and atmospheres to compose the sequences of a kind of involuntary drawn film with a neo-realist imprint, governed by a finely calibrated interplay between fidelity and infidelity, between fragments of writing and visions.

At the Gallerie d’Italia – Milano, the Intesa Sanpaolo museum in Piazza Scala, in dialogue with the works housed in the vaults, a tribute to Morandi is presented through the photographs by Gianni Berengo Gardin dedicated to the painter’s Bolognese studio.

At Palazzo Citterio, the Grande Brera hosts an unprecedented homage by William Kentridge, likewise dedicated to Giorgio Morandi. Kentridge’s intervention unfolds in two parts: a sound video installation and a sequence of cardboard sculptures, which poetically reinterpret everyday objects—the protagonists of Morandi’s still lifes. This approach establishes an ideal dialogue with the Metaphysical works by the Bolognese master preserved at Palazzo Citterio. In keeping with the curatorial framework of *Metafisica/Metafisiche*, Kentridge’s installation highlights Morandi’s formal and conceptual legacy and revisits an expressive practice in which time, memory and rhythm become visual matter.

The unified catalogue for the exhibitions is published by Electa.

On the occasion of *Metafisica/Metafisiche. Modernità e malinconia*, Electa, in collaboration with the National Museum of Photography – MUNAF, presents *Racconti della metafisica*, a programme of cultural events for visitors to the exhibition at Palazzo Reale, running from February to June 2026. A series of special tours and conversations will bring different disciplines and perspectives into dialogue, offering the public new insights into the resonances of Metaphysical art in the present.

List of venues

Metafisica/Metafisiche. Modernità e malinconia
Palazzo Reale
28 January – 21 June 2026

Milano Metafisica
Museo del Novecento
28 January – 21 June 2026

Gianni Berengo Gardin.
Lo studio di Giorgio Morandi
Gallerie d'Italia – Milano
28 January – 6 April 2026

William Kentridge.
More Sweetly Play the Dance and
Rememebering Morandi
Grande Brera-Palazzo Citterio
6 February – 5 April 2026

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title

Metafisica/Metafisiche Modernità e malinconia

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Anna Luigia De Simone, coordinator

Anna Calise

Vincenzo Di Rosa

Alessia Scaparra Seneca

venue

Palazzo Reale, Piazza del Duomo 12, Milan

dates

28 January – 21 June 2026

An exhibition by

Comune di Milano-Cultura Palazzo Reale

Museo del Novecento Electa

In partnership with

Italian Ministry of Culture, Grande Brera-Palazzo Citterio, Intesa Sanpaolo-Gallerie d'Italia

In collaboration with

Fondazione Giorgio e Isa de Chirico and Museo Morandi

Part of

Cultural programme of the Milan Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games

Exhibition design

Massimo Curzi, architect, with Marco Belloni

and Isidoro Panitti

Graphic design

Irene Bacchi Leonardo Sonnoli with Noemi Barletta and Alice Teodorani

- studio Sonnoli-

Technical sponsor

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Opening hours - Palazzo Reale

Monday: closed

Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday:

10:00 a.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Thursday: 10:00 a.m. – 10:30 p.m.

Last entry one hour before closing

Tickets - Palazzo Reale

Full price, open ticket: €17 – flexible date

(includes free audio guide or QR code)

Full price: €15 (includes free audio guide or QR code)

Reduced: €13

Booking and advance sales fees

Groups and individual visitors: €2 per person

School groups: €1 per person

Information, bookings and advance sales

ticketone.it

Tel: +39 02 33020022

Monday to Friday, 9:30 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Email: gruppiescuole@tosc.it

Information and bookings for school groups and guided tours – Ad Artem

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Vincenzo Trione

Metaphysical Art is the name given to one of the most compelling and controversial chapters in the adventure of the European avant-gardes.

1917. Ferrara, “the city of a hundred marvels.” At the psychiatric hospital of Villa del Seminario, Giorgio de Chirico finds himself together with his brother Alberto Savinio, Carlo Carrà and Filippo de Pisis. From mid-April to mid-August: in those four months, the Metaphysical school is born. An almost-movement, bringing together some of the greatest solitary figures of Italian art, united by their fear of war and driven by precise intentions.

To move beyond progressive myths. To return to questioning distant memories, without nostalgia or retreat. To reaffirm the importance of tradition, of art history, of plastic values. To reassert the centrality of painting. And, at the same time, to initiate a problematic dialogue with the devices experimented by Cubists, Futurists and Dadaists.

From the interweaving of origins and originality emerges a poetic vision rooted in philosophy. To learn to see the world in an uncommon way, in a state of emergency, amid moments of anguish and unsettling disorientation. To tear open the curtain of habit. To isolate elements of the present from their customary dimension, releasing an unexpected charge of mystery.

To glimpse forms in an interstice, between wakefulness and sleep. To discover the enigmatic nature of truth, revealing its nocturnal side. And further: to expose the senselessness of what is ordinary. To disintegrate all familiar communication through the very language of familiarity. To portray a fantastic universe, yet one devoid of ghosts. To make the utmost clarity coexist with the utmost obscurity. Finally, to conceive the surreal as the orthogonal projection of the visible.

Before long, these urgencies were shared by another “ungovernable” figure, Giorgio Morandi, who between 1918 and 1919 produced still lifes inhabited by motifs characteristic of the Metaphysical imagination. Structured in chapters, this exhibition retraces a unique and extraordinary story.

And, at the same time, documents a plot twist. Through an unforeseeable conjunction of circumstances, Metaphysical painters have become the unwitting fathers of vast areas of twentieth- and twenty-first-century art. Their iconographies have been taken up and profaned according to differing sensibilities, acquiring further meanings. An unexpected dissemination that prompted Alberto Arbasino to write: “Metaphysical Art is one of the very few intellectual achievements and dimensions of the spirit to have emerged in Italy over the last two or three centuries. Despite Italy’s vast cultural heritage, it stands as a distinctive contribution to universal culture.”

Squares and statues, arches and porticoes, towers and shadows, still lifes and mannequins have passed through significant stages of art, architecture, photography, design, fashion, cinema, theatre, graphic novels, music and literature. More or less faithfully, these traces have been reinvented by “makers” inclined to refer back to an unmistakable way of seeing, founded on melancholy, suspended atmospheres, refined perceptual games and shadows without origin. It is an alphabet that has now entered our familiar lexicon.

Thus, a heterodox history has taken shape. Like a labyrinth leading through cultures and practices, through borrowings and improper appropriations. Or like sequences of an impossible film, to which we have given a title: *Metafisica/Metafisiche*.

Vincenzo Trione, curator

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The exhibition

Pictor Optimus

The prologue and epilogue are devoted to Giorgio de Chirico. A way of forcefully reaffirming the centrality of the work of the Pictor Optimus, prophet of an original philosophy of art and, at the same time, witness to the possible destiny of that very philosophy. “We Metaphysicians (I say ‘we’ out of délicatesse),” writes de Chirico.

La Metafisica

The first act of the exhibition fixes the birth of the Metaphysical group in 1917, in Ferrara, at the former psychiatric hospital of Villa del Seminario. Almost a “joint-stock company”, de Chirico recalls. Alongside de Chirico himself, the protagonists are Carlo Carrà, Alberto Savinio and Filippo de Pisis. They are distant and diverse personalities, united by a scandalous proposal: to initiate an open and problematic dialogue between the ephemeral and the eternal. This aesthetic would profoundly shape the research of Giorgio Morandi, the other voice of this experience.

This chapter advances a deliberate historical-critical stretch. Displayed in sequence are not only the works painted by the leading figures during the golden age of Metaphysical Art, but also those produced in the following decades (up to the 1940s). The aim is to demonstrate how this poetic vision represented, for de Chirico, Carrà, Savinio, de Pisis and Morandi alike, a necessity. A primer that they never ceased to rearticulate. Finally, the exhibition dwells on an apparent contradiction. Unlike the protagonists of Futurism, De Stijl, the Bauhaus and Esprit Nouveau, the Metaphysical painters pursued their experience within the framework of the work of art itself. Not without, however, indulging in certain linguistic shifts. The challenge: to take painting elsewhere. By initiating dialogues with theatre, cinema and fashion. In secret resonance with a recurring impulse within the proposals of the avant-gardes.

Le Metafisiche

The exhibition explores also a plot twist. Through an unforeseeable conjunction of circumstances, Metaphysical painters have become the unwitting fathers of vast regions of twentieth- and twenty-first-century art. From Dadaism to Surrealism, from the New Objectivity to Magical Realism, from the great European and American abstraction of the post-war period to Pop Art, from Conceptual art to Postmodernism.

Altre metafisiche

The exhibition documents unexpected re-emergences. Squares and statues, arches and porticoes, towers and shadows, mannequins and still lifes take on the value of letters. Letters that are adopted and reactivated, across different registers, in significant moments of photography, architecture, design, fashion, theatre, cinema, graphic novels and music, between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Between tribute and reinvention.

The parcours is punctuated, in each room, by “close-ups”: in-depth examinations of particularly revealing works. It is also marked by recurring “resurgences” of paintings by the Metaphysical masters – an artifice designed to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of these iconographies.

Furthermore, the itinerary is enriched by “parentheses” that reconstruct the historical context in which Metaphysical Art was born and established.

Museo del Novecento/ Milano Metafisica

The second act of the exhibition is devoted to the relationship between certain members of the Metaphysical Art and Milan. La Scala, the Triennale. Particular attention is paid to the “presences” of de Chirico, Carrà and Savinio, author of *Ascolto il tuo cuore, città* (1944), one of the most passionate and restless literary tributes to the Lombard capital, encompassing “all the ‘carnal’ love that a man can feel [for] a city.” This documentary novel is honoured with tributes by Mimmo Paladino and Joseph Kosuth: a kind of storyboard in a neorealist vein and a permanent light installation on the museum’s side façade.

Gallerie d’Italia/ Gianni Berengo Gardin. Lo studio di Giorgio Morandi

The third part of *Metafisica/Metafisiche* is hosted in the vault of Gallerie d’Italia and features Gianni Berengo Gardin’s reportage on Morandi’s legendary Bolognese studio in Via Fondazza. This body of photographs from 1993 introduces a secluded space where the work of a master was created – driven by the conviction that “there is nothing more abstract than the visible.”

Grande Brera/Palazzo Citterio/ William Kentridge. *More Sweetly Play the Dance and Remembering Morandi*

Finally, the fourth act. A complex work by William Kentridge, comprising two components: an immersive sound video installation and a sequence of cardboard sculptures that poetically reinterpret Morandi’s still lifes. An attempt to establish an ideal dialogue with the Metaphysical works of the Bolognese master preserved at Palazzo Citterio. At the same time, a way to bring Morandi’s silent constructions into resonance with the visionary explorations of a major contemporary artist, engaged in creating tension between history, memory, anticipation, temporality and the media.

Vincenzo Trione, curator