

PRESS RELEASE

Settore Musei Civici Bologna | Museo Morandi

Mary Ellen Bartley: MORANDI'S BOOKS

Curated by Alessia Masi

31 January - 7 July 2024

Opening Tuesday 30 January 2024 17.00

Exhibition sponsored by the Settore Musei Civici Bologna | Museo Morandi

Special project of ART CITY Bologna 2024 on the occasion of Arte Fiera

Bologna, 29 January 2024 - Museo Morandi of the Settore Musei Civici Bologna is pleased to present the exhibition **Mary Ellen Bartley: MORANDI'S BOOKS**, curated by **Alessia Masi**, the first solo exhibition in Italy of American photographer **Mary Ellen Bartley** (New York, 1959).

Open from **31 January to 7 July 2024** in the museum that houses the largest public collection of Giorgio Morandi's works, the exhibition is one of five **special projects** of the 12th edition of **ART CITY Bologna** - the institutional program of special exhibitions, events and activities sponsored by the **City of Bologna** in partnership with **BolognaFiere** on the occasion of **Arte Fiera** - that explore and reinterpret **Giorgio Morandi's** work on the **60th anniversary of his death** through different contemporary languages.

The **opening** will take place on **Tuesday, 30 January 2024**, at 17.00 in the presence of Mary Ellen Bartley. During ART CITY Bologna, from 1 to 4 February 2024, admission is free.

Mary Ellen Bartley is known for her photographs exploring the tactile and formal qualities of the printed book and its potential for abstraction. One aspect of her approach is to work in unique libraries and archives, where she responds to collections and their habitat by developing projects during the time spent with them.

The **21 photographs**, presented in two rooms of the Museo Morandi, are the fruit of a **residency** the photographer carried out in Bologna in the spaces of **Casa Morandi** beginning in May 2020, interrupted shortly thereafter by the COVID-19 pandemic, and subsequently resumed in 2022. **MORANDI'S BOOKS** was born from this experience: a photography series of personal compositions built with some of the books and objects belonging to the artist and now preserved in the house-museum in Via Fondazza.

In the hands of Bartley, volumes on Corot, Ingres, Piero della Francesca, Rembrandt, and Cézanne - that is, the teachers of the Bolognese master - have become silent interlocutors of his "still lifes"; they sometimes live alongside objects and tin cans removed from the dust of the artist's studio, ready to return to life and find a space in photography that lends them a measured aesthetic dignity as well as formal value.

In her methodological approach, Bartley has observed such features as light, colour and geometry, so dear to Morandi, in order to convey and emphasise values increasingly precarious in the contemporary social fabric: simplicity, silence, peace, order, meditation and reflection. Giorgio Morandi and Mary Ellen Bartley: two artists distant in time and differing in their use of artistic mediums, but united by the search for the essence and an attention to simple things.

When Mary Ellen Bartley visited Casa Morandi for the first time in the spring of 2018 and saw the Bolognese master's rich personal library, she said *"it was like experiencing a miracle"*, and harboured no doubts about devoting herself to the new project. Back in Bologna in May 2020, her work was complicated and interrupted by the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. In an interview with the *East Hampton Star* newspaper, Bartley described the particular state of mind in which she worked: *"I found myself leaving a day or two before the total closure of Italy. During the residency, I spent most of my time in the library, with very limited access to Morandi's studio. I always had to be accompanied by one of the curators of the Museo Morandi. The museum was closing to the public and the red line of Northern Italy was coming closer and closer. It was very stressful"*. Back in the U.S. in her Sag Harbor, New York studio, she declared: *"I had the photos I had taken, but I didn't have the full project yet, and I knew it. I had this dream opportunity. I had gone to Bologna but I had come back with the project incomplete"*.

When Bartley returned to Casa Morandi in 2022, she entered the artist's studio with ideas about collage already in mind. She was able to employ some of Morandi's most familiar subjects in her work - bottles, cans, vases, cups and other objects - allowing them to enrich compositions, emptying them of meaning and letting them simply be themselves. Bartley continued: *"What I realized, surrounded by all the vessels that he used, was how amazing he was. I felt viscerally the extraordinary alchemy that happens between these pretty ordinary-looking objects becoming these iconic characters that he paints again and again. If you didn't know his work, you would never get there. It's not obvious that those objects would have made those paintings"*.

Alessia Masi, curator of the Morandi Museum and the exhibition, notes in her catalogue text: *"Objects merge with each other, shapes hide behind or inside each other through*

the use of colour and light, creating enchanted and seemingly illusory images. Mary Ellen's intuition to blur parts of the composition evokes some expressive modes used by Morandi, especially in his final years, and especially in watercolour, the most suitable medium for him to record the continuous changes of the visible, like a seismograph able to grasp and synthesise in an absolute way every slightest variation of the infinite dynamics of reality. It is precisely on fine sheets of paper that Morandi can achieve results that oil does not fully allow him, effects of transparency that almost create an expectation outside time. With their undefined contours, objects seem to evaporate in part towards infinity, unpainted areas that seem to wish for invasion by the universe that penetrates them. A mysterious, almost dreamlike atmosphere in which an irreconcilable balance is achieved in the human experience: that between dream and reality. Perfectly balanced images, prefigured in the artist's mind and perfected through the use of modest optical instruments that foreshadow the most technological devices employed by photographers today: a canvas used as a filter to modulate light and fragments of celluloid sheets divided by Morandi in grids and more or less dense reticles to frame the composition, dividing it on the Cartesian model and distilling the two-dimensional vision to be transferred to the canvas. Bartley introduces these same fragments into her work to better understand Morandi's method, to ensure a structural balance in the photographic image and to create her own compositions in which the square shapes of books intertwine, tracing original geographies that sometimes also enclose objects or parts of them, always in a perfect balance of idea and form."

In addition to the photographic images, the exhibition itinerary proposes a **video** created by Bartley herself, in which the artist narrates her encounter with Giorgio Morandi's work and books, her experience and the *modus operandi* used to carry out this project.

The exhibition follows a practice the Museo Morandi has tested out for years: creating relationships between the work of contemporary artists and that of the Bolognese master to reaffirm his leading role in the global cultural imagination and his influence on international visual culture.

The exhibition is accompanied by a **bilingual Italian/English catalogue** published by **Danilo Montanari Editore**, with texts by Alessia Masi and Lorenza Selleri and the reproduction of all the photographic works on display.

The press kit, including images of the works and installation views, can be downloaded via this link: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1vOfPUFrbJPxr-eLV04SJ54cawsFHD4X?usp=sharing>

BIOGRAPHY MARY ELLEN BARTLEY

Mary Ellen Bartley was born in New York in 1959. She lives and works in Sag Harbor, New York.

Her keen interest in the still life genre has inspired a body of works rich in metaphors, pictorial depth and tactility. Her compositions reveal simplicity and suggest, with subtle insistence, the layered history of the books themselves. Her photographs are replete with questions about what we see and don't see and the stories we tell. However, the spirit of her work offers a thoughtful response, a respite from an increasingly noisy and chaotic world.

In addition to her minimalist studio installations, with books chosen solely for their physical qualities and colours - represented in such series as *Paperbacks*, *Reading in Color* and *Blue Books* - we find projects carried out in libraries and archives of a unique character, developed by the artist over time in response to the collections and their habitats.

Bartley has been invited to work in the libraries of famous artists like experimental theatre director and artist Robert Wilson, painters Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner, stylist and bibliophile Karl Lagerfeld, and Giorgio Morandi, whose quiet still lifes have been an essential source of inspiration from the beginning of her artistic career. The subtle use of natural light, precise selection of focus, and a keen sense of geometric arrangement often pervade photographs of calm moderation and meditative stillness.

Mary Ellen Bartley continues to find innovative techniques to expand the range of images of books, her main subject, since every new book collection requires a new approach, including xerography, re-photography and collage.

Her works have been exhibited at numerous exhibitions and institutions, including the Queens Museum (New York), Walker Art Centre (Minneapolis), Morgan Library and Museum (New York) and Parrish Art Museum (Watermill). His photographs and artistic books are in the permanent collections of the Centre for Creative Photography (Tucson), J. Paul Getty Museum (Los Angeles), Museum of Modern Art (New York), Library Special Collection (New York), Parrish Art Museum (Watermill), the Morgan Library and Museum (New York) and Walker Art Centre (Minneapolis).

maryellenbartley.com

WORKS ON DISPLAY

Mary Ellen Bartley

Large White Bottle and Shadow, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 68.58 x 91.44 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Box, Books and Ca, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 68.58 x 91.44 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Ingres Collage, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 68.58 x 91.44 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Standing Pink Book, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 68.58 x 91.44 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Two Bottles on Left, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 68.58 x 91.44 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Two Cezannes Gold Piece, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 68.58 x 91.44 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Angelico, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 43.18 x 55.8 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Celluloid blue stripe vase, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 43.18 x 55.8 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Corot and Ingres, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 43.18 x 55.8 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Grey piece, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 50.8 x 48.9 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

La Nature Morte Glassine, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 43.18 x 55.8 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Oil can glassine, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 43.18 x 55.8 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Painted vase, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 43.18 x 55.8 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Piero della Francesca, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 48.9 x 55.8 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Rembrandt Album, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 43.18 x 55.8 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Roberto Longhi, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 43.18 x 55.8 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Three pale books, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 43.18 x 55.8 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Vermeer glassine, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 43.18 x 55.8 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Yellow and white book, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 43.18 x 55.8 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Giotto glassine, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 43.18 x 55.8 cm

Mary Ellen Bartley

Vellum top, 2022

Archival pigment print mounted on dibond, 43.18 x 55.8 cm

INFORMATION

Exhibition

Mary Ellen Bartley: MORANDI's BOOKS

Curated by

Alessia Masi

Sponsored by

Sezione Musei Civici Bologna | Museo Morandi

Location

Museo Morandi

Via Don Giovanni Minzoni 14, Bologna

Exhibition dates

31 January - 7 July 2024

Opening

Tuesday 30 January 2024 17.00

Opening hours

Tuesday, Wednesday 14.00 - 19.00

Thursday 14.00 - 20.00

Friday, Saturday, Sunday, public holidays 10.00 - 19.00

Closed Mondays non-public holidays

Opening hours during ART CITY Bologna (1 - 4 February 2024)

Thursday, 1 February 10.00 - 20.00

Friday, 2 February 10.00 - 20.00

Saturday, 3 February 10.00 - 23.00

Sunday, 4 February 10.00 - 20.00

Admission

Full price € 2 | reduced price € 4 | special reduction for young adults age 19-25 € 2 | Free for Card Cultura holders

Entrance during ART CITY Bologna (1 - 4 February 2024)

Free

Information

Morandi Museum

Via Don Giovanni Minzoni 14 | 40121 Bologna

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www.mambo-bologna.org/museomorandi/

Facebook: MAMboMuseoArteModernaBologna

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Settore Musei Civici Bologna

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