



fiera internazionale d'arte  
moderna e contemporanea

international exhibition of  
modern and contemporary art

2/4.02.2024  
Bologna

## ***Number Zero. Arte Fiera's first catalog***

**Curated by Clarissa Ricci**

**In collaboration with ANGAMC – Associazione Nazionale Gallerie d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea**

**Arte Fiera, Hall 26  
Bologna, 2-4 February 2024  
Preview 1° February 2024**

1974 was the “year zero” of Arte Fiera. The pilot edition was the starting point of an adventure that was to last a long time, but it had the characteristics of an experiment for which no documents have survived, apart from the oral recollections of the participants and a very rare catalogue; a catalogue that, by analogy, we can call ‘number zero’. On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Arte Fiera, the catalogue has been “expanded” on the walls, allowing visitors to discover the ten galleries - all Italian, most of them from Bologna - that were protagonists of the first edition of the fair.

The 1974 catalogue is not only an insight into artistic and market life in Italy at the time: it is a manifesto. In the introductory text, the critic and journalist Giorgio Ruggieri, who was in charge of gathering the consensus of the first galleries, shows a clear awareness of the cultural and developmental opportunities of the fair. The debate about the commodification of art was already heated, and an event that openly declared its commercial intentions seemed an opportune solution. In addition, although art fairs were still in their infancy, Arte Fiera knew that it could rely on a solid commercial structure like Ente Fiera, which had major expansion plans for the entire fairgrounds (“fiera district”), including the construction of cultural facilities like GAM - Galleria d'Arte Moderna and a modern conference centre. Arte Fiera was placing its bets on an expanding cultural system.

Ruggieri promised, almost prophesied, at the end of his catalogue text that 1974 was only the first step towards something much greater: “This mini-exhibition-market, however, has the premises and the structure to propose itself again next year, even tenfold”. This prediction turned out to be less than reality: in 1975, Arte Fiera opened its doors with more than 200 galleries.

The extraordinary growth of the event was linked to the vicissitudes of international relations between galleries and artists. It was this network of relationships that made the event-fair a key moment for the entire art system, which, as it expanded across the globe,



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increasingly needed places for interaction and exchange that also offered opportunities for updating and researching new experiments.

The importance of Arte Fiera was undoubtedly cemented by the ability of the galleries to group, which played a fundamental role in creating and developing the Bologna art market. To pay tribute to this role, the 1974 catalogue exhibition is accompanied by a **chronology of the participation of the galleries between 1974 and 1979**. The choice of dates is not accidental: at the end of the decade, due to the complex political and cultural situation in the country, the event was interrupted and resumed in 1983.

In the 1980s, while Arte Fiera was able to draw on a previous history of relationships and experimentation, the general conditions had changed (and the event had moved, almost symbolically, from June to January in the calendar). The first six years of Arte Fiera's history can therefore be seen as a founding chapter in its own right, in which the galleries were the protagonists.

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