

## PRESS RELEASE

Settore Musei Civici Bologna | MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna

***Lynda Benglis e Properzia de' Rossi: Sculptrici di capriccioso e destrissimo ingegno***  
Curated by Lorenzo Balbi

MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna | Project Room  
26 January- 26 May 2024

Opening Thursday, 25 January 2024 at 6 pm

*Bologna, 24 January 2024 - MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna of Settore Musei Civici Bologna inaugurates the Project Room exhibition program for the year 2024 with the exhibition **Lynda Benglis e Properzia de' Rossi: Sculptrici di capriccioso e destrissimo ingegno** ('Lynda Benglis e Properzia de' Rossi: Sculptors of most dexterous and whimsical ingenuity'), curated by Lorenzo Balbi, on view from 26 January to 26 May 2024.*

The opening will take place on **Thursday 25 January at 6 pm** as part of **ART CITY Bologna**, the institutional program of exhibitions, events and special initiatives sponsored by the City of Bologna in partnership with BolognaFiere on the occasion of Arte Fiera.

The exhibition proposes a novel dialogue between **Properzia de' Rossi** (Bologna, circa 1490 - 1530), considered the first female sculptor in art history and the only woman to have a biography in Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, and **Lynda Benglis** (Lake Charles, Louisiana, 1941), considered one of the most important and irreverent living female sculptors. Belonging to distant ages and cultures, the two artists, both virtuosos of the sculptural medium, have shared the ambition of affirming their creative individuality in contexts hostile to or difficult to access for women.

**Properzia de' Rossi** challenged the limits of the era she lived in through her inclusion as an artist in a purely masculine context: the prestigious San Petronio building site in Bologna. Such celebrated artists as Niccolò Tribolo, Alfonso Lombardi, Girolamo da Treviso and Amico Aspertini worked on the marble sculptures of the façade portals. According to Vasari, in shouldering the immense physical effort of sculptural techniques de' Rossi was animated by the desire for fame and the drive to extirpate male "boasts of superiority", although she asked the "makers of the basilica" to take part in their work "through her husband". Vasari also underlines the woman's irreverent nature in the marble panel she fashioned, depicting the biblical episode of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. The art critic claimed that the work - which portrays an adulterous affair -

is a manifesto of the “ardent passion” the sculptor nurtured for her lover, vented through art. In Vasari’s view, Properzia de’ Rossi’s artistic activity is thus scaled down by the intervention of two men: her husband, as a middleman for obtaining work, and her lover, as a source of inspiration for her art.

Five centuries after Properzia de’ Rossi, **Lynda Benglis** has, like the Bolognese artist, carried out a revolution since her début: challenging social limits and, at the same time, material ones through her artistic feats. An American of Greek origin, Benglis began her career in the 1960s by opposing the geometry and dogmatism of the Minimalist art movement - whose major representatives, such as Donald Judd and Robert Morris, were male - with inventive coloured works. From spills of pigmented latex that birth paintings adhering to the floor to the choice of experimental materials which change their nature over time, everything contributes to fuelling Benglis’s creation of works in progress that challenge the immutability and static nature characteristic of sculptural art.

Even in those works exhibited at the MAMbo, the brilliant shades of colour do not follow the canonical trajectory for the use of white marble in contemporary art - as in the case of Sol Lewitt, for example - thus expanding the expressive possibilities of the technique and resulting in a rich, deep visual heritage. Her experimentation with colour in marble sculpture goes hand-in-hand with the desire to preserve historical elements, such as the influence of Greek and Baroque art, to deconstruct art’s temporal boundaries. Benglis’s works preserve an anthropomorphic trace captured through a precise gesture and moment she defines “the frozen gesture”. They produce a revolutionary new interpretation of sculptural art by setting up a close dialogue between the past and present.

*Lynda Benglis e Properzia de’ Rossi: Sculptrici di capriccioso e destrissimo ingegno* presents the **Grassi family noble coat of arms**, in silver filigree with carved plum or apricot pits, from the Bolognese artist’s artistic output. It belongs to the **Museo Medievale di Bologna** and has been specially restored for this exhibition. A 3D reproduction of the marble panel, also produced for the exhibition, depicts the biblical episode of **Giuseppe e la moglie di Putifarre** (‘Joseph and the Wife of Potiphar’), sculpted for the portal of the **Basilica of San Petronio** and preserved in the **Museo diocesano**. The latter is a duplicate of faithful accuracy, extremely useful in the event of the loss of the original work. It allows visitors to the MAMbo to enjoy a sculpture impossible to move from its original walled location. The 3D reproduction represents a concrete action to enhance the cultural heritage entrusted to digital technology, generally used to preserve and restore artistic assets. Both the Grassi family noble coat of arms and the marble panel produced for the Basilica of San Petronio are described and attributed by Vasari to Properzia de’ Rossi in his **Lives**, the first critical text of art history. This is displayed, in turn, in two precious editions dating to 1568 and housed at the **Biblioteca dell’Archiginnasio di Bologna**.

The exhibition features **seven marble sculptures** created from 2015 to 2021 from the artistic output of Lynda Benglis. They come from the **Thomas Brambilla Gallery** in Bergamo and **private collections** located in the **Bologna** region. The latter works are an unmissable opportunity for the public to enjoy, in addition to promoting the Emilia region.

*Lynda Benglis e Properzia de' Rossi: Sculptrici di capriccioso e destrissimo ingegno* - born from the partnership of the Settore Musei Civici Bologna, Settore Biblioteche e Welfare culturale of Municipality of Bologna and Archdiocese of Bologna - represents a virtuous example of a cultural strategy that aims to create shared projects to forge new and fascinating diachronic narratives about the city's cultural history.

The exhibition is accompanied by a **catalogue** published by **Silvana Editoriale** in a bilingual Italian/English edition, with texts by **Lorenzo Balbi**, **Vera Fortunati**, **Irene Graziani**, **David J. Getsy** and **Eloisa Morra**. The appendix also includes thematic contributions by **Elisa Rebellato** on the edition of Vasari's *Lives* on exhibition; by **Matteo Fabbri** on the 3D reproduction of the Properzia de' Rossi's bas-relief *Giuseppe e la moglie di Putifarre*; and by **Simone di Virgilio** on the restoration of the Grassi family noble coat of arms sculpted by Properzia de' Rossi. The volume is completed by views of the exhibition set-up and additional images that accompany the texts.

We wish to thank the **Biblioteca dell'Archiginnasio** in Bologna, the **Museo Civico Medievale** in Bologna, **Thomas Brambilla Gallery** in Bergamo, **SOF:ART Collection**, and the **Stefano Angelini private collection**, together with the lenders who preferred to remain anonymous. A special thanks to the **Museo della Basilica di San Petronio** in Bologna.

## WORKS ON DISPLAY

Lynda Benglis  
*UNTITLED (Torsos)*, 2015 - 2016  
Royal Yellow Marble, 139 x 76 x 20 cm  
Private collection

Lynda Benglis  
*UNTITLED I*, 2017 - 2018  
Guatemala Green Marble, 120 x 50 x 45 cm  
Private collection

Lynda Benglis  
*UNTITLED III*, 2017 - 2018  
Marquina Black Marble, 80 x 100 x 53 cm  
Private collection

Lynda Benglis  
*UNTITLED III*, 2017 - 2018  
Red France Marble, 80 x 100 x 53 cm  
Bergamo, Thomas Brambilla Gallery

Lynda Benglis  
*UNTITLED (Wing)*, 2020 - 2021  
Red France Marble, 98 x 42 x 35 cm  
Bergamo, Thomas Brambilla Gallery

Lynda Benglis  
*UNTITLED (Brooch)*, 2020 - 2021  
Carrara White Marble, 120 x 98 x 20 cm  
Bergamo, Thomas Brambilla Gallery

Lynda Benglis  
*UNTITLED (Torsos)*, 2020 - 2021  
Guatemala Green Marble, 139 x 76 x 20 cm  
Bergamo, Thomas Brambilla Gallery

Properzia de' Rossi  
*Coat of Arms of the Grassi Family*

Silver filigree, cast parts, rock crystal, boxwood, pits, 39 x 22 cm  
Bologna, Museo Civico Medievale, inv. no. 2135

Properzia de' Rossi  
*Joseph and Potiphar's Wife*, 1525 - 1526  
3D reproduction, 2023  
Resin relief, 53,5 x 54 cm  
MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna

Giorgio Vasari  
*Le vite de' piu eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori. Scritte da m. Giorgio Vasari pittore et architetto aretino, di nuouo dal medesimo riuiste et ampliate con i ritratti loro et con l'aggiunta delle vite de' viui, & de' morti dall'anno MDL infino al MDLXVII*  
Prima, e seconda parte - 1° e 3° volume. Ed. In Fiorenza : appresso i Giunti, 1568 (In Fiorenza : appresso i Giunti, 1568)  
Bologna, Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio

## INFO SHEET

### Exhibition

*Lynda Benglis e Properzia de' Rossi: Sculptrici di capriccioso e destrissimo ingegno*

### Curated by

Lorenzo Balbi

### Promoted by

Settore Musei Civici Bologna | MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna

### Venue

MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna  
Via Don Minzoni 14 | Bologna (I)

### Dates

26 October - 26 May 2024

### Opening

Thursday, 25 January 2024 at 6 pm

### Hours

Tuesday and Wednesday 2 pm - 7 pm

Thursday 2 pm - 8 pm

Friday, Saturday, Sunday and public holidays 10 am - 7 pm

Closed Mondays, not public holidays

### Extended hours on the occasion of ART CITY Bologna (1 - 4 February 2024)

Thursday, 1 February, 10 am - 8 pm

Friday, 2 February, 10 am - 8 pm

Saturday, 3 February, 10 am - 11 pm

Sunday, 4 February, 10 am - 8 pm

### Admission

Full price € 6 | reduced price € 4 | Free for Card Cultura holders and during ART CITY Bologna 2024 (1 - 4 February)

### Information

MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna

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**Settore Musei Civici Bologna**  
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