

BENVENUTO! SISLEJ XHAFA

A major retrospective devoted to an ironic, subversive artist who draws inspiration from the complexity and contradictions of reality

on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the birth of the Italian Republic

2 June – 2 October 2016

Thursday 2 June 2016, 6:00 PM | AGAIN AND AGAIN

Performance by Sislej Xhafa with the *Orchestra d'archi Roma Sinfonietta*

MAXXI Gallery 1 | admittance with museum entrance ticket

www.fondazionemaxxi.it

*Reality is stronger than art.
As an artist I do not want to reflect a reality,
But I do want to question it.
Sislej Xhafa*

Rome 1 June 2016. Sislej Xhafa has furnished the waiting room of a police station in Gent like a grand palace. He presented a clandestine Albanian pavilion at the Venice Biennale and has used the Ljubljana train station as if it were a stock exchange selling wishes and hopes to people instead of shares: he is an artist who draws inspiration from the complexity of social relations to whom MAXXI is dedicating the exhibition **BENVENUTO! Sislej Xhafa**, curated by Hou Hanru and Luigia Lonardelli **from 2 June to 2 October 2016.**

The exhibition comprises about **30 works**, spanning his career from the 1990s through to the present, including a **new work the artist has created especially for this show**. MAXXI is presenting the full range of his artistic output that draws inspiration from the contradictions of contemporary reality.

The exhibition's title is taken from the major installation created by the artist in 2000 within the ambit of the *Arte all'Arte* project in the Casole d'Elsa hills near Siena. A gigantic script *Benvenuto* (Welcome), an invitation to openness, to the embracing of others understood as necessary, inevitable progress that over time leads to social and cultural change.

This work, together with many others on show, highlights issues such as the coexistence of the cultures and religions and the redefinition of the concept of migrant in a global world.

Installed in the spaces of MAXXI's Gallery 2, **BENVENUTO! Sislej Xhafa** comprises numerous widely different works, chosen by the artist and curators, with a layout that avoids a chronological order, preferring to juxtapose the works and create a syncopated rhythm that in part recreates the stratified identity of the artist. The issues the artist tackles are frequently tied up with his own experiences; those of identity, nationality, migrations, legality and the institutions, always confronted with tones ranging from the ironic to the subversive and making recourse to the most diverse techniques.

The works include *Association in Yellow* (2009), an oversize jacket on which is printed a list of New York lawyers taken from the Yellow Pages, a piece that questions the representation of power by attempting to humanize it.

Beh-Rang (2004) is a video filmed in Kabul featuring a burning bicycle referencing the poetics of violence while *Giuseppe* (2003 - 2007) is a sculpture in black marble that represents Garibaldi with a plastic bag and a

number of sugar cubes in his hand: a reflection on the concept of the modern hero, the theme of identity and the contemporary idea of the celebratory monument.

This Call May Be Recorded for Quality Service (2012) in which the artist has recycled around 2,400 old cell phones used as pieces in a mosaic that composes the Ying and Yang symbol in red and black.

Sunshade (2011) is a wall-mounted beach umbrella where the materials are refugee clothes left behind on the beaches of Lampedusa, a wrong-footing symbol of a promised land, a reflection that is both poetic and bitter on the issue of migration.

The show also features *My Garden* (2011 - 2016) which sees the gallery floor scattered with pieces of paper, bags, empty bottles, plastic cutlery, objects commonly considered to be rubbish, but which in the imagination of the artist become a garden with an aesthetic that has been overturned with respect to traditions. The same formal configuration has also been adopted with *Paradiso* (2003), installed in the museum piazza and featuring a plastic table with four chairs and an umbrella which beneath the neon script "Paradiso" create strangely contrasting images.

BENVENUTO! Sislej Xhafa is a visual journey through the complexity of the modern world in which each work encourages the observer to reflect, both in personal and collective terms, on the social, economic and political phenomena of our world.

On the first day of opening of the exhibition, **Thursday 2 June at 6:00 PM**, the performance **Again and Again** will be staged in MAXXI's Gallery 1 (admittance with a museum entrance ticket).

A performance piece by the artist that involves the *Orchestra d'archi Roma Sinfonietta* and which like other works by Xhafa plays on the deconstruction of traditional values and the overturning of perception.

On the occasion of the exhibition MAXXI presents **CLANDESTINE. Meetings beyond the frontiers of art** a series of Lectio Magistralis given by philosophers, anthropologists and sociologists, to reflect upon the meaning and value of topical and ever changing issues such as: identity, reception, globalization, borders, integration and the role of art.

Sislej Xhafa was born in 1970 at Pejë (Kosova). When he was 20 years old, he left his home country to move to London and later Italy. His artistic education took place in Italy where he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence. The last fifteen years he has lived in New York, a place which he chose "for its contradictions and its uncertainties". Xhafa has exhibited in leading contemporary art museums around the world, including: Kanazawa, Toronto, Istanbul, Frankfurt, Roma, Tokyo, London, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Paris and New York. He has participated in the Venice biennial (1997, 1999, 2005, 2013), Istanbul biennial (2001), Gwanju biennial (2002) and Havana biennial (2009). Among the awards he has received is the Premio Querini Stampalia – Furla for young Italian art in 2000, assigned to him in consideration of his relationship with the country that welcomed him during his formative years.

The show is supported by GALLERIA CONTINUA, San Gimignano / Beijing / Les Moulins / Habana

The press kit and images of the exhibition can be downloaded from the Reserved Area of the Fondazione MAXXI's website at <http://www.fondazionemaxxi.it/area-riservata/> by typing in the password **areariservatamaxxi**

MAXXI – National Museum of XXI Century Arts

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opening hours: 11:00 AM – 7:00 PM (Tues, Weds, Thurs, Fri, Sun) | 11:00 AM – 10:00 PM (Sat) | closed Mondays

Admittance free for students of art and architecture from Tuesday to Friday

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