

**flowers never die, they are reborn:
Betty Bee's portraits of resilience**

Betty Bee is a unique artist having authored a distinctive and compelling body of work. Employing her own biography to disrupt crystallised social conceptions, Bee's practice unfolds as a powerful inquiry regarding the female condition, stamping a fierce mark in the Italian art scene. This exhibition establishes a dialogue between pre-existing and newly produced works, from 1991 to today. Together, the selected pieces map a possible reading of a diverse and vital practice.

Untitled operates as the pulsating core of the exhibition. This new set gathers small-scale heart-shaped depictions of flowers interconnected by golden threads. The canvas' profiles humanise the arrangements, framing them as portraits. Flowers and metallic wiring are recurring elements in Bee's artistic grammar, expressing tensions arising from the mutually dependent relations between self and other. Echoing a celestial constellation, the hovering features of *Untitled's* bouquets project a relational quality akin to our webbed subjectivities. Linking figures, feelings and memories, it maps the multiple dimensions of one's experience of life. In so doing, *Untitled* stands both as a depiction of a timeline as well as of a social network. As a composite subjective and collective portrait, the work outlines a mesh of mutually defining relations, and signals the interpenetration of art and life in Bee's practice.

Whereas the earlier performative photographs such as *Untitled* (1997-2005) or *Mice Puppet* (1995), belong to a period when the artist explored self-representation as a method for analysis and critique, the strand *Untitled* (2024) belongs to expands Bee's recognized motif of the flower as a life-like symbol of identity. The exhibition includes two further new series: both named *Untitled*. While they both manifest further articulations of Bee's recurrent employment of the flower, such exemplary use of black, white and grey tones in combination with stylized shapes adds novel facets to the artist's imaginary.

Thought at a first glance such a sober, grief-oriented approach could strike a contrast with Bee's recognizable lively use of colour, a closer look testifies how this shift might also be understood as a continuity rather than a rupture. Larger than life and standing vertically, erect-like, the figures project a rebellious posture reminiscing the provocative performative gestures of the past, while their stylized features, echoing a shadow play, add an added choreographical layer to this associative possibility. The dark background can also be found in several works such as *La Mucca Pazza* (1996), in both cases functioning as a marker for emotional and inner or less conscious layers of the self. Lastly, while the landscape surrounding the flower-figures is dark it is not void, but rather animated and responds to our movement in space: mixed with glitter the paint produces a shimmering effect, a strategy also found in previous works.

Enveloping the exhibition with its soundscape, *Gilda* is another source of life-like movement. Combining sadness and joy and manifesting both as a testimonial of abuse and a defiant stance, the video is exemplary of the artist's strategies and interests. From the performative gestures and the meandering branches and wires, to the twinkling surfaces and the dim backgrounds, Betty Bee's work constantly documents the flow of life as it happens. It is a practice which reflects and embodies the marks of time and like a flower consistently changes and shape-shifts: dying only to be reborn.