



PARCO ARTE
VIVENTE
CENTRO D'ARTE
CONTEMPORANEA
TORINO

CLAUDIO COSTA METAMAGICO

CURATED BY MARCO SCOTINI

16.05.2026
11.10.2026

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Metamagico

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with the support of:



CITTÀ DI TORINO



**REGIONE
PIEMONTE**



**Fondazione
CRT**



The artist

Claudio Costa was born in Tirana on June 22, 1942, to Italian parents, though his roots lay firmly in the Ligurian landscape of Val Fontanabuona. Following scientific studies in Chiavari and enrolling in the Faculty of Architecture at the Milan Polytechnic in 1961, his expressive urgency quickly drew him into the Milanese gallery circuit, where he received early recognition with the Diomira and San Fedele prizes. The turning point came in 1964 when he moved to Paris after winning a scholarship for engraving. At the famous Atelier 17 of S. W. Hayter on Rue Daguerre, Costa refined his technique and met the father of conceptual art, Marcel Duchamp. His Parisian years were marked by intense cultural and political activity; in 1968, he experienced the French May firsthand, collaborating on the book *Mai '68 Affiches* alongside internationally renowned artists such as Alechinsky, Jorn, and Matta.

Upon returning to Italy in 1969, Costa established his home-studio in Rapallo, which soon became an international crossroads for critics and artists like Jean-Christophe Ammann, Robert Filliou, Wolf Vostell, and the Merz couple. In this ferment, he began experimenting with a heterodox grammar of materials: graphite, fish glue, acids, copper sulfate, and clay became reagents for an art that rejected decoration in favor of cognitive inquiry. With the exhibition *La Vela e Altro* at the Galleria Bertesca in Genoa, Costa officially entered the international circuit of Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, and Fluxus.

In the 1970s, Costa theorized the concept of "Work in

Regress,” a journey backward toward human origins as an alternative to linear progress. Paleontology became his primary field of inquiry; he published the volume *Evoluzione-Involuzione* and participated in the 1972 Paris Biennale. His interest in “uncontaminated” cultures led him to engage with the Maori of New Zealand – spurred by correspondence with the Museum of Wellington and a meeting with explorer Thor Heyerdahl – and to conduct research trips to Morocco. In 1975, this urgency to preserve memory crystallized in the Monteghirfo project, where he co-founded the Museum of Active Anthropology with Aurelio Caminati. Here, objects of Ligurian peasant culture were “preserved” under glass to halt their disappearance, enhancing them as living cultural messages. This commitment led him to the prestigious documenta 6 in Kassel in 1977 with the work *Antropologia riseppellita* (Reburied Anthropology).

By the end of the 1970s, Costa’s research shifted toward alchemy, viewed as a return to magic and myth. This phase culminated in 1986 with his participation in the Venice Biennale within the “Art and Alchemy” section curated by Arturo Schwarz. The artist’s final season was marked by a profound human and therapeutic commitment. From the mid-80s, he worked at the former psychiatric hospital of Genoa Quarto, where, in 1992, he founded the Active Museum of Unconscious Forms: a revolutionary space where the works of professional artists and patients coexist without barriers.

In the 1990s, a sense of origins repeatedly led him to Africa. From this emerged the Skull-Brain Museum project, inspired by the discovery that the profile of the *Homo Erectus* skull

mirrors the perimeter of North Africa – an infinite museum of communication between Europe and Africa. Claudio Costa passed away prematurely on July 2, 1995, leaving behind an artistic legacy he once defined as an “anthological ontology” of the deepest, shadowed parts of the human being.

THE EXHIBITION

PAV Parco Arte Vivente in Turin presents a major solo exhibition dedicated to Claudio Costa, one of the most singular and least explored artists of the Italian late twentieth century. *Metamagico*, curated by Marco Scotini, explores Costa's central body of work from the 1970s, revolving around his founding obsession: the relationship between material culture, biological memory, and anthropological origins. The exhibition follows a path that revisits the archive, the museum, and the ritual as sites where this relationship manifests.

The exhibition is part of PAV's historical research program dedicated to the roots of the relationship between art and the ecosystem – a direction it has cultivated since its foundation but which, in recent years, it has sought to extend to those pioneers who, as early as the 1960s and 1970s, anticipated the questions now central to the debate on ecology, biodiversity, and the memory of the living. Within this framework, Claudio Costa occupies a unique position: he does not represent nature; he uses it as an archive, as a system of signs, as material that carries within itself the traces of biological and cultural time, convinced that the natural past is not lost but always latent, capable of being exhumed through the artistic gesture.

Claudio Costa trained between Milan and Paris, where he attended S.W. Hayter's famous graphic workshop, Atelier 17, and met Marcel Duchamp, who would remain an essential reference for him. From the late 1960s, moving in contact with the experience of Arte Povera without ever fully absorbing its coordinates, his research developed in an autonomous and radical direction: that of a visual anthropology blending tools





from ethnography, paleontology, and alchemy into what he defined as "Work in Regress." This concept, a play on James Joyce, served as his primary inspiration: a journey always in the making, but moving backward toward the origin of humanity. Costa is not an artist who speaks "about" primitive culture, but rather one who adopts its method: collecting, classifying, burying, exhuming, and transforming.

From his earliest works in the 1960s, Costa worked with organic and elementary materials – slate, clay, wax, terracotta, bones, plant elements – constructing objects that inhabit a threshold between the artifact and the work of art, between the natural history museum and the ritual display case. A prominent figure in the Arte Povera, Conceptual, and Fluxus circuits, he participated with a solo room at documenta 6 in Kassel (1977) and in several editions of the Venice Biennale, including the "Art and Alchemy" section in 1986. In the final phase of his career, he combined art and social commitment, founding the Active Museum of Unconscious Forms at the former psychiatric hospital of Quarto in Genoa, stemming from his relationship with psychoanalysis.

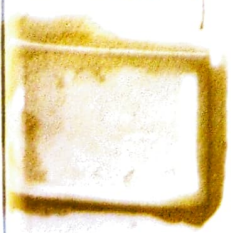
Metamagico, which cites a 1978 work by Costa present in the exhibition, is the title Marco Scotini has chosen to indicate Costa's operational plan: a reflection on magical thought that dialogues with philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, using the logic of ritual and myth as a cognitive tool alternative to Western modernist rationality. It is a thought that, in the words of the anthropologist and philosopher Ernesto de Martino, inhabits the border between the "collapsing presence" and its redemption: the place where

the artist and the shaman operate together. The exhibition brings together a heterogeneous range of works from his 1970s production – panels, display cases, installations, photographic series – held together by a single thread: a dogged insistence on searching for the origin, however immanent it may prove to be. The *Metamagico* exhibition is divided into three areas: *Reburied Anthropology* (dedicated to his 1977 Kassel solo room), the *Museum of Man*, and the *Museum of Active Anthropology of Monteghirfo*.

The first stage of Costa's research is defined by a fundamental intuition: an object is not valuable for what it is, but for the world it drags along with it – the history, the memory, and the humanity sedimented in the matter. His confrontation with Marcel Duchamp is explicit and polemical: not the cold decontextualization of the ready-made, but the opposite: the recovery of the fetishistic and ritual value of the object, its sacredness. Works such as *Hypothesis of Extinction* (1972) and *Portraits from Memory* (1972) construct maps of biological time and individual memory, where photocopies, glass, manual writing, and objects coexist as if in a natural history museum case. In parallel, Costa developed a systematic comparison with non-Western cultures, particularly the Maori: the series *The Models – The Incised Skin of the Maori* (1974) and *Anthropological Symbols* (1974) link systems of visual signs – tattooing as bodily writing, terracotta as the skin of the Earth – that come from distant latitudes but obey the same logic: the body as archive, matter as memory.

The moment of international recognition for Costa arrived with his participation in documenta 6 in Kassel in 1977. The

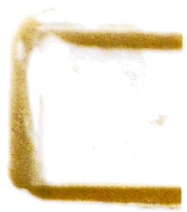
Storia della Repubblica



*Colore della pelle
del dorso*



*Colore della pelle
in rosso*



Primo modello di...

Secondo modello...



work presented – *Reburied Anthropology* – is the highest synthesis of his 1970s research and one of the most ambitious works of his entire career. Large wooden crates coated in clay, contain clay, plant, and animal elements, terracotta fragments, and photographs under glass. They are ritual burials: the gesture of reburying what had been extracted from the earth, of returning to the soil the materials that compose it, documenting the process with a photograph that itself becomes an artifact.

In 1975, Claudio Costa founded the Museum of Active Anthropology in Monteghirfo, an abandoned village in the Ligurian Apennines. This gesture was simultaneously a performance, an institution, and a utopia: a museum that does not preserve, but produces knowledge through doing, collecting, and transforming. Monteghirfo became the gravitational center of all his 1970s production, a territory where rural material culture – farming tools, stones, bones, plants – was gathered and reimagined as a system of living signs. The series *Comparison of Objects* (1976) and *Investigations into an Object from the Monteghirfo Museum* (1976) apply the method already tested with Maori cultures to the local context: a found object is photographed, modeled in clay, cast in wax, and reconstructed in terracotta. To know means to remake. The series expanded the scale: environmental photographs, taxidermy objects, sickles, and tools mounted on panels like an inverted natural history museum – not nature classified by science, but material culture treated with the same care science accords to nature. Among the works, *Table and Chair* (1980) stands out, expanding and radicalizing the gesture: everyday objects are covered in clay, wooden “bones” are scattered on the floor,

and honeycombs become terracotta reliquaries.

The exhibition project is an attempt to restore the visibility that has long been denied to Costa, not as an exercise in nostalgia, but as a critical gesture. His work is extremely relevant today, speaking of extinction, grafting, and what survives when a culture is erased. In a present marked by unresolved ecological and colonial crises, his research takes on a pertinence that goes far beyond art history.



Monteghi (tagliato)
di Monteghi



forma in terra
R. 13. 6. (1880)

GREENHOUSE

Reburied Anthropology

In the late 1960s Claudio Costa began a research practice that called into question traditional forms of knowledge. The materials he worked with – earth, slate, rope, bones, vegetable matter – do not illustrate the world: they retain it, stratify it, return it transformed. In this initial phase, every object is already a gesture: the weight, tension and roughness of matter become the language of an art that refuses the decorative in favour of cognitive inquiry.

The fundamental gesture that emerges from these years is re-burial: not bringing to light in order to preserve, but returning to the earth, reactivating a latent memory. This gesture found its most complete form in *Antropologia riseppellita*, presented in a dedicated personal room at documenta 6 in Kassel in 1977: the moment at which Costa's research received its first international recognition, and at which the gesture of re-burial established itself as the proposal of a different epistemology – that of cultures which think through analogy, contiguity, and transformation. The works gathered here, from the first material experiments of the 1960s to the great syntheses of the late 1970s, construct a cosmology of deep time, of knowledge that survives history.

PROJECT ROOM

Museum of Man

From the early 1970s, Costa's research structured itself around a precise idea: the museum not as a place of conservation, but as a device of knowledge. An object's value lies not in what it is, but in the world it carries with it – history, memory, humanity sedimented in matter. His engagement with Marcel Duchamp is explicit and polemical: not the cold decontextualisation of the ready-made, but its opposite – the recovery of the fetishistic and ritual value of the object, its sacredness.

The works in this room take the form of display cases, boards and systems of comparison in which objects, images, and materials become traces of human experience. Body and matter are understood as living archives, capable of retaining signs, gestures and memories. The museum Costa imagines does not organise knowledge in a stable way: it constructs it through relations – between different cultures, between distant times, between forms of the living. Rather than representing the human, it continuously calls it into question, rendering it visible as a process in becoming.

In this space, the engagement with non-Western cultures, particularly Maori culture, is not ethnographic but epistemic: visual sign systems from distant latitudes obey the same logic as European ones. The body as archive, matter as memory, the sign as survival.

CORRIDOR / VIDEO ROOM

Active Anthropology at Monteghirfo

In 1975 Costa founded the Museo di Antropologia Attiva in Monteghirfo, an abandoned village in the Ligurian Apennines. Not a museum that preserves: an operative device in which collecting, transforming and reactivating coincide. The rural context is not background but living archive, traversed by relations between human and non-human, between material culture and biological time.

Objects of Ligurian peasant civilisation are subjected to a series of translations: photographed, modelled, reconstructed. Each step is a hypothesis, a form of knowledge produced through making. This process – which Costa implicitly defines as Work in Regress – does not indicate a nostalgic return, but a movement of reopening toward origins as a field of possibilities still open.

In this perspective the museum neither preserves nor documents, but produces difference: a space in which knowledge emerges as a situated practice, always in the process of becoming. Material culture is not the testimony of a concluded past but a sign system still alive, capable of questioning the present.



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Metamagico exhibition is organized with the support of Compagnia di San Paolo, Fondazione CRT, the Piedmont Region, and the City of Turin. The exhibition is in collaboration with the Claudio Costa Archive and C+N Gallery CANEPANERI.

PAV Parco Arte Vivente is an experimental center for contemporary art, conceived by the artist Piero Gilardi and directed by Enrico Bonanate. The PAV includes an open-air exhibition site and an interactive museum intended as a place for encounters and workshop experiences focused on the dialogue between art and nature, biotechnology and ecology, the public and artists. The Park is a green area in continuous evolution and occupies a former industrial zone of about 23,000 square meters, where, in addition to *Trèfle* (2006), an environmental installation by Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, and *Jardin Mandala* (2010), a garden designed by landscape architect Gilles Clément, other relational and participatory projects are in progress, including *Focolare*, winner of the PAV Prize 2012, and an urban beekeeping project with the introduction of bees inside *La Folie du PAV* (2009) by Emmanuel Louisgrand.



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PAV Parco Arte Vivente



pav_turin

**Summer opening hours
June 10 – September 30
Wednesday – Friday: 16:00–19:00
Saturday – Sunday: 12:00–19:00**

**Winter opening hours
Friday: 15:00 – 18:00
Saturday – Sunday: 11:00 – 18:00**

**For schools and groups:
by appointment, Tuesday
to Friday**